

ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN FILM STUDIES

Theorizing Film Acting

Edited by
Aaron Taylor



Theorizing Film Acting

Routledge Advances in Film Studies

- 1 Nation and Identity in the New German Cinema**
Homeless at Home
Inga Scharf
- 2 Lesbianism, Cinema, Space**
The Sexual Life of Apartments
Lee Wallace
- 3 Post-War Italian Cinema**
American Intervention, Vatican Interests
Daniela Treveri Gennari
- 4 Latsploitation, Exploitation Cinemas, and Latin America**
Edited by Victoria Ruétalo and Dolores Tierney
- 5 Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers**
The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear
Julian Hanich
- 6 Cinema, Memory, Modernity**
The Representation of Memory from the Art Film to Transnational Cinema
Russell J.A. Kilbourn
- 7 Distributing Silent Film Serials**
Local Practices, Changing Forms, Cultural Transformation
Rudmer Canjels
- 8 The Politics of Loss and Trauma in Contemporary Israeli Cinema**
Raz Yosef
- 9 Neoliberalism and Global Cinema**
Capital, Culture, and Marxist Critique
Edited by Jyotsna Kapur and Keith B. Wagner
- 10 Korea's Occupied Cinemas, 1893-1948**
The Untold History of the Film Industry
Brian Yecies with Ae-Gyung Shim
- 11 Transnational Asian Identities in Pan-Pacific Cinemas**
The Reel Asian Exchange
Edited by Philippa Gates & Lisa Funnell
- 12 Narratives of Gendered Dissent in South Asian Cinemas**
Alka Kurian
- 13 Hollywood Melodrama and the New Deal**
Public Daydreams
Anna Siomopoulos
- 14 Theorizing Film Acting**
Edited by Aaron Taylor

Theorizing Film Acting

Edited by Aaron Taylor

First published 2012
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group,
an informa business*

© 2012 Taylor & Francis

The right of Aaron Taylor to be identified as the author of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark Notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Theorizing film acting / edited by Aaron Taylor.

p. cm. — (Routledge advances in film studies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Motion picture acting. I. Taylor, Aaron.

PN1995.9.A26T53 2012

791.4302'8—dc23

2011041097

ISBN13: 978-0-415-50951-0 (hbk)

ISBN13: 978-0-203-12321-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by IBT Global.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi

Introduction: Acting, Casually and Theoretically Speaking	1
AARON TAYLOR	

PART I

Aesthetics: Understanding and Interpreting Film Acting

1 Acting Matters: Noting Performance in Three Films	19
BRENDA AUSTIN-SMITH	
2 Living Meaning: The Fluency of Film Performance	33
ANDREW KLEVAN	
3 Play-Acting: A Theory of Comedic Performance	47
ALEX CLAYTON	
4 Performed Performance and <i>The Man Who Knew Too Much</i>	62
MURRAY POMERANCE	
5 “Brando Sings!”: The Invincible Star Persona	76
GEORGE TOLES	

PART II

Reception: Film Acting, Audiences and Communities

6 “Look at Me!”: A Phenomenology of Heath Ledger in <i>The Dark Knight</i>	93
JÖRG STERNAGEL	

- 7 **Is Acting a Form of Simulation or Being?
Acting and Mirror Neurons** 107
WILLIAM BROWN
- 8 **The Bond That Unbinds by Binding:
Acting Mythology and the Film Community** 120
KEVIN ESCH
- 9 **From Being to Acting: Performance in Cult Cinema** 135
ERNEST MATHIJS
- 10 **Acting and Performance in Home Movies and Amateur Films** 152
LIZ CZACH

PART III

Culture: Film History, Industry and the Vicissitudes of Star Acting

- 11 **Story and Show: The Basic Contradiction of Film Star Acting** 169
PAUL MCDONALD
- 12 **The Screen Actor's "First Self" and "Second Self":
John Wayne and Coquelin's Acting Theory** 184
SHARON MARIE CARNICKE
- 13 **Acting Like a Star: Florence Turner, Picture Personality** 201
CHARLIE KEIL
- 14 **Niche Stars and Acting "Gay"** 210
CHRIS HOLMLUND

PART IV

Apparatus: Technology, Film Form and the Actor

- 15 **What Becomes of the Camera in the World on Film?** 229
WILLIAM ROTHMAN

16 Sonic Bodies: Listening as Acting	243
JENNIFER M. BARKER	
17 Dance of the Übermarionettes: Toward a Contemporary Screen Actor Training	256
SEAN AITA	
18 Articulating Digital Stardom	271
BARRY KING	
<i>Contributors</i>	287
<i>Index</i>	293

Figures

1.1	Nadia Sibirskaia in <i>Ménilmontant</i> .	22
1.2	Gene Hackman in <i>The Conversation</i> .	26
1.3	The donkey in <i>Au Hasard Balthazar</i> .	30
2.1	<i>Camille</i> .	34
2.2	<i>The Philadelphia Story</i> .	36
2.3	<i>In a Lonely Place</i> .	38
2.4	<i>It's a Wonderful Life</i> .	40
3.1	The Tramp (Charlie Chaplin) auditions to be a clown.	49
3.2	Herbert H. Heebert (Jerry Lewis) is a LOUSY housekeeper.	53
3.3	Pontius Pilate (Michael Palin) plays to the crowd.	55
3.4	Maria Tura (Carole Lombard) remembers the goldfish.	57
4.1	Doris Day as Jo Conway McKenna, singing "Que Sera, Sera (What Will Be Will Be)" for guests at an embassy in <i>The Man Who Knew Too Much</i> .	62
5.1	Marlon Brando shifts the terms of "I'll Know" from wistful monologue to a smilingly goading direct address in <i>Guys and Dolls</i> .	80
5.2	It is natural for us to be attuned to kindred manifestations of possession in the star himself.	85
5.3	Mitchum's unhurriedness comes from a reluctance to push himself into the artifice of dramatic action.	88
6.1	Heath Ledger throws himself at the camera with his interpretation of the Joker in this first, transient and extreme close-up in Christopher Nolan's <i>The Dark Knight</i> .	99
6.2	Heath Ledger as the Joker threatens both Rachel Dawes (Maggie Gyllenhaal) and his spectators in <i>The Dark Knight</i> .	100
6.3	The mask of Jack Nicholson's Joker is thick and impermeable, as if shaped in plaster: his make-up does not fade and his smile stays on in Tim Burton's <i>Batman</i> .	103

6.4	The mask of Ledger's Joker is thin and permeable, as if painted in watercolors: his make-up fades but his smile remains in <i>The Dark Knight</i> .	103
9.1	Acting about acting: Jean-Claude Van Damme as himself in <i>Friends</i> .	136
9.2	Polysemous expression: Jean Seberg imitates Jean-Paul Belmondo imitating Humphrey Bogart in <i>Breathless</i> .	140
9.3	Acting as intertextual reference. Spot the cameos in this shot from <i>From Dusk 'till Dawn</i> .	142
11.1	The look of loathe.	175
11.2	Sizing him up.	176
11.3	Tenderness with protection.	177
11.4	Pitt as Rusty.	178
12.1	Does he look at his partners or inward toward his thoughts and fears?	194
12.2	Wayne nearly falls from his horse, off-balance.	195
12.3	Does Edwards seek water in the dry earth?	196
12.4	Wayne holds the canteen as if to steady himself.	197
14.1	Chris Cooper uses his eyes and lips to convey Col. Frank Fitts' mistrust and fear. Do his gay neighbors "read him?" Do they know that he, too, is gay?	213
14.2	Catherine Keener's stance indicates Maxine Lund's lack of attraction to John Cusack's Craig Schwartz in <i>Being John Malkovich</i> .	217
14.3	Playing Lana Tisdell, Chloë Sevigny's mouth, eyes and cradling fingers promise "phallic" bliss to Hilary Swank's Brandon Teena in <i>Boys Don't Cry</i> .	221
15.1	Jean Arthur in <i>If Only You Could Cook</i> .	230
15.2	<i>Sherman's March</i> .	234
15.3	Rod Steiger and Marlon in <i>On the Waterfront</i> .	241
17.1	Mo-cap actor/producer/director Reuben Langdon.	260
18.1	Vectors of reference in <i>Avatar</i> performances.	279

Acknowledgments

This anthology has been gestating for a number of years and would not have been possible without the kindness, patience and invaluable support of a number of friends and colleagues. The project gathered momentum thanks to the initial interest of a number of thoughtful editors, including Shannon McLachlan at Oxford University Press and Annie Martin and Barry Keith Grant at Wayne State University Press. Special thanks are due to my colleague Bohdan Nebesio, who took me up on my suggestion to begin this project and helped establish much of the volume's structural and organizational groundwork. It is largely thanks to his editorial experience and keen insight that the volume got off the ground.

I have received excellent assistance and care from various editors and administrative assistants at Routledge. Felisa Salvago-Keyes was an attentive and generous editor. Erica Wetter and Charles Wolfe were instrumental in finding the volume a home. Technical questions were handled with friendly aplomb by Julie Ganz and Joyce Lucas.

A number of first-rate scholars of film acting should also be mentioned for their interest and participation in the volume during various stages of its development. I benefited greatly from exchanges with and contributions by Wheeler Winston Dixon, Elizabeth Marquis, Roberta Pearson, Johannes Riis and Carole Zucker. My own ideas about film acting have also been informed by instructive conversations with several colleagues at the University of Lethbridge, including Ken Allan, Peter Alward, Louise Barrett, Ron Chambers, Marek Czuma, Lisa Doolittle, Gail Hanrahan, Dana Inkster and Douglas MacArthur. I am especially grateful to Dana Cooley, who provided helpful responses to the volume's Introduction, and to the Department of New Media in general for providing an ideal environment for the cultivation of this volume.

My thanks are also extended to a number of individuals who offered intelligent advice and shared helpful ideas about acting. The responses of the anonymous readers were greatly appreciated, as were a number of interesting discussions that I had with Robert Blanchet and Margrethe Bruun Vaage via email and during the 2009 and 2010 Society for Cognitive Studies of the Moving Image conferences. I also appreciate the opportunity to

have exchanged ideas with other like-minded scholars at the 2010 “Acting in Film” conference at the University of Potsdam, and I thank Deborah Levitt, Dieter Mersch and Jörg Sternagel for the invitation. Philippa Gates is to be commended for her advice on how to go it alone, and Vivian Sobchack deserves special notice for her rejuvenating affirmations and the extension of her friendship. Most of all, I wish to thank the contributors to this volume. Their patience, dedication and frequent acts of cheerleading unquestionably carried the day.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge my family for their unconditional love and support throughout this volume’s cultivation. The faith and confidence of my parents kept me afloat, the affectionate encouragement of my three children kept me impassioned and the brilliance, unflagging good sense and compassion of my wife, Amy, kept me inspired.

Note: “Articulating Digital Stardom” by Barry King was originally published in a slightly different form in *Celebrity Studies* 2, no. 3 (2011): 247–62. Permission to reprint the article was granted by copyright holders Barry King and *Celebrity Studies* editor Sean Redmond and is gratefully acknowledged.

Introduction

Acting, Casually and Theoretically Speaking

Aaron Taylor

“I think so much of what we respond to in fictional movies is acting. That’s one of the elements that’s often left out when people talk theoretically about the movies. They forget it’s the human material we go to see.”

—Pauline Kael¹

Acting has long been configured as a problem for film studies. A commonplace concern, articulated in nearly every scholarly monograph or anthology on the subject, is that acting has been either overlooked or misrepresented by the discipline.² The problem with acting is also articulated in a different way via the correlative of this concern: the occasional anti-theoretical screed in which theory is characterized as being “too abstract” and unconcerned with the “concrete and practical dimensions” of acting.³ Such a scholarly disinclination to concentrate on acting is, however, decidedly not shared by non-specialist viewers. That is, in spite of the relative paucity of writing that gives an account of what performers are actually doing onscreen and why their creative efforts excite our interest, non-academic viewers frequently extemporize confidently about acting. Indeed, assessments of performance elements are often the first critical observations made during casual conversations about film. My question, then, is this: if so little is (or can be) understood theoretically about film acting, why are so many viewers prepared to pontificate with self-assured authority on the merits or demerits of a given performer?

It has been suggested that the surfeit of trivia about the lives of film actors and the concomitant deficit of theorizations about their work speak to screen acting’s captivating elusiveness. This captivation signals a kind of yearning, as it were, to come to know certainly and conclusively the enigmatic cinematic figures before us.⁴ Certain film theorists answer this yearning by articulating at length how one might use theoretical criteria to speak to an actor’s actual performance with some degree of aesthetic precision.⁵ If acting truly has been such a blind spot for film studies, then such scholarly endeavors are undoubtedly important. At the same time, we

might also consider how acting, “as an inherently experiential . . . element of cinema,” could serve as “an invitation to reexperience what it is that makes theory possible and desirable.”⁶ That is, film scholars may stand to learn much from non-specialists’ often instinctive and non-programmatic engagements with film acting. The casual and intuitive assessments of so-called “ordinary” viewers, then, are not so much emblems of an “undisciplined” spectatorship but paradigms of attraction worthy of emulation. Such unselfconscious evaluative confidence indicates how performance serves as a royal road to knowledge—or better, attending to film acting might allow us to rediscover why one was desirous of such knowledge in the first place.

As a way of introducing this collection’s aspirations, I do not wish to begin this collection by rehearsing film studies’ “problem” with acting once again. Rather, I would like to make the modest suggestion that this gulf between the scholarly reluctance and non-specialist readiness to talk about acting bears further thinking about. To that end, I would like to propose an interconnection between the evaluative self-assurance and the yearning that characterizes our engagement with acting. I wish to assert that the confidence with which we make casual pronouncements about acting stands in for our desire to make sense—often intuitively—of a cinematic experience. In so doing, I hope to establish how this volume may help find some common grounds between academic and “ordinary” discourses about acting. The primary ambition of *Theorizing Film Acting*, then, is to bring forward a number of voices that speak with precision and desire about our conceptual understanding of film acting. Although its intended address is admittedly scholarly, I hope that its readers might come to appreciate these chapters as helpful ways of conceptually bridging the distance between intuition and theory, scholar and non-specialist—a function so often admirably fulfilled by an extraordinary performance.

SPEAKING CASUALLY ABOUT ACTING

It seems a curious phenomenon, in some respects, that casual evaluations of acting often serve as initiatory gestures toward a more coherent assessment of a film. During the course of an informal exchange about a recently seen movie, it is not unusual for the conversation to turn toward a consideration of the relative merits of an actor’s performance. Invariably, at some point, reference will be made to the performer’s labor—the extent of his or her conviction, the intensity of his or her feelings, the employment of his or her creative energies: in essence, one inevitably assesses whether or not he or she “did a good job.”

Such casual assessments seem inextricably linked to both our comprehensive and evaluative summations of a film as a whole. Consider a politicized response: a discussion about *Tropic Thunder* (Ben Stiller, 2008), for

example, will inevitably wind its way toward an assessment of Robert Downey, Jr.'s parodic take on racial impersonation and the perceived pretensions of American Method acting. Or, consider a discussion of a film's generic pedigree: before one fully contends with, say, the unrestrained melodrama of *Curse of the Golden Flower* (Zhang Yimou, 2006), one struggles to adequately describe the magisterial histrionics of Gong Li and Chow Yun-Fat as a loathsome Imperial couple. Or, consider the centrality of acting in a dispute over a film's affective merits. If, for instance, we are to convincingly articulate the reasons *30 Days of Night* (David Slade, 2007) failed to terrify us, it becomes imperative to steer the conversation toward a discussion of Josh Harnett's uncanny inability to channel human feeling—let alone serve as our emotional analogue in his role as a vampire-besieged Alaskan cop.

So, why do casual conversations about film—especially among non-specialist viewers—often turn so readily toward discussions about acting?⁷ More specifically, why might considerations of acting take precedence over discussions about other formal or experiential aspects of a movie? Do such informal considerations of acting substitute for a more general theory of one's engagement with and/or appreciation of a film? Our ready interest in the dramatic comportment of the human figure on film warrants some consideration—particularly the implications of an intuitive philosophy of acting.

For some, the question of our immediate critical interest in acting may not be such a mysterious matter. One obvious response to the question of our preoccupation with acting might be that non-specialist viewers tend not to appreciate other aspects of film aesthetics and thus turn their attention to more directly perceptible qualities related to a work's content—most prominently: story, dialogue and acting. And yet even a cursory glimpse at the user comments posted at Metacritic.com regarding the performance of Mickey Rourke in *The Wrestler* (Darren Aronofsky, 2008) reveals that viewers are very much cognizant of the dialectic between style and story and do not simply regard acting as an index to narrative comprehension. Kyle B., for example, remarks on the verisimilar particulars of Rourke's craft ("Every little nuance he portrays gives life to this character and the frailties he has"), whereas Erica M. focuses on the centrality of his star persona ("I don't know of any actor who is better suited for this role"), and JayH makes note of the confluence between acting and visual style (Randy "the Ram" Robinson is "very ably performed by Mickey Rourke" and is filmed with "appropriate gritty cinematography").⁸ Clearly, viewers are aware of acting as such—as an element of cinematic style and not simply the representation of a possible person.

A second objection might be that this readiness is simply indicative of a general tendency toward unreflectively humanistic forms of engagement with cinematic fictions. The operative presupposition is that narratives are expected to provide instructive scenarios whereby audiences imaginatively

establish virtual connections with other dramatized subjectivities and ideally reflect on the shared qualities or differences that they discover. Familiar classical realist performance norms thus cohere to these humanist ideals. Actors fashion their particularized characters as unique and discrete individuals (rather than broader types or symbols) in whose desires and actions we are invited to take emotional and/or moral interest.⁹

Thus, it is assumed that a non-specialist viewer's interest in acting is typically limited to an assessment of an actor's embodiment of a possible person. Realist criteria—verisimilitude, plausibility and expressive coherence—are assumed to be the grounds of “good” acting, especially with regard to a star performance. One assesses how effectively a star fits the part and judges the extent to which the celebrity performer subsumes his or her own recognizable persona within a representational façade. Sympathetic or antipathetic evaluation of the role is a concomitant goal (e.g., “I loved/hated her character”), as is empathetic alignment (e.g., “I could completely relate to her”). In order to facilitate such connections, viewers are required to overlook or modulate their awareness of the actor's identity as a public person (whether little known or famous).

Why, though, would such humanistic responses to film acting render uninteresting the question of a general readiness to critique an actor's work? The immediate answer might be that such an instinctive and prevalent tendency is representative of a curtailed regard for acting in general. Acting itself becomes “invisible” as non-specialist viewers ignore the mechanics or stylistics of a performance, and more hedonic forms of attention (sympathetic or antipathetic evaluations of character) supersede their appreciation for an actor's artistry or skill.¹⁰ A second concern with humanistic normativity might be that it leads to a perceived general disregard for performances that eschew more familiar classical realist norms. Such disregard might register as impatience with non-realist acting styles (which are pejoratively described as “mannered” or “theatrical”) or an inability to consider how a performer might be asserting conceptual ideas rather than externalizing individual psychology. Finally, one might identify the general “invisibility” of acting within reductive critical assessments of performance, in which unfamiliar or lesser known actors are conflated with the characters they play, and the evaluation of a star turn is restricted to a consideration of his or her suitability to the role.

I would suggest that the supposed pervasiveness of such uncritical investments in varied forms of “identification” with enacted characters in lieu of attentiveness to an actor's performance is questionable. First, we should be cognizant of personalized attunements to an actor's gestural particularities—especially recurring or iconic ones—that are “frequently remembered through a bodily connection” with an actor (e.g., the fan who brushes her hair like Bette Davis after watching her in *Dark Victory*).¹¹ These beloved embodied motifs are a mimic's *métier* and the source of an aficionado's private bliss.

Second, it should be obvious that some of the most popular and well-paid actors are neither associated with naturalistic styles of acting (e.g., Johnny Depp, Adam Sandler) nor venerated for their ability to personify a broad range of possible people (e.g., Angelina Jolie, Jennifer Aniston).¹² Non-naturalistic performances and the exhibition of familiar star motifs can and do prompt reflections on acting beyond humanistic and evaluative considerations of character (motive-seeking, moral appraisal, sympathetic associations, etc.).

Last, it is not that empathetic relations and sympathetic evaluations of filmic characters are inherently unreflective or inappropriate to considerations of acting. Rather, casual responses to film acting are often an interlacing of reflections on character behavior, performance style and an actor's connotative signification. For example, in a viewer survey regarding the question of Robert Pattinson's talent, respondents address his aptitude as an actor in a variety of ways. Their assessments encapsulate a number of co-mingled considerations: his most popular role as a love-smitten vampire in the *Twilight* series (2008–2012) is evaluated (e.g., he "is able to express difficult emotions, like hurt and despair, but also bravery and strength"), recurring motifs are noted across his brief career (e.g., a propensity for "pouts" and "broodiness"), comparisons are made with other stars (e.g., Brad Pitt and Colin Farrell are invoked), and viewers expressed admiration for Pattinson's expressive self-consciousness regarding his own image (e.g., "By portraying a playboy [in *Bel Ami* (Declan Donnellan, 2012)], he can draw on his heartthrob status to an almost comical effect").¹³

In addressing skeptical qualms about Pattinson's talent, the survey's respondents reveal the inherent complexities in casual assessments of acting. What is noteworthy here is the coalescence of their various points of interest. Although the survey's notion of talent is ill-defined, this comingling of responses should not inherently be construed as a confusion of the artifice of acting with the naturalness of behavior nor a confusion of conceptual categories. Rather, the intersection of intent, affect, aesthetics and signification always informs assessments of acting. In turn, such attentiveness to an actor's deliberate artistry can frequently serve as a tacit attempt to comprehend the explicit and implicit conceptual ideas manifested within a work.

The various deliberations on screen acting discussed earlier should be regarded as more than simply casual or amateur evaluative proclamations about a fundamental aspect of film style. What we might begin to recognize is that these casual deliberations can frequently serve as tacit substitutions for (or self-reflective entry points into) more explicit and coherent theories of filmic engagement and/or appreciation. Our readiness to discuss acting before other formal elements, and the confidence with which we are prepared to pass judgment on a performance, seems indicative of an unconscious intimacy between acting and theory. But rather than draw from a carefully defined set of aesthetic principles or philosophical ideals in order

to formulate an intricate, cogent, and systematically argued thesis about a film as a holistic system, we are often more likely to “use” acting as a vehicle to indirectly or implicitly theorize about a cinematic experience in an impressionistic, intensely personal and piecemeal fashion. What I have been encouraging us to acknowledge here—in an effort to bring to light what knee-jerk dismissals of amateur criticisms of acting fail to acknowledge—is simply this: that our attentiveness to and intuitions about an actor’s artistry frequently serves as a tacit attempt to comprehend the explicit and implicit conceptual ideas manifested within (and around) a work.

FILM ACTING: THEORIES AND INTUITIONS

I have deliberately described these attempts at comprehension as “intuitions” rather than “theories.” The confirmation that an intuition demands differs from the kind of evidence that one must provide in order to verify a theoretical hypothesis. Suppositionally speaking, one could mount an empirical investigation to test my idea’s validity as a theory. Interviews could be conducted, for example, or questionnaires composed that would attempt to ascertain the general nature of viewers’ attention to acting and/or how such awareness is mobilized in the larger interests of formulating ideas about the film in question. Recurring dimensions or areas of interest might be noted and potentially connected with the explicit or implicit meanings that viewers draw from that particular viewing experience. However, such an investigation would overlook the type of understanding that intuition requires. It is not that the previous postulation—that casual discussions about acting qualify as informal occasions for philosophy—can or should be empirically proven. Rather, if this intuition is to be rendered intelligible, it requires the discovery of a perspective that would enable a suitable form of understanding. As Stanley Cavell puts it, “intuition places a demand upon us, namely for tuition; call this wording, the willingness to subject oneself to words, to make oneself intelligible.”¹⁴

What *Theorizing Film Acting* strives for is the legitimizing of a variety of perspectives that might help one begin to trust and believe in one’s own feelings about acting as they come into being. To be clear, this is not a call for an investment in ahistorical and solipsistic forms of impressionistic thought. Rather, if we are to trust in our intuitions about acting—indeed, if we are to trust in the intuition that our ordinary impressions about acting qualify as a form of theory-making and/or can be used to theorize about film—then we must find ways of enabling such understanding. The chapters here collectively represent an effort to pursue the tuition required by such belief: they represent a “willingness to make oneself intelligible” in the greater interests of conviction. Earlier studies of film acting have already argued compellingly for the validity of paying closer attention to acting; this collection responds with a variety of specific directions

in which our attention might be focused.¹⁵ In other words, it answers the demand placed on us by our intuitions by offering various forms of tuition. This still begs the question: is “theory” required for us to make our intuitions about film acting intelligible? I would answer in the affirmative based on three relevant ways of understanding theory conceptually: as an activity of “self-accounting,” as akin to the classical ambitions of “*theoria*” and as a propaedeutic tool.

First, this collection reinforces the synonymy between theory and philosophy as identified by Stephen Mulhall. That is, philosophy’s distinct requirement is that of self-accounting, and so film theory is, in essence, an activity in which one “reflects upon the conditions of [film’s] possibility”—on its internal resources, so to speak.¹⁶ Film theorists move from a concern with the particular to the production of generalities that speak to “the cinematic capacity itself.”¹⁷ Thus, a number of contributors seek to readdress some of the longstanding fundamental questions about acting as an internal resource of cinema. What is (distinct about) film acting, for example? What are the necessary capacities and conditions that enable a subject to act? Classical predecessors on the internal resources of acting include: Leo Braudy’s assertion that film acting is distinctive in its exploration of the intimate and authentic feelings of individual persons, Charles Affron’s claim that great performances uncannily combine expression and emblem and thus speak to the camera’s dialectical capacity to evoke reality and ideality simultaneously and Vsevolod Pudovkin’s insistence on the dialectical “subjugation and re-expression of the actor’s own living individuality” in order to craft a “lifelike image.”¹⁸

Alternatively, other contributors provide essays in the spirit of David Rodowick’s revivification of theory’s ancient origins as *theoria*: an epistemologically and ethically motivated speculative and contemplative enterprise. In this sense, theory serves as a systematic self-examination in which we simultaneously “evaluat[e] our styles of knowing” and “examin[e] our modes of existence and their possibilities of transformation.”¹⁹ Certain contributors, then, undertake a thoroughgoing investigation of the means by which we might come to know film actors—their styles of being, labor and evolving creative and epistemic potentialities—and how we might respond to or engage with their performative acts. A number of chapters in this volume enquire into the nature of the relationship between actor and audience. Correspondingly, several other contributors ask how we might describe the formal and/or economic relationships among performer, character, work and market. In so doing, some writers expand on the work pioneered by such early theorists as Béla Balázs—who argued that our attention to the microphysiognomy of an actor’s face provides access to a film’s spiritual drama—and Walter Benjamin, whose conception of film acting involved the mechanically assured immutability of the performer and the non-interactivity of the audience.²⁰ Others follow directions forged in the early 1980s, such as the taxonomic distinctions Stephen Heath draws between various

“presences of people” in the cinema, Barry King’s economies of bodily signification and labor and the cultural materialism of Richard Dyer’s analysis of star images.²¹

Finally, certain contributors’ theoretical ambitions are in alignment with what Malcolm Turvey describes as the “propaedeutic function” of a philosophy of the cinema.²² In this sense, film theory’s aim is to avoid reductively hermeneutic paradigms and clarify the meaning of explanatory generalizations about film instead. Given the tendency to describe the mechanics of an actor’s work as an elusive or ineffable practice that is suitably parsed in intensely subjective terms, the analytic clarificationism of theory aims to rectify the perceived “quasimystical” dimensions of this so-called “reverie approach” to acting discourse.²³ Thus, various writers incorporate their musings on acting within a more precise analysis of performance as a whole, asking how the specifics of the medium might function in relation to an actor’s work. They also attempt to understand how notions of acting change depending on the modal context in which the performance occurs. Precursors include: Lev Kuleshov’s conception of the actor’s body as a machine that might be trained to adapt to the contingencies of film production without resorting to the use of emotional memory; Siegfried Kracauer’s claim that cinematic technology requires the film actor to “relinquish . . . ‘unnatural’ and surplus movements and stylizations” in order “to impart the physical existence of a character”—one that takes on an existential equivalency with other objects on screen; and Stanley Cavell’s assertion that the film actor does not match his skills to the necessities of a preexisting character as a stage actor does, but because he is the subject of the camera’s study, he “lends his being to the role and accepts only what fits” instead.²⁴

Therefore, by reasserting the value of theory, in all three senses of the term outlined earlier, this collection will demonstrate that theorizing film acting does not inherently mean: (1) simply quibbling about authorship, (2) reducing actors into components of the *mise-en-scène*, (3) objectifying actors as bodies that bear the “gaze,” (4) reading stars textually as social instrumentalities or (5) appreciating acting exclusively for its potential contributions to various politicized “alienating” effects. Rather, despite their differences, these three theoretical strains are employed here to expand the field of film acting and performance studies in the interests of self-accounting, clarity, elucidation, precision and, ultimately, acknowledgment.

In so doing, this volume will also explicitly address earlier accusations that film theory has thus far been both lacking in self-consciousness and lexically restrictive in its dealings with film acting.²⁵ It should be noted that such allegations have become less compelling given the groundswell of interest in this area within the last decade. Acting has attracted attention from a wide variety of theoretical traditions, and this volume aspires toward the consolidation of such an exciting array of ideas. As Pamela Wojcik asserts, “we should recognize that film acting touches upon

numerous areas of inquiry and provides a means of exploring areas such as technological change, genre, and institutional history, from a new perspective.”²⁶ Similarly, Carole Zucker also promotes a “plurality of thought” in acting studies, and this theoretical “polyvalence” is embodied by this collection’s intention to provide an updated and comprehensive representation of the field of film acting studies to date.²⁷ In the spirit of such pluralism, the chapters in this volume offer extended meditations on the ontological, stylistic, authorial, historical and ideological questions that have only been identified in schematic or scattershot ways thus far.

Although the anthology is clearly supportive of theoretical syncretism, it also offers a forum for theorists and practitioners to work out their individual differences, defend their respective orientations, advance new models of thinking and suggest dynamic interrelations between previously embattled traditions. The “methodologically robust pluralism” advanced by Noël Carroll—in which theories “can be put in competition with each other” in the “hopes that some will be eliminated through processes of criticism and comparison in light of certain questions and the relevant evidence”—is not advocated here.²⁸ Such academic Darwinism minimizes the oft-surprising richness of both analytical and continental traditions and the potential for intellectual discovery in empirical as well as essayistic investigations. To adopt a totalistic, “scorched earth policy” with regard to theory is to reductively suggest “that one movement or another got everything wrong”; instead, this volume advances the more moderate pluralism advocated by Robert Stam, in which “theorists broach the same questions, but answer them in light of different goals and in different theoretical language.”²⁹ To embrace such polyvalence is not to court incoherence; rather, we aspire toward intercommunication and interpenetration even while clarifying the grounds of potential philosophical disagreement.

AIMS, OBJECTIVES, ORGANIZATION (AND APOLOGIES)

In accordance with these syncretistic ideals, three of the primary aims of the collection will be: (1) to provide theoretical accounts of the grounds and phenomenon of screen acting, (2) to bring new specificities to the various languages used to describe acting and, correspondingly, (3) to precisely analyze the work of an actor through a number of different lenses that collectively represent the wide array of theoretical programs and traditions in contemporary film studies. Inclusivity, comprehensiveness and reflexivity are the volume’s guiding principles, and so a broad number of representatives from across the discipline of film studies are included here. In accordance with true propaedeutic functionality, some entries attempt to provide new answers to various essential questions about film acting. Other contributors are not so much engaged in theory-building as they are moved by the spirit of *theoria* to engage in novel applications of familiar theoretically

informed modes of analyses. Still others offer the kind of carefully attentive explication that might satisfy Lesley Stern's and George Kouvaros' call for a "more ostensive and demonstrative mode of description"—analysis that is tantamount to a theoretical self-accounting of cinema's internal resources.³⁰ Many contributors took the opportunity to self-reflectively argue for the importance of their respective line of thought. Thus, the chapters collected here offer concentrated justifications for the validity of numerous philosophical traditions in order to open up multiple avenues of investigation in acting studies.

Each part proposes innovative ways of considering a few of the recurring motifs in performance studies, including the mutually contingent problematic of description and interpretation, the intricacies of bodily dynamics and their reception by audiences, the significance of stars and the impact of evolving technologies and film styles on acting traditions. These motifs are affiliated with some of the more general avenues of theoretical thought that collectively comprise the discipline of film studies: aesthetics, reception studies, cultural and historical research and philosophies of the apparatus. Therefore, the anthology's four parts are arranged in accordance with these general theoretical domains, rather than via the philosophical sympathies between contributors.

The chapters in Part I, "Aesthetics: Understanding and Interpreting Film Acting," are concerned with the questions of how one might accurately translate what an actor is doing during the process of analysis and/or just how it is that performers' actions are capable of significance beyond the level of immediate referential meaning. In her chapter on the noteworthiness of a given performance, Brenda Austin-Smith (Chapter 1) locates the tension between the particularity of an actor's being and the narrative specificity of his or her gestures as an equilibrium that merits our attention—especially as the meaningful distinctiveness of their expressive actions gives rise to our awareness of their characters' privacy and personal freedom. Andrew Klevan (Chapter 2) makes note of a number of performative factors that make possible our articulation of narrative significance even while they might also simultaneously destabilize the security of those same interpretations—a dynamic form of interpretive insecurity that results from an actor's "achievement of fluency." In his own account of the meaningfulness of performative instances in film comedies, Alex Clayton (Chapter 3) wonders how comic intentions—rather than comedic effects—are made manifest and endeavors to show how the pleasure we take in these "incongruous intentions" is caught up in our recognition of an actor's "deftly executed failures," "comic twinkles" and delirious strategies of self-presentation. In turn, Murray Pomerance (Chapter 4) demonstrates the intricate effects on our relationship with the actors in the films of Alfred Hitchcock that are generated by the imposition of a particular level of narrative discourse: the "enframed" performance, in which an onscreen watcher bears witness to a performance, unaware of his or her own position as an audience member

as such. Finally, George Toles (Chapter 5) delves into the expert management of known and unknown elements in intriguing star turns by Marlon Brando, Deanna Durbin, James Stewart and Robert Mitchum, arguing that their accomplishments emerge from the proficiency by which they move between the familiar and the mysterious.

Part II, “Reception: Film Acting, Audiences and Communities,” features chapters that address the intentionality of actors’ expressive decisions and their various receptive contexts—particularly the cognitive and experiential dimensions of spectators’ engagement with a performance, and how spectators in turn make pragmatic use of these engagements in the interest of fashioning social relationships. “Reception” is to be understood here in an expansive sense insofar as some of the chapters here focus on the mechanics of the processes by which a performance is received by viewers, and not just in accordance with reception studies’ traditional interest in the historicized meaning-making activities of actual audience formations. The contributors included here identify the complexities of an actor’s address to (or coexistence with) an audience and the spectator’s resultant cognitive processing of this mediated act of self-presentation, or they discuss the means by which an interest in (or attempt at) acting itself generates a particular interpretive and/or familial community. Shifting ground from the previous section’s discussions of our epistemological understanding of acting, Jörg Sternagel (Chapter 6) focuses on our phenomenological experience of Heath Ledger as the Joker in *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008) in order to demonstrate how actor and audience co-exist energetically within the virtual tactility of a performance space, and how acting is capable of sensitizing our consciousness toward a filmed subject’s corporeal being. By contrast, William Brown (Chapter 7) turns his attention to the functioning of the actor and audiences’ minds—particularly the role that mirror neurons might play during a close-up of an emotionally charged moment—suggesting that our abilities to create and respond to authentic feelings in fictional situations is a consequence of our rather remarkable neurological hardwiring.

Meanwhile, at the level of the interpersonal, Kevin Esch (Chapter 8) considers how audiences (including other actors) find use-value in the creative labor of performers, and he describes the process whereby various “mythologies” about film acting are ritualistically created—not in simple appreciative terms that glorify creative innovation, but as a way to establish communicative interconnections between otherwise separate communities. Ernest Mathijs (Chapter 9) examines one such community: cultist viewers and their especial knowledge of arcane performative moments, in which acting becomes recognized as a complex public address rather than the creative application of unique skills to a given role. If the communal dimension of acting is largely a matter of “knowing your audience,” then Liz Czach (Chapter 10) investigates a non-fictional mode of production in which this familiarity is taken literally: the home movie. Czach focuses

on the intimacies between amateur filmmakers and the familial subjects who act for them, revaluing the self-conscious, awkward and ostentatious performances therein and defending them against the disapproval of those who sought to impose naturalism as a “professional” norm.

Part III, “Culture: Film History, Industry and the Vicissitudes of Star Acting,” presents innovative new directions in the longstanding tradition of star studies. However, rather than offer case studies of celebrity figures using well-worn semiotic and/or sociological models of analysis, the chapters here pay close attention to the performative details of stars in action and consider their implications beyond discursive or textual signification. The relationship between performance and narrative is revisited in Paul McDonald’s (Chapter 11) treatment of the ostensiveness of star acting in which he argues against entrenched oppositions between impersonation and personification, figure and character, story and spectacle. Sharon Marie Carnicke (Chapter 12) provides a novel rejoinder to John Ford’s exclamation of surprise at John Wayne’s performance in *Red River* (Howard Hawks, 1948)—“I didn’t know the son of a bitch could act!” By drawing on Constant-Benoît Coquelin’s insights into the ontology of acting, as well as Wayne’s performance choices in *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956), she demonstrates the compelling means by which star performers imprint character images on themselves in order to craft indelible and naturalistic illusions of believable human behavior. Charlie Keil (Chapter 13) focuses on one of the newly emerging “stars” of transitional cinema: Florence Turner—an actor important for our conceptualization of industrial film’s shift from the “picture personality” to the full-fledged celebrity performer whose image is just beginning to become separable from its iteration and display within a narrative scenario. Chris Holmlund (Chapter 14), by contrast, turns her attention to three heterosexual niche stars (as distinct from celebrity performers)—Chris Cooper, Catherine Keener and Chloë Sevigny—whose ability to playfully enact queer sexualities in the late 1990s helped bring New Queer Cinema into the mainstream while shifting the sexual politics of star acting into promising new territories.

Part IV, “Apparatus: Technology, Film Form and the Actor,” incorporates reflections on actors’ internal resources, ethically motivated speculative contemplations of their ontology and pragmatically motivated clarifications of the process of their mediation—all of which aim to address the complexities of the actor’s relation to the machinery of filmmaking. Contributors provide accounts of actors and audiences’ mutual acknowledgment of film performance’s irreducibly mechanistic dependency—its technological givenness, so to speak—or propose practical techniques whereby contemporary practitioners might acclimatize their physicality and consciousness to the demands of various filmmaking technologies. William Rothman (Chapter 15) focuses on the relationship between actor and camera—as he or she meets its gaze, looks “through” it, or turns away from it altogether—and uses these acknowledgments and disavowals to speculate about the

simultaneous reality and unreality of the camera in the world on film. In turn, Jennifer M. Barker (Chapter 16) draws on the writings of Jean-Luc Nancy and the performance of Ulrich Mühe in *The Lives of Others* (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006) to consider the ways in which film sound and the performer's activity of "listening-as-acting" creates a "sonic body" that exists between actor and spectator. Sean Aita's chapter (Chapter 17) is the first of two entries that look to the future of cinematic acting in which a performance is largely the consequence of digital intervention. Aita concentrates on the actor's corporeality—particularly, the impact of motion capture technologies on acting training—and asserts that older, psychology based models of characterization are giving way to increasingly more physical role taxonomies. In turn, Barry King (Chapter 18) revisits his earlier semiotic work on stardom in light of emergent high-profile performance transcription technologies, arguing that digitized modes of acting are producing potentially radical changes to the economies of the corporeal sign, filmic signification and labor market for actors.

Despite this volume's efforts at comprehensiveness, there are some obvious and unfortunate omissions. Although extensive editorial efforts have been made to secure representation from a diverse number of theoretical traditions, simultaneously ensuring that the volume addressed acting traditions from a broad array of cultural and/or geographical areas was ultimately an unachievable aspiration. Although historically expansive in its attention to acting styles from the transitional era to the present, the volume largely limits its discussions of acting to films produced in the United States and Europe. Certainly, future acting and performance studies would do well to draw on the internationalist ambitions of theatre studies, which have historically been much more expansive in their attention to non-Western performance traditions.

As a handful of scholarly anthologies precede *Theorizing Film Acting*, the volume also avoids replicating material that is readily available elsewhere. Therefore, I have identified some noteworthy pioneers in the study of film acting but do not provide an abbreviated history of theoretical interest in the subject. For those interested in the rather fraught historical relationship between film theory and acting, excellent summative accounts can be found in the Introduction of *Movie Acting: A Film Reader* and the opening chapter of *Reframing Screen Performance*. Likewise, in the interests of space, this volume provides endnotes to each chapter in lieu of a subject-specific bibliography. Readers in need of such a localized resource are urged to consult the works cited lists of the aforementioned books, which are collectively quite comprehensive.

In summary, the chapters assembled here collectively aim to produce a philosophically robust approach to the emergent tradition of film acting studies, which addresses its own procedures systematically in a self-conscious manner. The mode of investigation here is therefore analytic in spirit and will endeavor to provide specific answers to some of the more

basic theoretical questions that confront us in thinking about screen acting. Thus, our contributors will not simply provide new ways of understanding acting through the application of specific theoretical models; rather, they will help us to better appreciate how careful considerations of acting might illuminate facets of these models as well—how attention to acting might allow us to see “what makes theory possible and desirable.” Our own intuitions—so often left poised on the verge of illumination—deserve nothing less.

NOTES

1. Leonard Quart, “I Still Love Going to Movies: An Interview with Pauline Kael,” *Cineaste* 25, no. 2 (2000): 10.
2. For a select exemplification of this tendency, see Cynthia Baron and Sharon Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 1–7; Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Frank P. Tomasulo, “Introduction: More Than *the* Method, More Than One Method,” in *More Than a Method*, ed. Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Frank P. Tomasulo (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 11–12; Jeremy G. Butler, “Introduction,” in *Star Texts*, ed. Jeremy G. Butler (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 7; Karen Hollinger, *The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1–22; Pamela Robertson Wojcik, “General Introduction,” in *Movie Acting: The Film Reader*, ed. Pamela Robertson Wojcik (London: Routledge, 2004), 1–6; and Carole Zucker, “Preface,” in *Making Visible the Invisible: An Anthology of Original Essays on Film Acting*, ed. Carole Zucker (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1990), vii–viii.
3. Alan Lovell and Peter Krämer, “Introduction,” in *Screen Acting*, ed. Alan Lovell and Peter Krämer (London: Routledge, 1999), 8.
4. Murray Pomerance, *Johnny Depp Starts Here* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 9–10.
5. For example, in *Reframing Screen Performance*, Baron and Carnicke introduce acting terminology—often appropriated from craft discourses and theatre studies—as a corrective to “impressionistic” academic discussions of performance. See also the criteria for evaluating acting laid out in Richard Barsam and Dave Monahan, *Looking at Movies*, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 2010), 310. Their instruction for offering a theoretically informed evaluation involves assessing a performance’s appropriateness, inherent thoughtfulness, expressive coherence and wholeness or unity.
6. Pomerance, *Johnny Depp Starts Here*, 256, 260.
7. My ongoing references to “non-specialist viewers” is to be understood in the same sense as Noël Carroll’s references to “untutored audiences” in his writings on mass art: spectators who are able to comprehend the referential and explicit meanings of a film by virtue of their innate perceptual capacities and cultural situation and without a dependence on an education in relevant aesthetic histories and theories. See Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 190–93; and Noël Carroll, “Mass Art: The Debate Continues,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35, no. 3 (2001): 18–20.
8. *The Wrestler*. User comments. *Metacritic.com*. [http://apps.metacritic.com/movie/usercomments.jsp?id_string=6087:rQdo\\$TvI7Ls5bv6EI7P6nQ**](http://apps.metacritic.com/movie/usercomments.jsp?id_string=6087:rQdo$TvI7Ls5bv6EI7P6nQ**) (accessed June 1, 2009).
9. See Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 2nd ed. (London: BFI, 1998), 91–93.

10. Baron and Carnicke have such “invisibility” in mind when they claim that audiences tend to “see through” the “transparent” acting choices of a performer because those choices often mimetically resemble the analogous and familiar behavior of people in the real world. See Baron and Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance*, 181–87.
11. Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994), 210.
12. Examples taken from Matthew Miller, Dorothy Pomerantz and Lacey Rose, ed., “The Celebrity 100,” *Forbes*, June 3, 2009, http://www.forbes.com/lists/2009/53/celebrity-09_The-Celebrity-100_Rank.html.
13. Jed Medina, “tMF Viewers’ Survey: Hype or Glory? Rob Pattinson—His Acting Career So Far,” *the Movie-Fanatic*, June 13, 2009, http://themovie-fanatic.com/index.php/posts_about_actors_making_news/survey-robert-pattinson-acting-career (accessed July 12, 2009).
14. Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge: In Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.
15. Exceptional justifications for the close analysis of performance can be found in Baron and Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance*, 33–61; Andrew Klevan, *Film Performance: From Appreciation to Achievement* (London: Wallflower, 2005), 1–17; and Paul McDonald, “Why Study Film Acting? Some Opening Reflections,” in *More Than a Method*, 23–41.
16. Stephen Mulhall, *On Film*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 132.
17. Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 4.
18. See: Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame*, 25th Anniversary ed. (1976; repr., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 191–201; Charles Affron, *Star Acting: Gish, Garbo, Davis* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977), 18–19; and V. I. Pudovkin, “Film Acting,” in *Film Technique and Film Acting*, trans. and ed. Ivor Montagu (1933; repr., New York: Bonanza Books, 2007), 22–25.
19. D. N. Rodowick, “An Elegy for Theory,” *October* 122 (2007): 101–02.
20. See Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (1952; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 60–88; and Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Sohn (1935; repr., New York: Schocken, 1968), 217–52.
21. See Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1981), 176–94; Barry King, “Articulating Stardom,” *Screen* 26, no. 5 (1985): 27–50; and Dyer, *Stars*, 132–50.
22. Malcolm Turvey, “Theory, Philosophy and Film Studies: A Response to D. N. Rodowick’s ‘An Elegy for Theory,’” *October* 122 (2007): 116–18.
23. Hollinger, *The Actress*, 4–5.
24. See Lev Kuleshov, “The Art of the Cinema,” in *Kuleshov on Film*, ed. and trans. Ronald Levaco (1929; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 99–115; Siegfried Kracauer, “Remarks on the Actor,” in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 94–97; and Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 25–29. I would also include James Naremore’s groundbreaking analytical work—particularly his notions of “the performance frame” and “expressive coherence”—in this tradition. See James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 9–21, 68–81.
25. Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros, “Introduction: Descriptive Acts,” in *Falling for You: Essays on Cinema and Performance*, ed. Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros (Sydney: Power Publications, 1999), 6.

26. Pamela Robertson Wojcik, "General Introduction," 11.
27. Carole Zucker, "Preface," viii–ix.
28. Noël Carroll, "Prospects for Film Theory," in *Engaging the Moving Image*, ed. Noël Carroll (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 386.
29. Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 9.
30. They identify such rhetoric as "*ekphrastic*" description. See Stern and Kouvaros, "Introduction," 17.

Part I

Aesthetics

Understanding and
Interpreting Film Acting

1 Acting Matters

Noting Performance in Three Films

Brenda Austin-Smith

In his essay, “Why Study Film Acting?”, Paul McDonald notes the relatively short shrift given to the analysis of screen performance by film studies in comparison to auteurship, editing and film stars. He also points out that just because acting has been overlooked by film scholars does not by itself provide a good enough reason for studying it. Rather, he stresses, the study of acting requires a warrant: “Analyzing film acting will only become a worthwhile and necessary exercise if the signification of the actor can be seen to influence the meaning of the film in some way. Acting must be seen to count for something.”¹

In order to be fully valued, performance must be noticed and identified *as* performance, rather than as star exhibition, an artifact of editing or the traces of someone merely living in front of the camera. Noticing film actors is one of the first things that audiences do, since our eyes are attracted to the figures that most resemble us, but this is not the same as recognizing what they do as work or understanding their portrayals as the product of choices made by professionals in command of their craft. Film performance is nevertheless a pesky fascinator, something obviously visible, but often thought of as elusive because, as Lovell and Krämer write, referring to the internal deliberations of the performer, the “decisions the actor has made are invisible.”²

The difficulty is not just a byproduct of film studies’ emphasis on directing or the ideology of representation, nor a claim that we have stars in our eyes as we look at the screen. The trouble is in the first instance one of ontological crowding: the actor is physically commensurate with the character played, their existences occupying the same space and appearing to make use of the same body. Critical elision ratifies this confusion when writing about acting becomes discussion “of a fictional character (whose creation is the work of the writer) rather than analyses of how that character is embodied (the work of an actor).”³ Another persistent difficulty has been the tendency of film studies to mystify performance, invoking distinctions between stage acting and screen acting that award expertise and craft virtuosity to the former rather than to the latter. The screen actor’s particular relationship with and exposure to the camera encourages this

differentiation. So strong is the influence of “realist” performance styles, usually conflated with “the Method,” that these are often regarded as the standard against which all other forms of acting are judged. The confounding result can sometimes be criticism from viewers that “visible” acting is bad acting, whereas “invisible” acting, because it is natural, can’t be properly described because its properties of authenticity and inwardness are ineffable and can’t be identified, much less interpreted. If you can see it, it isn’t working; if it works, you can’t really see it.⁴

This romantic, almost religious, paradox leads to speechlessness or vague raptures before the performances we admire most, as if to talk or write about something as crucial as film acting were to ruin it or diminish its transporting effects. Richard Dyer writes about the necessity to counter this non-treatment of screen performance by attending to “performance signs” in star acting, such as facial expressions, voice, gestures, body movements and so on.⁵ More recently, Cynthia Baron and Sharon Carnicke remind us that a “rich vocabulary for analyzing film acting already exists” and has been available for “at least fifty years.”⁶ That screen actors have made use of performance training, carrying it with them across the great divide presumed by some to exist between theatre and film, is clear not only in interviews and memoirs but also in items such as the “Emotion Chart” developed and used by Robert Donat to guide his portrayal of Dr. Manson in *The Citadel* (King Vidor, 1938). The chart, writes Vicky Lowe, “shows that for Donat screen acting was a consciously coded performance, even if it might appear to audiences that he was simply being himself.”⁷

The existence of performance signs and codes does not, of course, shape the meaning of any instance of acting in a definitive way. Dyer writes, “any attempt to analyze performance runs up against the extreme complexity and ambiguity of performance signs,” which is “seldom totally eliminated.”⁸ Although Dyer refers to “determinate” contexts in which these signs take shape, his own reading of performance allows for variance in interpreting, for example, Bette Davis’s portrayal of Regina Giddens in *The Little Foxes* (William Wyler, 1941) as both evil and as an embodiment of class revenge, although he negatively attributes these interpretive possibilities to a “lack of clarity” in Davis’ performance.⁹ The point is that the history of acting and the variation of acting styles across film eras and genres informs but does not contain the range of actual portrayals encountered onscreen or limit the interpretations thereof. Baron and Carnicke write, “From the standpoint of reception, what the actor does within the frame with body and voice, rhythm and movement, matters more than the presumed creative process.”¹⁰ And although the deliberations that actors make are indeed invisible to us, the results of those decisions are not. They are available to analysis in the same way as are other elements of film art.

In what follows, I examine three performances that “count for something,” in that they add complication and distinctiveness to the portrayal of character. Each role—that of a wronged young woman, a soulless

technocrat, an abused animal—functions as a site for predictable viewer affects of, respectively, sympathy, judgment and pity. The achievement of Nadia Sibirskaia in *Ménilmontant* (Dimitri Kirsanoff, 1924), Gene Hackman in *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974) and the donkey in *Au Hasard, Balthazar* (Robert Bresson, 1966) is that they distinguish each character from its function as an emblem of innocence, moral cowardice or victimhood by endowing it with inwardness, what Stanley Cavell calls “privacy,” defined as “personal freedom,” the “right to idiosyncrasy” and the “wish for perfect personal expressiveness.”¹¹ My choice of texts ranges across eras and styles to pursue, through close reading, singular performance moments that have become cherished examples in my own teaching practice of how ambiguous, contradictory or apparently meaningless physical details can contribute to memorable film characterization. *Ménilmontant* is a silent melodrama lauded for its poetic montage aesthetics rather than for its performances; *The Conversation* is an example of a “New Hollywood” auteur film with a star actor whose extroverted persona is deliberately muted, whereas *Au Hasard, Balthazar* denies its actors expressivity. Forms of reserve and silence, dictated by technology, script and direction, thus condition the environment in which these performances are crafted.

The significance of these three performances is linked to questions of freedom and choice on the part of performer and character. When we watch most films, we assume the freedom of actors to make choices that result in visible performance signs. We become aware of how those choices create characters who have existence and choice only in a fictional sense. Whether the character’s freedom is ultimately enabled or constrained by the diegesis is a thematic concern to which the actor’s performance of that character contributes. Movies give us fictional beings we figure out by watching them respond to a world arranged by someone else. Seeing the same sequence over and over awakens us to the choices that actors make in dramatizing the characters who confront these arrangements. We are convinced by performances that at this point in the plot other decisions were possible for these characters. Because of what the performer does, we believe in the freedom of the character to have done otherwise and to have decided on this rather than that course of action, even if the character’s decision is finally the refusal of his or her freedom to choose.

Our belief in a character’s choice in a scripted fictional universe usually depends on the actor’s creation and communication of some reservoir of reflection—distinct from the actor’s own—from which the character’s choices can emerge. This existential duality in one corporeal package would seem one of the “necessary capacities and conditions that enable a subject to act.”¹² But while *Ménilmontant* and *The Conversation* provide evidence of that private self in the performance of thought and reverie, what James Naremore calls a “form of affective thinking,” its existence is harder to assume in *Balthazar*.¹³ Nevertheless, the donkey’s performance makes possible worthwhile reflections on the role of self-consciousness in

acting. It also makes worthwhile reflections on the part that expressiveness plays in reassuring us of the onscreen presence of a depicted character who is capable of making meaningful choices, at least in filmic worlds in which choice itself has meaning.

MÉNILMONTANT AND NADIA SIBIRSKAIA

In *Ménilmontant*, Nadia Sibirskaia plays one of two sisters, orphaned and driven from their French country home by a shocking murder (Figure 1.1). Having moved to and found work in Paris, the sisters become involved with the same man. They are separated by circumstance but reunited on the city streets in the final shots of the film.

In the scenes I've chosen, Sibirskaia's character considers and acts out ways of responding to sexual invitation and initiation. Sibirskaia shows us a young woman both feeling and figuring out feeling by trying out gestures and movements commensurate with worldly wisdom, tenderheartedness and remorse. All of these emotions the character might feel entitled to, but Sibirskaia's performance makes us aware that the character is still free to choose among them and is not really in the defining grip of any.



Figure 1.1 Nadia Sibirskaia in *Ménilmontant* (Kino Films, 1924). Digital frame enlargement.

Early in the film, the character of the young sister played by Sibirskaiia meets the young man (Guy Belmont) after a day at a factory where she and her sister (Yolande Beaulieu) make bunches of artificial flowers. The young man will become her lover and also her sister's, abandoning her to unwed motherhood and leading her sister into prostitution. But for now, he is the person with whom she can't wait to meet. Her impatience is not just erotic, the pent-up energy of someone who has been waiting hours to meet a loved one, but that of someone for whom the freedom of being alive and young in the city is a joy that surges against the confines of those who treat her restlessness only as coquetry or as requiring sex as an appropriate, subduing antidote. She is not looking for sexual satisfaction but for the kind of urban experience that could complement her own vitality, which seems connected to the metropolitan montage of streets, cars and bustling people that fronts the sequence. Seconds later, she skips around a corner from the left of the frame, hands stuffed into her cardigan as if to keep them quiet. Another cut, and she comes around another corner from the right, half-dancing, half-skipping up behind Belmont to tap his back. He turns toward her and she darts away into a pirouette, then stops beside him. A cut captures her face from the collar up; her head tilts up in sauciness and then down in coyness. She shakes her head slightly, turns it away more definitely and then turns back to him, birdlike in her combination of caution and interest. Her body moves toward him, describing a half-circle as the camera cuts to the young man's face.

As Sibirskaiia moves toward and away from Belmont, we see the character's flirtatiousness, but we also sense her wariness and sensual confusion. She is drawn to him but is uneasy and unsure of how to respond to the sexual demand his unmoving presence makes of her and backs away. Sibirskaiia's flitting movements contrast absolutely with Belmont's tendency toward stillness. She dances around him as if around a question that his presence insists on, which is the question her hands fend off as they keep his lips away from hers, treating his sexual advances as a joke even though he really means it. Their dismaying mismatch is instantly apparent and will work itself out in the form of Sibirskaiia's steady diminishment as she is burdened by the consequences of this liaison. In subsequent scenes, we watch her body slow down, the mechanism of her playfulness unwinding, leaving her not just homeless and with a child, but spiritually spent, until the reunion with her sister brings back the joyful pirouette that Sibirskaiia uses to define the character.

The next scene of interest begins after the couple's night together. The light in the man's room is dim, and we can barely make out the young woman standing, dressed for departure, near the door. She faces the inside of the room and looks over to where he lies sleeping. She walks slowly across to the bed, filling in an action we did not actually see her undertake in the earlier scene of lovemaking, in which an ellipsis magically transported her across the room, suggesting the mixture of desire and uncertainty that

made her want and not want to be there at the same time. Now, though, she folds the coverlet up and sits on the bed. A lap dissolve brings us closer, and we see her gently move the covers up again to tuck her lover in as she softly kisses him on the forehead. The maternal note of Sibirskaiia's gesture is melancholy not only in its foreshadowing of her character's approaching motherhood, but also in its double suggestion that at this moment she surpasses this man in maturity and is yet young enough to believe that bending over a lover in tenderness is something that one does in moments like this. She does not wish to awaken him, and so she does not kiss him on the mouth. But she remains, caressing his hair, perhaps wishing that he would wake up on his own, that the newly formed bond between them would make him responsive to her affectionate presence and rouse him to consciousness. The soundness of his sleep, though, is an index of his loutishness and indifference to her now that their relationship has been consummated, and it predicts her future loneliness. He seems as deliberately intent on slumber now as he was on seduction then and no more open to diversion.

The image blurs, and a cut takes us outside to a shot of a bridge, the river, traffic and trees in what seems like morning light. Another cut returns us to the dim room, with the young woman lingering on the threshold of the door she was reluctant to cross the previous night and now is just as unwilling to leave behind. She hesitates, watching the young man from across the room, waiting until the last possible moment to turn away.

In the next shot, Sibirskaiia walks along a path, close to a stone wall, entering the middle rear of the frame as the camera sits above her. She passes under our gaze looking ahead but also inward. Her arms and hands cross, and the fingers of one hand splay across her neck, as against a chill, touching her chin. There is nothing downcast or mournful in her pacing; she walks steadily, focused on what it feels like to walk through the city, in this new state of sexual knowledge. We see her from behind as she reaches the end of the path where the river wall curves and then as she walks up to the wall. A cut to a shot of trees and then back to Sibirskaiia's face as her hand moves to cup her chin and her finger traces its way along her mouth, triggering a blurred transition into a reverie of her childhood, in which we see her running and playing in the countryside. The end of the flashback returns us to Sibirskaiia's face, her thoughts still fixed on the past.

The memory sequence is over-determined in its connection of the young woman's girlhood to an unfallen natural world of asexual unself-consciousness and seems more than a little self-dramatizing. It is excessively romantic, and she seems to seize on this self-representation as an image appropriate for someone who should be regretting the loss of sexual innocence. Sibirskaiia's finger thoughtfully flicks the side of her lip, showing the character testing the memory of her girlhood against what she really feels, rather than what she thinks she ought to feel, and coming up, ruefully, without a match. The gesture is an echo of Sibirskaiia's earlier flirtatious moves and shows us that the young woman does not regret her sexual

experience, although it makes her thoughtful. She turns her head, and a cut shows her from behind beginning to walk down the stairs to the walkway along the river. She takes a couple of steps, then a cut to her shoes shows her take one more step down and then stop. The shot lingers on her shoes, visible toward the top of the frame, re-considering the downward pull of the steps. A dramatic gesture acknowledging her sexual initiation seems called for; if not actual suicide, then at least acting as if suicide were an option. But it is not, because despair and shame is not what she feels. Not yet. That will come later.

THE CONVERSATION AND GENE HACKMAN

In *The Conversation*, Harry Caul (Gene Hackman), a surveillance expert, becomes obsessed by a conversation between Mark (Frederic Forrest) and Ann (Cindy Williams), which he has recorded on an assignment and replays repeatedly. Harry begins to fear that this job will result in the death of one of the individuals under his surveillance, as another of his assignments once did. His own pathological sense of privacy is shattered by his emotional involvement in the case, which eventually results in his complete mental breakdown.

Harry is pathologically obsessed with evading his past, his conscience and opportunities for self-reflection. He is not one for mirrors. Nor does he wish to be known by others in any but a cursory way, a state that makes him preternaturally aware, it seems, even of the camera on which his diegetic existence depends. We certainly see this when Harry arrives at his apartment at the end of a day of surveillance work. Having unlocked his door, disabled the alarms and picked up the birthday present waiting for him, Hackman moves through this living space in expectation of a witness or as though the apartment belonged to someone else. His movements are neutral, uninflected, as he walks out of sight, presumably into the kitchen, and then returns to the frame. Coppola's commentary on the DVD release notes the "dead" camera, its passivity a device intended to reinforce the thematic motif of veiled observation. Rather than swivel or re-focus to keep Hackman in its sights, the camera lets him walk out of and then back into the frame. The camera's air is that of minimal interest, although when Hackman moves out of the shot to sit on his living room couch, the camera does go in search of him after a few moments, as if roused to sudden attention by the absence of the target from the frame. The camera's flat pan to the left in search of its subject carries with it a slight whiff of mechanical concern—that of a bored technological underling charged with a mundane task who has somehow managed to doze off or look away—and is worried it has missed something of interest. But in this case, it hasn't missed a thing.

As Hackman talks on the phone to the landlady (Figure 1.2), informing her that from now on his mail will be re-directed to a combination



Figure 1.2 Gene Hackman in *The Conversation* (Lionsgate Home Entertainment, 1974). Digital frame enlargement.

mailbox, he makes himself comfortable, removing a shoe. He leans his head back on the couch, looks up to the ceiling and, holding the sides of his belt with both hands, undoes the buckle and opens the zipper of his pants. As he says “I would be perfectly happy,” Hackman sits back for a moment, hands at his sides on the couch, exasperated, before moving on—“to have everything personal burnt up in a fire, nothing personal”—as he slides his pants down over his thighs—“nothing of value”—and pushes them to his knees—“nothing personal except my keys, d’you see, which I really would like to have the only copy of.” This last part of the exchange occurs as he raises one leg, slips off his remaining shoe and slides his pants over his legs, lifting them and dropping them on the couch beside him.

Hackman’s disrobing does much more than signal Harry’s confidence in his solitude. Harry is a creature of habit, and Hackman’s matter-of-fact pulling off of his pants tells us that this is something that Harry does, almost without thinking, as a way of shucking off the formalities and obligations of work. But in this scene, Harry is intensely aware that his private space has already been invaded and that what he had assumed was available only to him is open to others. The act of removing not just his shoes but also his pants as he sits in front of this particular camera becomes almost exhibitionistic. We watch the character through a lens he seems somehow to sense, in a moment that combines physical unself-consciousness with a terse conversation about intensified privacy and are aware of our voyeurism. The way Hackman holds the phone, tucking it close to his body, reminds us that it connects him to someone else, to a woman who cannot see him, but in whose aural presence he is undressing while outlining the new terms of his inaccessibility. The gesture seems both thoughtless and loaded with intent, almost aggressive.

If someone *is* watching Harry, there is nothing for anyone to see but Hackman's physical assertion that not even Harry's body is personal, that even half-dressed it radiates nothing "of value," nothing particular about him that someone could use to their advantage.

A very different sense of Harry is communicated by Hackman's performance toward the end of a later scene. It is evening, and colleagues from the surveillance conference have convened in the warehouse Harry uses as his workshop, which places him in the uncomfortable position of wary host. Hospitality and mistrust contend as Hackman picks up materials related to his current contract and locks them away in a caged-off section of the workshop, at the same time clearing off space for drinks. Over the course of the party, Harry will be set up for two betrayals by William Moran (Alan Garfield), his rival in surveillance. At one point during the party, Harry and Meredith (Elizabeth McRae), the convention showgirl who has been hired to seduce him and take the tapes, move out to the warehouse floor and become engaged in a conversation in which Harry confesses his love for Amy (Terry Garr), the woman we have seen him break up with earlier in the film. As other partiers interrupt the exchange between Hackman and McRae, Hackman slowly makes his way back to the workshop area, and a cut on action finds him standing by the counter of the workshop.

Hackman taps a piece of what looks like wire on the edge of the work counter with his left hand and puts his plastic drink cup down with his right. He then taps the piece of wire on the counter again, preoccupied, still thinking about his talk with McRae. He plays with the wire and, as he does so, falls forward slightly, hitting the edge of the counter. As he bumps against it, a match cut takes us in to a shot of Hackman from mid-chest up, and we see his head hit, lean into and set in motion a small sign hanging in front of him, attached to a string. As it twists around, we see that it says "TURN LIGHTS OUT" in big white letters on a red background. Hackman draws his head back, his face tilted down, startled at having come into contact with something. He tilts his face up slightly and looks at the sign, looks down again, takes a breath and opens his mouth slightly, as if preparing himself to speak to the object as he would to a person. He lifts his face again, facing the sign straight on, purses his lips and blows gently, moving his head ever so slightly back and forth, making the sign sway. He pauses, takes a short breath and blows on the sign again, coming to the end of his breath just as Garfield's character, Moran, seemingly out of nowhere, breaks into his reverie—"Know something Harry?" Harry, surprised, looks left to see Moran already in place, drink in hand, leaning back against the work counter. How long has he been there, watching?

These shots form a brief transition between Harry's intimate interaction with Meredith and the confrontation with the belligerent, hectoring Moran. Hackman uses these moments to fashion a temporal pocket of introspection in which we see the emotional traces of Harry's conversation with Meredith and his thoughts about how he might bring himself to tell

Amy his feelings for her. All of this is bound up with the effect of Ann's taped voice on his conscience, for he has begun to fear for her safety if he turns in the surveillance recording to the man who has paid him to make it. The surprise is our sudden intimacy with Harry in the middle of a social function, where we expect the man Hackman has given us until now would be even more on guard. We are close enough to Hackman that we see him lean into the sign, like someone touching the forehead of a lover. We see his face nod up and down, and we note the intake of his breath. Of all the things that could come next—a whisper, a muttered line of dialogue—seeing Hackman set the sign in motion with an exhalation is a glimpse of Harry's capacity for whimsy, for unself-conscious revelation and for emotional vulnerability. We are amazed and moved by this unexpected gesture, and in the next moment even concerned, for, like Harry, we are startled by Moran's voice, which suddenly cuts into this dreamy interlude of self-reflection. The party is full of potential enemies and unreliable friends, and what we have just seen alerts us to the way they will take advantage of the strangely unprotected Harry.

AU HASARD BALTHAZAR AND ANIMAL PERFORMANCE

Au Hasard Balthazar follows a donkey, Balthazar, through his life from adored and baptized family pet to barnyard beast of burden and circus animal performer. As we watch him age, we see the same human characters pass in and out of his life, subjecting Balthazar and each other to indignities and abuses. Alfred Hitchcock's apocryphal remark that "actors are like cattle" provides a provocative entry for a discussion of the donkey's performance in *Au Hasard Balthazar*. Hitchcock was expressing a preference for non-Method actors, for those who could hit their marks and say their lines with precision but without fuss, something Bresson famously took to a modernist extreme. The donkey that plays Balthazar is a perfect embodiment of Bresson's non-acting "model," who ideally eliminates all "purposeful expression" in the service of his "aesthetics of denial."¹⁴ Apparently, though, not just any ass would do. Speaking of his search for the right animal, Bresson is clear: "First of all I didn't want a very clever donkey."¹⁵ The donkey's perfection arises from its limitations as a self-conscious being, creating a performance standard the human actors struggle to achieve through their suppressions of interiority. In so doing, Anne Wiazemsky, Francois LaFarge and the other actors reveal the beastliness of their characters, what they share with Balthazar, even as cruelty emerges as what is most human in them because their characters choose it thoughtlessly.

The performance of the animal in the title role is not an example of "acting" in the way that Sibirskaiia's and Hackman's portrayals are. The donkey and the character it plays are minimally distinguished; the performing donkey does not die, for example, as Balthazar does. Rather than feigning

or impersonating (as in Michael Kirby's acting/non-acting continuum), the donkey exists in a "symbolized matrix," in which "the referential elements are applied to but not acted by the performer." The result, writes Kirby, is that "we see a person, not an actor," or in this case, an animal.¹⁶ The duality that we associate with acting (the distinct existence of actor and character in one being) collapses, as the performing animal's qualities—stubbornness, for example—automatically inform viewers' understanding of the character animal. The effect is not unlike star acting in this regard. None of this is intentional for the donkey, who acts like a donkey and whose performance choices are made for him by the filmmakers.

And yet the circus scene of Balthazar meeting the other animals is striking and memorable for the privacy it affords the animals in each other's company. Balthazar's apprehension of other creatures gives rise to what we might see as idiosyncrasy in the donkey, traces of Cavell's expressive freedom in his movements and responses that are all the more resonant in the context of cages and chains. When Balthazar escapes from Arnold (Jean-Claude Guilbert) to the circus, he performs chores there before becoming one of its acts. We see a pile of hay pushed over a floor and then lifted and loaded by a worker onto a cart attached to the donkey. The man takes the donkey's harness and pulls him forward. We hear animal noises, including a roar, and the donkey resists, flattening his ears in protest as he is led toward the noise. In the next shot, Balthazar enters the left of the frame. There is another roar, and the worker disappears from the shot, leaving the donkey alone in our sight as he stands there, his breath visible, his mouth chewing nervously, shifting his weight from one leg to another, uneasy and uncertain. There is a cut to a tiger, staring out at Balthazar through the bars of a cage, motionless except for its heaving flanks. Next, Balthazar pulls the cart over to a polar bear's cage. The bear roars, too, and the donkey moves its ears back and then forward, alarmed at first, but more confident of the bars that stand between them. As the bear continues to roar, oblivious to Balthazar, the donkey looks curious but is pulled on. Balthazar moves to another cage, in which the chimp we heard in an earlier shot stands with one of its arms stretched up along the front of the bars, a chain fastened around its neck. The chimp reacts to Balthazar, looking up and beginning to chatter. Balthazar looks steadily but disinterestedly at the chimp. As he moves on, he lifts his head suddenly, surprised by what he sees before him, and then stops. After the cut, we see him enter the frame from the right, his left eye looking forward and to the left. There is a cut to a close-up of an elephant, looking, presumably, at the donkey, its left eye focused on his. It is chewing on something, likely the fresh hay that Balthazar has brought. A cut brings us back to the donkey's eye (Figure 1.3), and then he is led away as the chimp calls after him.

As the donkey comes face to face with the other animals, framing and editing shape their respective presences and affect our readings of their confrontations. The tiger looks at the donkey as a potential meal, the polar bear



Figure 1.3 The donkey in *Au Hasard Balthazar* (Criterion Collection, 1966). Digital frame enlargement.

seems lost in its own misery, the chimp craves attention and response and the elephant is benign and rather distant. It is a scene of captivity and captivation, of animals looking at animals with no human intermediary. The donkey seems to move from fear to curiosity, from amazement to wonder, as he faces beings like but unlike himself. Indeed, Dana Polan suggests the cross-cutting is a “curious parody or replay” of the Kuleshov acting experiment.¹⁷ The frame excludes humans, giving the donkey a space in which we see his entitlement to be an animal in the company of other animals, and to know himself, even if he remains unknown to us. We cannot know for certain if and what the donkey thinks, although our own curiosity is intense here, but the effect of the scene is to suggest, as Tony Pipolo writes, “that Balthazar not only suffers at the hands of men but understands that he does so—in other words, that he may have a consciousness and interior life,” both of which, Pipolo notes, are “the basis of Greek and Elizabethan tragedy.”¹⁸

All of the animals in this scene are indentured to someone or something else. None of the things they do is done freely, either as animals or as performers in the circus, and all of their tasks are undertaken in the service of humans. Only indirectly, for example, does Balthazar even deliver hay to refresh these animals, saving his circus master’s time and effort. If these animal characters *do* understand each other, as it seems irresistible to think, one of the elements of their communion might be their recognition of a shared lot, one of limited choice, suffering, loneliness, routine and boredom. They are separated from each other by cages, chains and harnesses, but as the camera pauses before each one, we are invited by the donkey’s gaze to see in each cage a possible stand-in who could take over

the donkey's part should qualities other than a saintly stubbornness be called for.

Considering the performance of the donkey tests the claim that belief in a character's reality depends on an actor's creation and communication of that character's inner world and on the intentional performance of an actor. The donkey that plays Balthazar shows us a character who perhaps cannot be as fully known as other characters in other films but who is no less knowable than the human characters in this film, unless of course he plays a character who can be fully known by what he shows to us, having no choice but to show us all that he is. The presence or absence of choice in the world of all these characters, human and animal, becomes one of the matters to which the film addresses its performances, urging viewers at one moment to see the inscrutability of the characters as proof of their mystery and at another as evidence of their emptiness. Nowhere is this more marked than in the performance of the donkey, who is both itself and Balthazar, but whose air of "a knowing unknowness" hopelessly and wonderfully complicates the relations between choice, self-knowledge and performance in this film.¹⁹

Each one of these performances produces a compelling sense of particularity through performance signs that can be read as indices of character awareness and self-understanding. The performer's actions and responses are memorable because we receive them as the products of character decision and response rather than as gestures intended by an actor to produce mere consistency. In fact, it is often when performers no longer appear to act "in character" that these moments occur. Sibirskaja's character does not regret making love and so becomes more than a seduced and abandoned naïf, a stock figure of sexual misfortune. Similarly, the sudden lapse of Harry Caul's vigilant self-monitoring asks us to re-evaluate our dislike of him, our feeling that he is too clinical and craven to deserve our curiosity, much less our understanding. Hackman's gestures make Harry seem spontaneous, almost sweet, in what looks like a completely unscripted moment. Balthazar's twitching ears and wide eyes as he looks at the circus animals likewise credit him with curiosity and wonder, making him more than a walking symbol of suffering. The demonstration of his self-possession in this scene makes it possible that his return to his brutal owner may have been a choice after all. The marvelous capacity of all three performances is to give us more than coherent characters: to create figures who can suddenly change, who make inexplicable choices and who can, finally, no more be fully known to us than we can be to ourselves.

NOTES

1. Paul MacDonald, "Why Study Film Acting? Some Opening Reflections," in *More Than a Method: Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance*, ed. Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Frank P. Tomasulo (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 26.
2. This observation is made by Alan Lovell and Peter Krämer in the Introduction to their edited collection, *Screen Acting* (London: Routledge, 1999), 5.

3. Ibid.
4. For an example of the criticism of “visible” acting, see Stephanie Zacharek, “Too Great to Be Good,” *Salon*, February 20, 2008, http://www.salon.com/entertainment/movies/feature/2008/02/20/daniel_day_lewis/index.html.
5. Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 2nd ed. (London: BFI, 1998), 133–34.
6. Among these are the Prague school of semiotics, Laban’s movement analysis, Delsarte’s gestural taxonomy and Stanislavski’s Active Analysis. See Cynthia Baron and Sharon Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 5, 2.
7. Vicky Lowe, “Acting with Feeling: Robert Donat, the ‘Emotion Chart’ and *The Citadel* (1938),” *Film History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 75.
8. Dyer, *Stars*, 133–34.
9. Ibid., 148–49.
10. Baron and Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance*, 46.
11. Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 128–29.
12. Aaron Taylor, “Introduction: Acting, Casually and Theoretically Speaking,” in *Theorizing Film Acting*, ed. Aaron Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2012), 9.
13. James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 71.
14. Doug Tomlinson, “Performance in the Films of Robert Bresson: The Aesthetics of Denial,” in *Making Visible the Invisible*, ed. Carole Zucker (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1990), 71.
15. Robert Bresson, “Robert Bresson in Conversation with Raymond Hayward,” 1973, reprinted in Robert-Bresson.com, <http://www.mastersofcinema.org/bresson/Words/TransAtlanticReview.html>.
16. Michael Kirby, “On Acting and Not-Acting,” *The Drama Review* 16, no. 1 (1972): 5.
17. Dana Polan, “*Au Hasard Balthazar*,” *Senses of Cinema* 42 (13 February 2007).
18. Tony Pipolo, *Robert Bresson: A Passion for Film*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 187–89.
19. Cavell, *Contesting Tears*, 128.

2 Living Meaning

The Fluency of Film Performance

Andrew Klevan

“In my music, I’m trying to play the truth of what I am. The reason it’s difficult is because I’m changing all the time.”

—Charles Mingus¹

SHIFTING MEANING

In his Introduction to *Contesting Tears*, Stanley Cavell writes the following about Greta Garbo’s performance in the opening of *Camille* (George Cukor, 1936):

The opening sequence, a privileged minute or two of her shifting moods, traverses a series of moods as notable for their lucidity as for their range; it constitutes an entire course in film acting and contains a greater density of description and revelation than is likely to be found in a lifetime of respectable exposure and diligence.²

In this opening sequence, Garbo’s Marguerite Gautier is confined, but her flexibility of movement counteracts the constraint and rigidity. The restricted space of the carriage frames and encloses, and she necessarily must sit, but this channels movement into the upper body and intensifies it. She is sandwiched between two older women (one outside and one inside the carriage), stiff and unrefined, but their stridency focuses her delicacy. The circumscribed space oppresses, but it permits a concentration of movement, and so the film immediately establishes a vital dramatic current: the possibilities for (Marguerite’s) expression within a stifling social framework. Her smelling of the camellias relaxes and softens her, but as she turns her head slightly and redirects her eyes, it also intoxicates—“I will have twice as many tomorrow”—her voice full of velvety desire and mellow voraciousness. Then, as she removes the camellias from her face, she looks on them with loving admiration and satisfaction and mouths unspoken words to her baby.

During her tender communion with the flowers, the two other women shout across her—a violent and distracting cross current. The vulgarity and brutality of the public, social sphere attacks the intricacies of private consciousness. Despite their noise, however, each gesture by Marguerite



Figure 2.1 *Camille* (Warner Home Video, 1936). Digital frame enlargement.

slides into another without interruption. When she says, “Of course, I own too many flowers, too many hats, too many everything—but I want them,” she rocks her head to the side (on “I want them”) and then immediately throws her head back (Figure 2.1). This gesture is an expression of abandon to her desires *and* one of resignation at her inability to fight them. Yet, it also provides the momentum for her gesture of forward motion to the driver—“to the theatre,” she says—with an insouciant superiority that she mocks and recuperates.

A few seconds later, as the carriage departs and she converses with Prudence (Laura Hope Crews), she moves from sulky to stern to bemused (a double take with the camellias) to curious to cynical to contemptuous. Her head sways this way and that, weaving these states together while her playfully mocking tone unites them. Only a short instant divides these expressions from her uproarious laughter that follows. Her companion may take this laughter to be joyous complicity—Garbo somehow manages to be idiosyncratic *and* accommodating—but it also looks hysterical. So as well as the nimble movement between expressions, there is a density of possible meaning within one. Marguerite’s laughter also, strategically perhaps, drowns out the tedious conventionality of Prudence’s scheming; it dissolves it and forces a swift crescendo into the fade and into the theatre.

One posture morphs into another quickly and continuously, making it difficult to track the variations and separate meanings. Garbo forbids that we simplify or exhaust her expression. Later in the film, there is another fine instance of her ability to fold one emotion into another. She is slapped by the Baron de Varville (played with wicked relish by Henry Daniell), which

triggers a series of facial transformations. The discussion of this moment formed part of a lecture I was giving to undergraduates. To give a concrete sense of the range of emotions Garbo expresses in this short space of time—there are approximately fifteen seconds from the beginning of the close-up, immediately after the slap, to the fade out to black—I endeavored to name them. She appears to indicate, in order: a proud, frozen defense, astonishment, anger or indignation, some hurt (to her feelings, to her body), relief and finally some pleasure in anticipation. However, as I was reading them out, hearing my words, I became increasingly dissatisfied with my articulations (more so than normal); or rather, I became conscious of the inadequacy of the specifications as each facial expression was already in the process of transforming into the next. Indeed, selecting the individual frames for display in the lecture made this even more noticeable, as I could not quite pinpoint the exact expression that corresponded. As I isolated them, each facial expression seemed to be between my descriptions. As I returned to examine it, related aspects were newly prominent: shock kept in check by a steely composure, inhibited resentment, a gathering of the self, resolve.³

It is not that Garbo invites interpretation only to thwart it; meaning or meanings are available. Indeed, her richness of being generates meanings that are crucial to securing our attention. Yet pinpointing any instance of meaning results in an insecure specification that seems disappointingly unrepresentative. Her breathing, suddenly heavy after the shock of the slap, supports the vacillations and enables her expressions to appear and disappear: her outward breaths release and carry forth each emotional variation whereas the inward ones soon draw them back in the effort to calm and restrain.

So this chapter celebrates the achievement of fluency by a selection of film performers and indicates the way in which, as each action flows fluidly into the next or as one move integrates with another, they make it difficult for us to isolate or crystallize meaning.⁴ This form of interpretative insecurity is a matter of interest for all the arts that move in time, but studying film performers in this regard is of particular interest. Not only are film performers moving in time and space, and the meanings they make are moving with them, but also they are living beings. The good performers are alive with meaning and alive to meaning, and the viewer is “living” with these meanings.

SUSPENDED MEANING

A single gesture by a performer, even an apparently trifling or frivolous one, may be alive to a serious tension at the heart of a film. Cavell draws attention, this time in his book *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, to a moment from another George Cukor film, *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), in which Mike (James Stewart) carries Tracy (Katharine Hepburn) after they have been swimming. He finds the

carrying posture to be one of those moments in Hollywood film that are deceptively profound; here it is symbolic of her death as goddess and rebirth as human.⁵ Despite the heroic symbolism concerning death and rebirth, for Cavell, “the posture is [also] an inherently ambiguous one.”⁶ The situation is certainly ambiguous. No other character quite sees what happens and, thanks to an ellipse, nor does the viewer. They kiss passionately, she pulls him to go for a swim and the film cuts. Each of the characters in the film arrives at a different interpretation of events. Indeed, Cavell sees *The Philadelphia Story* as something of a meditation on interpretation, where interpretation is linked to imagination (and according to Tracy it would not “take much imagination . . . just imagination of a particular kind”). Nevertheless, the ambiguities do not simply arise out of the ellipse, nor do the implications rest on innuendo about what the pair have or have not done in or around the swimming pool. Just as important is how Tracy and Mike *appear*, appear together, now, in this configuration: how their coupling manifests itself (Figure 2.2).

There is an element of the posture that Cavell does not mention: Tracy’s bare left leg moving up and down quite steadily, in time with Mike’s singing. The metronomic responsiveness of her leg contrasts to the rest of her body, sleepy and unresponsive, her head resting on Mike’s shoulder. Even



Figure 2.2 *The Philadelphia Story* (Warner Home Video, 1940). Digital frame enlargement.

in dozing surrender, a part of her body is alert. The dead weight of her body (perhaps, in Cavell's terms, the "death" of the woman) contrasts to the lightness of her leg, floating up (perhaps her "rebirth"). Her leg is fluently moving in time with Mike's singing. This characterizes how Tracy is carefree *and* careful on this evening with Mike, surrendering to him without losing control of sense or her sense of timing. However, is she matching his singing or is she conducting it? When her foot elegantly stretches and points, is she joining him in reaching for the accentuated notes or is she hoping he will reach them (especially in the light of his less than polished rendition)? As Mike carries Tracy, the romantic nature of their relationship is poised, as it is throughout the film, between reality and hope. What and how much it means are in the balance.

FLEETING MEANING

Good films create a living world, and responsive performers inhabit the world built for them.⁷ Consequently, any piece of their behavior, no matter how slight, may arise out of sympathy with the dramatic environment and contain significance. Yet this behavior might appear as incorporated (in the fictional world) rather than presented (to the viewer), so noticing it feels like the discovery of a secret. At the beginning of his essay on *In a Lonely Place* (Nicholas Ray, 1950), James Harvey analyzes a scene where Dix (Humphrey Bogart) and Laurel (Gloria Graham) are in a piano bar. Harvey describes the unfolding of the scene, particularly the relationship between the performers' interactions and the song performed at the piano by Hadda Brooks. In the middle of his chronological description, he notices a glance by Laurel:

[Dix] lights a cigarette and puts it between her lips, then says something we don't hear (we only hear the song). She likes it, whatever it is, and laughs. . . . And as he turns away, pleased with her response, looking back towards the singer, Laurel directs a glance of rueful affection at the back of his head—something only we see.⁸

Harvey makes a mistake. Dix's comment comes *after* Laurel's glance, not before, but it is sharply observant of him to notice the glance because, even on repeated viewings when one is mindful of it, it is easy to miss (indeed this might have contributed to the confusion over exactly when it appears in the sequence). It consists of a swift raise of her eyelids (just the time it takes to blink and miss it), and Harvey's discussion, somewhat appropriately, does not dwell on it: he lets it pass as it does in the scene. He describes the glance as one "of rueful affection," and although I can see the fondness, I am less sure I can see the sorrow or regret. For me, it is secretive on a number of levels: the woman checks out "her man" when he is turned away

and unaware. Possibly a furtive flirtation, she seems slyly amused *and* fascinated, a touch superior *and* salacious (Figure 2.3).

If I am unsure of Harvey's description, I am also unsure of my own, or not quite satisfied with it because even when I notice the glance I feel I am missing it. As well as being rapid, it occurs in a medium shot, and its placement within the dramatic continuity further embeds it. Laurel serenely slips it in amid the cigarette activity, somewhere between bringing up her own hand to support the cigarette in her mouth and taking her first drag. Furthermore, Dix tends to draw the eye away from her as he lights his own cigarette, so I tend to follow the completion of the activity that constitutes the primary momentum. As it was for Garbo, breathing is once again important: as Laurel looks away from him, she removes the cigarette and blows out a large amount of smoke, directed upward by her bottom lip. This is a more prominent gesture (than the glance) that restrains and releases, or restrains as it releases. Indeed, the feelings expressed by the glance are sucked back just as she blows out. Regardless of the sexual suggestion and sophistication, the precise timing of the glance makes it elusive and allusive.

There is another fine example of eye movement by James Stewart in *It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946), once again fleeting and suggestive, and once again enabled by two performers in precise rapport. George Bailey (James Stewart) arrives at the dilapidated house, and his future home, for his makeshift honeymoon (thanks to a little help from friends Ernie and Bert). George arrives at the "Bridal Suite," and Ernie, the cab driver (Frank Faylen), stands in as the hotel door attendant. In keeping with his new, playfully assumed professional standing, Ernie is more than eager to stand up straight.



Figure 2.3 *In a Lonely Place* (Columbia Tristar Home Entertainment, 1950). Digital frame enlargement.

This allows him to raise his hat by means of that ancient party trick of pushing the back brim against the wall. What might Ernie be communicating with this trick? Perhaps, “I can do this old party trick (in this old house), and I know it’s *old hat*, but old jokes can still be funny, especially when made by old friends, and maybe you’ll appreciate it (for old time’s sake)?” Perhaps, “I’ve put on my costume, and this is all one big play act, and yes, I’m playing with you, but will you accept this invitation to play with me?” Perhaps, “This is my acknowledgment that I’m operating mechanically (I’m not a natural), but could we go through the motions together?” There is something pleasingly unresolved about Ernie’s gesture with the hat and therefore generous because it invites a variety of responses.

Skeptical George approaches gingerly and reciprocates with a series of mechanical jerks of the head (the artificiality partly achieved by keeping the rest of his body still and together, arms by his side and hands in pocket). He looks up to see the raised hat, cranks his head down a notch to look Ernie in the eye, just for a second, and then nods his head further to tip him (with rain water) by tipping his hat. Under the guise of generosity, George takes advantage of Ernie’s beckoning, welcoming hand; he converts it into one waiting for reward so that he may *tip* into it (and Ernie later shakes this hand vigorously and with some disgust). By physically punning in this way, George accepts that he will play (with words, with hats, with Ernie, with this situation). Yet, for the time being, in his apprehensive, somewhat disgruntled mood, it will be on his terms, with a nod to sarcasm (and to urination).

The characters communicate without speaking, and so it is not quite clear what they are saying to each other. The success of their improvisation, which keeps their communication open ended, depends on their physical interactions being responsive and in rhythm. George rotates his head again to look him square in the eye, and this triggers Ernie’s hat to drop sharply back onto his head (Ernie indicating something like, “Thank you very much, but that’s quite enough of that”). This ambiguous acknowledgment is matched by George’s snappy sideways switch of his head, a bit of a smile, and nearly a wink. Like Laurel’s glance in *In a Lonely Place*, it is a compromised recognition and, like hers, it is valuable because it is easy to miss and difficult to know. This tiny movement is a muted flourish (it coincides with a little trill from the music coming from inside the house), exquisitely delicate in the indelicate context, and it encapsulates and acknowledges the reciprocity and uncertainty of their exchange.

EMBEDDED MEANING

Frank Capra is one of Hollywood’s most fluent directors, of performers, of story, of *mise-en-scène*. If *It’s a Wonderful Life* is his most fluent film, as many people regard it to be, it is also the film where fluency is at issue, or at stake. The film knowingly sets dramatic and narrative challenges to

fluency to show that it can continue to achieve this quality even when it is under duress.⁹ One rather undemonstrative example is when George Bailey and his Pa (Samuel S. Hinds) are eating together in the dining room on the night of Harry's high school graduation. Their conversation emerges out of the noise and kerfuffle of the surrounding activity. It merges with some previous business that includes Harry's entry from the kitchen and Ma Bailey (Beulah Bondi) leaving the table in dismay at Harry taking her plates to the dance. Ma, and later Harry (Todd Karns), when he re-enters the dining room, move behind George and Pa, and continuity is created through overlap. Activity in the foreground and background fuse and dramatic strands intermingle. George and Pa's "scene" emerges naturally from ongoing dramatic currents and is embedded within encircling activity.

Of particular interest is their eating which, to a remarkable and unusual degree, is dramatically assimilated into their conversation (Figure 2.4). Individual movements are distinctive: breaking food with the fork, using bread to push food onto the back of it and gesturing with it (and the knife). George stoops forward to the food (rather than bringing it to the mouth), sucks in strands, and talks with his mouth full. Yet, despite this, these movements are not heightened or asserted (even if one senses an effort at being lifelike). Instead, they are incorporated into the flow of conversation



Figure 2.4 *It's a Wonderful Life* (Paramount Home Entertainment, 1946). Digital frame enlargement.

and help shape its dramatic rhythms: biting, chewing, swallowing, gulping and also breaking, stabbing, moving and pressing food on the plate. Stewart is particularly adept in his *handling* of cutlery as he delivers his lines: chewing his food as he speaks and breaking the flow of his eating, fork suspended in midair, food upon it (waiting to enter his mouth).

As Pa asks the crucial question, “You wouldn’t consider coming back to the Building and Loan would you?”, he pushes his cup slightly forward—one of those displacements where his consciousness, possibly his nervousness, about a fundamental intervention is displaced into a miniscule, irrelevant adjustment of an everyday object. Yet, although any individual gesture may be a somatic revelation, in general, each one builds up to present a portrait of character, characteristics and situation. George is typically more active as he talks and eats, while Pa sits quite still, looking ahead, only occasionally glancing toward him, and stays contained. Stewart and Hinds successfully portray a habitual, familial familiarity—George has dined with his father all his life—in just one scene. Although film is drawn to exact psychological disclosure, it is equally well disposed, in its presentation and perusal of exteriors, to presenting humans *being*. Like real human beings (because they *are* also real human beings), the people are vivid and distinct and meaningful (full of meaning), but quite properly not easily accessible, and not amenable to specific, moment-by-moment interpretation.

Indeed, it is the *general* mood of easygoing, friendly and comfortable domesticity, and the absence of the specified, that is the necessary environment for undramatic coercion. Thus, a father exerts extraordinary authority over a son without being flagrantly bullying, aggressive or violent. The gently indirect will suffice to inflict the fatal blow. Pa asks that critical question—“You wouldn’t consider coming back to the Building and Loan would you?”—apparently reasonable, considerate, speculative in guise and shattering. George is trapped, as forcibly as he is by Potter (Lionel Barrymore), by the claustrophobia of the ordinary, as behind him Annie stands over his shoulder, while in front of him his father reaches across to the sugar bowl (and the shadow from the fringe of the lampshade, already dipping low into the frame, cuts into his forehead). Indeed, when at the start of the sequence, his father says, “Hope you have a good trip George,” at the same moment he passes him some bread; a gesture of kindness is a timely reminder of home comforts, and a parent’s good wishes for their child’s departure is also a seduction. The ease with which Stewart and Hinds perform eating in the scene allows them to express how one might be absorbed in homely comforts while the life-affecting significance of the absorption remains indistinct. Because the scene deftly integrates the behavior and paraphernalia of dinnertime into the flow of the conversation, the scene effectively shows how lampshades, teacups, bread, sugar bowls, knives and forks infiltrate into every aspect of George’s life and being. It is a picture of loving imprisonment.

MISTAKING MEANING

Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy's hand movements in *The Music Box* (James Parrot, 1932) are an undercurrent to the main narrative (in this case, getting a piano from A to B with all the interruptions and frustrations that entails) and, like the eating in *It's a Wonderful Life*, constitute another stratum of dramatic continuity. The first minute or so of the film, from meeting the postman to steadying the horse, has a range of hand gestures and sets up a film where barely a few seconds go by without a distinctive movement of hand or arm. Ollie adjusts his hat on greeting the postman; he points to the house "up there right on top of the stoop"; he gently pats Stan's arm with the back of his hand, and this then turns into a rigid jerk to beckon; he holds out his palm to "steady" Susie (the horse). Meanwhile, Stan provides shade over his eyes to view the stoop as if peering out to sea from the deck of a ship. Their hand gestures move in time with speech ("That's the house up there right-on-top-of-the-stoop"), with nods of the head (on "stoop") and with each other (Stan peers into the distance as Ollie pulls the reins, whereupon Ollie's steadying gesture comes immediately after Stan's look-out). Sometimes in unison, at other times they are in relay: one moves into a gesture as the other moves out of one. It is the ongoing alternation of their movements and behavior that establishes that they are inseparable and indomitable, always going on (and on) and getting on (with their tasks, and with each other). (The sense of the ongoing is indicated by one of Ollie's hand gestures, fingers nipped into his palms, thumb protruding, not quite a clench, which quickly passes in front of the camera just as he is moving out of the frame.)

White gloves adorn their hands, suitable enough for their line of work, and they embolden them, especially in contrast with the dark dungarees and black bowlers, in the medium two shots within which the pair often perform. When one focuses on watching the progression of hand movements, their white gloves seem to float free, abstractly, like Marcel Marceau's bodiless limbs bobbing in the darkness. Yet, Laurel and Hardy's achievement is neither to proclaim their fluent dexterity in the form of a clever *show* nor to detach from the reality of context *and* the reality of physically working in the world. In just the first few moments, we have pointing and peering (to the house, "right-on-top-of-the-stoop"), pulling (reins), halting (the horse) and knocking and beckoning (Stan). It continues in the following few moments: Stan slapping (the van's back), pulling and pushing (the piano), holding (the rail), adjusting (his hat) and covering and protecting (his chest after Ollie jabs him with his spider clawed hand). Ollie then enacts a further sequence of hand gestures of remarkable speed and proximity. He points and claws, and then he thinks through the forthcoming procedure ("This requires a little thought") as he imagines it with his hands: he points again at the piano (with one hand on his hip), then the ground, and then holds out both his palms.

He then fixes his hat with both hands!

(There is always time, in the midst of hands pulling, pushing, trapping, shaking, stroking and flapping, to adjust their hats.)

Finally, he gets onto his hands and knees and lifts his right hand to instruct—"now ease it down on my back"—pointing at the piano and then his back. All of this is in the space of approximately five seconds.¹⁰

Lowering the piano on Ollie's back cannot possibly end happily, and some viewers may find the stupidity too much to take, but the intelligence rests in the finesse with which the performers handle the cumbersome. Gesture acts as an intricate and intimate harmonic variation on the more prominent and drawn out main chords of their comedy (the narrative set-ups, the broader slapstick and the gag sequences). We could say that Laurel and Hardy were accustomed to using plenty of gesture from their days of making silent films, but that would not account for their appropriateness in the context of sound or their success in integrating gesture with vocal interactions and other ambient sounds (*nor* the variety and idiosyncrasy of the gestures). They do not fall back on gesture as their only form of communication (*or* suppress it out of a fear that it is now redundant) and overuse speech. The balance between speaking and not speaking is part of the grain of their films (not simply a well-achieved feature or subject of them). Carefully judged without appearing predictable or systematic, the alternation allows for variation in comic response and contributes to a rhythmic effect.

Ollie beckons, as if he were so clear and commanding—and in command—as not to require words, and Stan peers up to the "stoop," adopting what he takes to be the appropriate gesture for the circumstance regardless of whether it is functional. The gesture is plucked from his memory, misplaced and now misapplied, inappropriately implemented as if he were pleased to be trying it out (or trying it on—for size). Later, after Olly has tried to hit him, he touches his throat. Why? Is he thinking of it being cut, as if this were the general gesture for any attack on the body? Is he checking that his tie is straight (as he would his hat)? Despite the clarity with which the gestures appear, and their deliberateness, such as peering, or obviously signaling something, such as beckoning, their meaning is somehow not quite apparent to each other. Their gestures are unmistakable yet perplexing and seem to hang in the air, or leave a trace—unfulfilled. Laurel and Hardy's relationship is simultaneously responsive and unresponsive (they *follow* each other but do not really understand each other), which is why they must inevitably work together and yet can make very little work together.

As they prepare to lift the piano up the steps, Stan's hands furtively move around the box as if he didn't know how to get a grip, and then, with one arm in front of his waist and the other behind his back, he hops. It looks like a move from the sailor's Hornpipe dance performed in response to Ollie's nautical shout of "heave-ho" (and it harks back to his earlier peering gesture). Quite why he responds in this way, though, is something more mysterious. The move might prepare him to lift, pull himself up, straighten

or something. He is confusing and condensing any number of occasions—lifting, jumping, bowing, dancing—and although this piece of behavior is presumably triggered by Olly’s shout, it suddenly finds itself here for no reason, now, inessential (to lifting a piano, of course, but also to the direction of the film). His move is compacted and reduced so it practically escapes us (just as its practicality escapes us), but it is inescapably Stan.

SLIPPERY MEANING

I have written elsewhere about Laurel and Hardy’s effortless capacity to shift their moods, and shift their moods together, without contrivance and without producing jarring contrasts in tone.¹¹ The master of fluent movement between tones is Charlie Chaplin. In *The Adventurer* (Charles Chaplin, 1917), Charlie is an escaped convict who has contrived to wheedle his way into high society and finds himself at a social event, an ideal opportunity to consume plenty of alcohol. Charlie shifts attitude with speed and agility. One second he is performing to please his hosts, especially the women, and the next he is stealing a drink: so very well behaved, then naughty. He adopts a meek posture in front of one of the female guests, hands clasped in front of his waist, obsequiously grinning, and then, in an instant, he has turned and snatched the drink from under the waiter’s arm. Not only does he snatch it, but he downs it in one go and manages to replace the empty glass, through the waiter’s arm again, on the serving tray (all before the waiter turns around). Part of the comedy comes from the waiter’s lack of awareness of Charlie’s activity, and the supporting actors in his films are routinely adept at performing obliviousness. They remain strictly within their social roles or types, and this entails a physical rigidity ideal for flexible Charlie to snake in, out, under and around them.

Charlie replaces the glass just in time for the waiter to turn. In an instant he turns back, his greedier instincts quickly swallowed, concealed behind the politeness and patience of social decorum. He feigns a look of pleasant surprise that the drinks have arrived and gives a little gracious bow, as if to say, “Ahhh how nice, thank you, don’t mind if I do,” mimicking what is already a pose of affected surprise (often adopted by people when a cocktail waiter interrupts a conversation). The physical dexterity of the routine is impressive enough, but Chaplin’s mannerisms are essential to the subterfuge. His tricky maneuvers also entail slipping in and out of social mimicry and impersonation. When the woman knocks his drink, he looks annoyed, as if he had accidentally let his guard down, just for a split second, and then quickly makes light of the mishap; in fact the sincerity of both attitudes are in doubt given that they appear equally authentic (and inauthentic) and their transition so easily negotiated. Good slapstick is never simply about falling on the floor, it is equally about (performing) improvisation and instinct, the breathtaking ability (to be very well prepared) to think on your

feet. He holds his glass preciously with the tips of his fingers, little finger outstretched. Then, in an urgent attempt to get every drop of alcohol, he vigorously licks these same dainty fingers after they have circled the inside of the glass and breaks several social rules in so doing. The woman continues to watch, but he misbehaves quickly enough to pretend his actions are invisible to his hosts (and she does indeed seem oblivious). We can pretend too. This cements a rebellious complicity with the viewer—"We see what is going on but (somehow) you do not"—and so we too get one up on the conventional characters.

He pushes the hand of an adjacent gentleman so that his drink pours into his own glass, and the operation is as nimble as the cover-up: pretending it's the gentleman's fault, feigning shock and indignity, wafting his precious hand dry, nodding forgiveness reluctantly and, most audaciously, pushing him away because the man is, disgracefully, intruding on his social space. Cheeky Charlie takes advantage of high society by stealing their food and drink, but he also steals their precious meanings, exposing their conventionality, slipping in and out of them with startling rapidity, as insinuation attempts to rescue every act of impudence.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to evoke some aspects of the performers' fluency and their consequent shifting meanings. They are necessarily not easy to capture. Although the live, alive, aspects of film are central to our enjoyment and appreciation, they provide a challenge for criticism—to get a grip on them and to get to grips with them—and are therefore easy to overlook or disregard. We write about what we find manageable, certifiable, categorical or applicable, but the result is that we often turn moving moments into static examples with their affective complexity reduced. Classic criticism illuminated how precisely meaningful texts could be whereas contemporary criticism alerted us to their instability and flux. Good films, and their performers, make meanings that are tangible *and* elusive, where the once tangible may become elusive. The fluent film performers establish the presence and precision of meanings seemingly at the same time as they are adjusting and transforming them. Their meanings are suspended, ambiguous, amorphous, generalized, embedded, in-between, transitional, becoming, developing and overlapping, but they continue to make so much sense.

NOTES

1. Quotation from liner notes for album, Eric Mills, *Complete Jazz at Massey Hall* (The Jazz Factory, Disconforme, 2003; original Recording 1953).
2. Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 19.

3. Charles Affron, in his extraordinary account of the inflections, modulations and transformations of the performer in this film (and others), to which I am indebted, also mentions this moment but condenses the meanings. He only remarks: "Disappointment rather than the expected embarrassment is modulated into prefigured satisfaction with her new lover." He does however go on to comment on the complexity of the shot: "Garbo manages this range in a single shot because of the simultaneity of her Marguerite Gautier. The links between opposing or divergent states are made feasible by the characterization's great 'depth of field.' All of her Marguerite is always on view in the range of its paradox, its ambiguity, and its extensions in public and private realms." See Charles Affron, *Star Acting: Gish, Garbo, Davis* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977), 196–98.
4. The essay does not assume that fluency is the only worthy characteristic of performance: stillness, slowness and awkwardness also have their value, and these characteristics set their own challenges for interpretation.
5. Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 140.
6. *Ibid.*, 141.
7. I explore this idea at length in Andrew Klevan, *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation* (Wallflower: London, 2005).
8. James Harvey, *Movie Love in the Fifties* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 149.
9. I discuss interruptions and obstacles in *It's a Wonderful Life* in Andrew Klevan, "Guessing the Unseen from the Seen," in *Contending with Stanley Cavell*, ed. Russell Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 118–39.
10. This refutes the charge, I have sometimes heard, that Laurel and Hardy are about "doing silly things slowly."
11. See Klevan, *Film Performance*, 25–32.

3 Play-Acting

A Theory of Comedic Performance

Alex Clayton

This chapter will offer a theory of comedic performance: a theory of its distinctiveness, hence a suggestion for how it may be fruitfully discussed. It is proposed not as an explanatory framework *per se* but as a critical tool, with the hope that it might allow us to see and articulate different dimensions of comedy in ways that vivify our appreciation and understanding. My method is to proceed through examples, largely drawn from the rich tradition of American film comedy—although my hope is that the theory will be pertinent for the study of comic material in other media and genres, and from other periods and regions. Cultural variations quite evidently make different allowances for what may be seen as humorous. Yet across such variations, there is at least one constant: a performance is comedic in as much as we recognize that it seeks to amuse. For this reason, comedy—or rather, the comic mode, since comedy is merely a genre in which this mode is dominant—may be most usefully defined with reference not, as has often been the case, to its presumed “affect” but rather to its disclosure of intent. My assumption here is that we encounter performance, indeed all art, not as something that “just is” (as we might view a sunset, say, through secular eyes), but as something that is *meant*, set forward *as* such-and-such. The question then becomes *how* a given performance comes to be placed, and to place itself, as comic—that is, how an intention to amuse comes to figure in a given performance, becomes part of the texture of the work (not just a factor in its production).

This, I suggest, should be a vital consideration for scholars of comedy, one that can only be addressed by analysis of particular examples. But if in the first instance the reader is tempted to find intention an irrelevance when it comes to matters of comedy, it may be worth recalling first the way we habitually distinguish—and tend to find it important to distinguish—between intentional and unintentional humor. We tend to want to know if something is *meant* to be funny (sometimes we find it difficult to tell). A wooden performance in a soap opera may be found amusing. So might a deliberately wooden performance in a spoof soap opera. It’s possible to imagine a situation in which we weren’t sure whether we were seeing a straight or parodic performance—but we would likely want to find out, since the difference is

crucial. Amusement in the former case involves amusement at the actor's failure; amusement in the latter case would be courtesy of the actor's success. Details of performance will be seen in a new light (hence our response will take on a different character) once we recognize an intention to amuse.

The significance of intention, when it comes to comedy, has been somewhat obscured by a longstanding insistence on comic *effect* as a definitive criterion. Such an emphasis can lead us to conflate the amusing and the comedic—whereas, of course, many things can and do make us laugh that we would not want to call comedy. Another risk is that it may lead us to assume that a comedy must be laughed at for it to be a comedy. Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik write that “the generation of laughter is not always enough, in and of itself, to define a film—or a television program—as a comedy.”¹ The point here is that laughter is not a *sufficient* condition of comedy—quite right—but the specious assumption remains (“not always enough”) that it is *necessary*. Yet we still recognize comedy as comedy if it fails to raise a titter; the joke that goes down like a lead balloon is a joke regardless, the defining feature being ambition rather than accomplishment. Nonetheless, comic theory has been quite fixated on the “generation of laughter.” From Aristotle to Thomas Hobbes (with their early versions of so-called “superiority theory,” according to which we laugh at the defects of others), from Herbert Spencer to Sigmund Freud (with their different versions of “relief theory,” according to which laughter “lances the boil,” so to speak), the primary emphasis has been on comic response, or rather on one facet of comic response—often glossed as “laughter,” as in the title of Henri Bergson's famous essay.² Incongruity theories can fruitfully help us to see how different elements of the comic object interact, yet even these approaches have tended to favor suppositions about the psychological *experience* of incongruity over its articulation in the work. One consequence of a fixation on comic response has been relative neglect of comedic delivery. Freud's study of humor and the unconscious, for instance, repeatedly refers to jokes without referring to the manner of their telling—as if a joke were a joke were a joke, whether written in a letter, spoken and fluffed, relayed soberly or conveyed with manic energy.³

Because the chief object of comic-response theory is in the realm of psychology rather than aesthetics, it has tended to offer a blunt tool for the analysis of comic forms. To take comedy as being of interest only in as much as it “produces” laughter urges the analyst to see it merely as a prompt for mirth. From this perspective, it may seem to matter little if amusing incidents happen on the street or on the stage—whereas from the perspective of intention there is likely to be a world of difference. Consider Bergson's central thesis: that laughter, with its social function of restraining eccentricity and promoting flexibility, results from “the mechanical encrusted on the living.”⁴ We can indeed very often find depictions of inelasticity, inertia, repetitiveness and reflex in comedy. But an accomplished comedic *performance*, we might want to say, is usually characterized not by inelasticity,

but by flexibility, variation and deftness. As important as our supposed sense of superiority is in the face of an act of inelegance, it may be an appreciation of the elegance with which this act been rendered.

A sequence from *The Circus* (Charles Chaplin, 1928) offers a vivid example of how intention and elegance can figure in comic depictions of inelasticity. It also offers a little demonstration that comic performance is not to be equated simply with “being funny.” Earlier in the film, fleeing from some cops, the Tramp (Chaplin) had burst into a circus big top and given his pursuers the runaround on a rotating platform—to the raucous delight of the ringside audience. Impressed by this “generation of laughter,” the circus ringmaster (Allan Garcia) gives the Tramp the chance of an audition to be a clown. “Go ahead and be funny,” he says. The Tramp stands there, with his bowler hat and cane, in the sawdust of the ring, and squirms. Be. Funny. He tries with a little wiggle of the ankle, self-conscious, almost a flirtation. With a touch more bravery, this develops into a succession of little leg-twists, almost twitches, like an insect being poked with a stick. Bending his knees outward at each side and proceeding forward in what can only be described as a moving squat, he then figures to parade back and forth in this fashion for a while, taking the time to doff his hat toward an imaginary passer-by as if on a promenade stroll (Figure 3.1). For



Figure 3.1 The Tramp (Charlie Chaplin) auditions to be a clown. *The Circus* (Why, 1928). Digital frame enlargement.

the lowbrow finale, he brings his cane under his legs and hoists himself up from below, as a workman might hoist up a palette. The circus owner turns away from the stage and scratches his head in frustration. This fellow was better when he wasn't meaning to be funny. "That's awful!" he cries, and we know what he means. The character's awkward improvisation *strains* to create an impression of physiological automatism and stiffness—approximating an effect of Bergsonian "mechanical inelasticity."⁵ But in its effort to impress, the Tramp's performance of inelasticity is itself inelastic. For the ringmaster and the internal audience, his routine lacks confidence, poise and fluency; the pieces of business individually lack finesse and together seem a random assortment of tricks, crudely performed and unimaginatively thrown together.

As the audience of the film, however, we have an additional layer of comic intent—we are perched differently in relation to the act. The Tramp's audition is *meant* to be awful. The character's inelasticity as a novice clown—marked by his physical effortfulness, resort to cliché—is held in tension with our sense of Chaplin's elasticity as an expert one—marked by his deftness, fluidity and imagination (for instance, in picturing how a novice clown might try in vain to amuse). An expert performance of inexperienced clowning, the moving squat, emerges as a deliberately bad comic turn (perhaps even as a bad impression of Chaplin's own bandy-legged walk). Where the Tramp offers the "moving squat" as funny-in-itself, Chaplin can offer it as funny-in-its-not-funniness.

The ringmaster gives the Tramp another tryout, instructing him to observe and then perform a role in a clown routine. It's a simple bit of business: Clown 1 places an apple on the head of Clown 2, with the premise of shooting through it with an arrow, but before Clown 1 can draw back his bow, Clown 2 has taken a bite of the apple; Clown 1 ticks him off and turns around to prepare the bow again, on which Clown 2 eats the rest of the apple in its entirety and Clown 1 shakes his fist in cartoonish outrage. As such, the routine involves a fake premise—the William Tell trick—hence a fictional intention to carry it out that is pretend-thwarted with Clown 2's consumption of the vital prop. The intentional disruption of a routine is itself the routine; when we see the routine again, the Tramp's participation will unintentionally disrupt the intended disruptions. Missing his cue, he stands there grinning, out of role and pleased to be part of the act. Ordered to take up his mark, he scampers backward and falls over the perimeter of the circus ring. Next, with the apple balanced on his head, the Tramp just stands there, apparently forgetting to eat it. When, finally, on command, he does take a bite, he finds a maggot inside—a lovely bit of pantomimic gesturing with a worm-like finger—and appeals to the attending audience. The pretend-thwarting has been thwarted. Losing patience, the clown (Henry Bergman) gives him another apple—but the Tramp has a better idea. He reaches in his pocket for a handy banana, takes a bite and, glancing blankly outward with a mouthful of fruit, lays it out on his head.

The substitution is comic not merely because one object is switched for an incongruous other. Chaplin's spruce execution of the Tramp's ineptitude amounts to the additional incongruity of a *deftly-executed failure*. Similarly, the pratfall over the ring fence can be seen at once as an extreme act of clumsiness and a display of acrobatic finesse. Such moments awaken a dynamic, always latent in performed fiction, between actor and character—polarizing them in terms of knowledge, awareness and intentionality. Comedic performance crucially exploits the duality of actor-character co-existence in a single embodied figure.⁶ This complex dynamic is brought boldly and comically to the surface in the banana moment when Chaplin looks at the camera *in character* (a wholly conventional paradox).

Looking at the camera is only one (albeit perhaps the most overt) form of comedic address. How is it that we recognize, even without extratextual knowledge of the performer, a stance, gesture or look as comedic? We find ourselves wanting to point at something in the body itself—the way the limbs are held, the way the gaze is fixed—a feature I want to call the *comic twinkle*. Difficult to pinpoint but impossible to ignore, the “twinkle” is that oblique bodily disclosure of comic intent—call it irony, cheekiness or a certain sense of “I-know-you-know-I-know”—which *appeals* to our sense of humor. As with direct-to-camera address, it visibly acknowledges a discrepancy between actor and character, even as that role continues to be played. Alternatively, bodily *placement* may alone yield a disclosure of comic intent. Buster Keaton and Jacques Tati provide striking examples of this phenomenon. In each case, the neatness of the action—think of the clockwork chase of *The Navigator* (Donald Crisp and Buster Keaton, 1924) or the meticulous placings of *Playtime* (Jacques Tati, 1967)—involves a comic foregrounding of choreography. With Tati's human figures one often has a double impression of both contingency (they could go this way, that way or another way) *and* synchronization (bodies and world unknowingly coordinated). With Keaton's films, everything seems subject to the whims of destiny because nothing has been left to chance: outrageously bad and good fortune are heaped carefully on top of one another in ways that make one wonder if Fate is a bored child or a chess master. In *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (Charles Reisner, 1928), the wall falls forward but Keaton stays standing, his body passing through the single window frame as the structure plummets. Trust his luck to be right here, right now. The inch-perfect precision of the placement, in co-ordination with the perpendicular view, is a fanfare of comic complicity among performer, camera and setting. The result in each case is to set off, in ways that generate different feelings and implications, the unforeseen against the anticipated, the accidental against the planned, chance against calculation.

The *deliberate accident* is the most vivid of comic incongruities in performance. A paradigmatic example of this is a further moment from *The Circus* audition sequence in which the Tramp, having failed to impress and now settling to watch the clowns' routine, whisks a chair out from under

the ringmaster just as he prepares to sit. The chair-being-pulled-away act is unmistakably a comedy cliché, but the irony here arises from its position in the comic sequence: the Tramp involuntarily executes a slapstick trope just at the moment he quits trying to perform. The action posits an offstage region (demarcated by a loose semi-circle of onlooking stagehands and fellow performers with their backs to us) as a kind of stage nonetheless, a transformation aided by the camera's front-on view. This effect urges us to recognize the *careful* staging of action—the conspicuous centrality of the ringmaster within the frame, for instance, his preparation to sit and subsequent fall to the sawdust floor so clearly configured to be presented fully and most directly to the camera's view. The disclosure of comic intent is here in the very neatness of composition, timing and arrangement. This is not so much artifice being declared as premeditation. (A thought experiment: if somebody told us that Chaplin-the-actor pulled the chair accidentally, that the blooper was captured for posterity and included in the film, would we—in light of the ringmaster's slow sit and the chair placed here and the camera here—*could* we believe them?) One effect of us recognizing premeditation is that we can summon a degree of anticipation in advance of the fall—anticipation we share with Chaplin but not with the Tramp. The friction between “meaning to” and “not meaning to” is a comic strategy I want to call *incongruous intentions*. Being alert to this strategy allows us, for instance, to appreciate the relationship as counterpoint between the intentionally subversive Chaplin, pulling the chair from under the bully, and the sycophantic Tramp, brushing sawdust from his master's suit. The clash of opposing qualities is permitted only by recognition of comic design.

If comedy often recalls the games of childhood, it is not least because such games teach us to distinguish incongruous intentions and varieties of pretence. “Daddy pretending to be a monster” is recognized as comic precisely because the child can sense the thrilling mismatch between monstrous and loving intentions. Such games teach children to read details of facial expression and gesture, which, minute as they may be, tell the difference between pretend-menace and genuine threat. Likewise, as accustomed viewers of comedy, we are able to recognize the distinction in visual character between actual and calculated clumsiness. In *It's a Gift* (Norman Z. McLeod, 1933), Harold Bissonette (W. C. Fields) is being harangued by his wife at the family breakfast table and avoids a direct hit by picking up an abandoned roller-skate from the dining room floor and studying (or pretending to study) it. As she raises her voice to a yell, he starts and drops it. A “straight” performance of the action is possible to imagine. But here the reflexive jump is marked by a little flourish, the skate unfurled from his grasp and turned over from hand-to-hand before allowed to fall, in a manner that discloses the actor's intention. The appearance of a voluntary reflex, of *stylized* nervousness, is what makes the performance in this moment distinctively comedic. There is no attempt at a naturalistic reaction; part of the pleasure lies in admiring the conventionalized neatness of the mishap.

Similarly, when, in another moment at the breakfast table, Harold absent-mindedly pours and continues to pour salt on his porridge—oblivious to what he is doing while Fields, of course, very clearly and consciously *means* to do it—the knowing performance of unknowing continuation creates the comic discrepancy.

As a variant on the deliberate accident, the convention of *knowing-unknowingness* is taken to an extreme by Jerry Lewis in a scene from *The Ladies Man* (Jerry Lewis, 1963). Here the intentionality of a blunder is so blatantly announced that it achieves a complex effect. Working as a housekeeper in a boarding house, Lewis' character sets about dusting a large group of colorful glass figurines arranged on a table. The matron figure of the boarding house (Kathleen Freeman) enters and warns him never to touch those priceless ornaments—on which he promptly knocks them all over, smashing them into countless pieces (Figure 3.2). Through Lewis' physical performance, the moment of destruction is drawn out, registering that slow-motion quality of consciousness faced with disaster. But, as with the Chaplin chair-pulling example, and yet with more force, Lewis pitches two intentions incongruously against one another: the intention to smash against the intention to preserve. Contorted facial registrations of panic as the ornaments tumble are contorted to appear like expressions of violent will. Outreaching hands ostensibly seek to save yet clearly work to



Figure 3.2 Herbert H. Heebert (Jerry Lewis) is a LOUSY housekeeper. *The Ladies Man* (Paramount, 1963). Digital frame enlargement.

smash. This figure in front of us so obviously *means* to knock over those ornaments, every last one. The intention is palpable, unmistakable. The representation of attempted carefulness is undermined to such a degree that clumsiness itself appears as a veiled manifestation of the desire to destroy.

In the service of this clash of intentions is an intensely stylized form of acting. This stylization goes well beyond an expressionistic heightening of a character's feelings: these are feelings *performed*—so obviously performed. Whereas Jerry Lewis offers an extreme case, it is characteristic of comedic performance for recognizable expressions and gestures—from dramatic repertoire and from everyday life—to be heightened and deformed, tweaked just enough to register the fact of mimicry or else contorted into the resemblance of an incongruous other. The promotional posters for two recent comedies, *School of Rock* (Richard Linklater, 2003) and *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (Adam McKay, 2004), can help demonstrate this point. In the former, Jack Black imitates the dynamic strumming gesture of a rock star, a stance familiar enough to be pushed into a comic register: the legs planted just a bit *too* wide, the strumming hand more stumpy than athletic, the facial contortion of a rock star's scream, normally deployed to convey a furious absorption in music, perhaps, here stretched into an expression resembling disgust. In the latter, Will Ferrell's newscaster's recognizable gesticulations of masculine assurance—upraised glass, furrowed brow and slightly elevated eyebrow—are tweaked to appear as blatant posturing, wooden promises of professionalism and virility. In each case, by means of a comic twinkle, the same gesture reveals both the sincerity of the character and the irony of the actor. Moreover, a recognition that the *characters* are performing draws out a clash of contradictory efforts: the rock fan's emulation of his musical hero against the comedian's rock burlesque, and the news anchor's attempted presentation of himself as worldly and assured against the comedian's swipe at masculine vanity.

James Naremore has pointed out that films often showcase actorly skill by finding occasions for “performance-within-performance,” working to “dramatize situations in which the expressive coherence of a character either breaks down or is revealed as a ‘mere act.’”⁷ Whereas the collapse or exposure of a character's presentational strategy is a frequent event in many types of movie, such situations are the mainstay of caricature, parody, burlesque and satire. A vital component in the satirical impersonation of political figures, for instance, is that such figures are themselves depicted in the act of performing, dissembling, trying to show themselves in a good light. In such cases, the attempt to present a favorable public image is set against the comedic intention to ridicule.

The Monty Python film *Life of Brian* (Terry Jones, 1979) offers a memorable example of this. To please the Judean masses gathered outside the Roman governor's palace, Pontius Pilate (Michael Palin) offers the token of releasing any held prisoner of the crowd's choosing. However, Pilate's unfortunate inability to pronounce his “r”s, sounding them as “w”s,



Figure 3.3 Pontius Pilate (Michael Palin) plays to the crowd. *Life of Brian* (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1979). Digital frame enlargement.

undermines his attempted-populist demonstration of authority through clemency. “Whom a-would you have me a-welease?” he asks, spreading his arms in a Christ-like pose of pompous benevolence (Figure 3.3). Pilate’s performance of mercy proves a crowd-pleaser nonetheless; the audience is merciless. “Welease Woderwick!” yells one smart-alec, and the gang falls about laughing. Yet whereas we may laugh with the internal audience here, we are not aligned with them. A speech impediment is importantly different from a *performed* speech impediment, gleeful mockery distinct from an appreciation of *wit*. Consider, for example, the way Pilate’s lines are deliberately crafted to contain as many “r”s as possible in the accelerating rhythm of the following line: “To pwove our fwriendship, it is customawy at this time to welease a wongdoer fwom our pwisons.” (And could a greater density of failed “s” sounds be packed into Biggus Dickus’ [Graham Chapman] enthusiastic announcement that he “may be of thome athitthanthe if there ith a thudden crithith”?) An utterance cannot be involuntarily witty. Lines are put in Pilate’s mouth with comedic intent—not just by the crowd but by the scriptwriters. Gestures are similarly placed in the dual service of self-glorification and derision. What we might call comedic acuity (poise, wit and knowledge beyond the immediate situation) rubs up against a failed effort at political authority (here characterized by theatricality, rhetoric and tokenistic demonstrations of compassion). The governor is doubly performed, and the two performances pull in different directions.

In the spirit of Naremore’s conception of “expressive incoherence,” comedy thus habitually involves a double exposure or unmasking: the peeking-out from behind the mask in the case of the comedic actor, alongside the

threatened or actual slippage of the mask in the case of the comic character.⁸ A sequence in *To Be or Not to Be* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1943), a comedy brimming with precariously maintained performances, draws an early connection between two of them: that of Jack Benny's Joseph Tura, on stage as Hamlet, and Carole Lombard's Maria Tura, Joseph's wife and co-star in the play, playing "The Great Actress Maria Tura" in her dressing room. She has covertly invited a star-struck young fighter pilot, Sobinski (Robert Stack), currently in the theatre auditorium, to meet her backstage while her husband is treading the boards—and the cue for Sobinski's exit is the first line of Hamlet's famous soliloquy, "To be or not to be." Treading the boards, Jack Benny's comic twinkle shines through to let us know that *he knows we know* Tura is a ham—one for whom theatre is a chance for self-validation, the actor's ego taking precedence over the character's credibility, so the scheduled walk-out during his big speech comes as something of an affront. Sheer disbelief fights for ground with wounded pride and growing anger, but Tura's feelings must be disguised and contained. The theatrical and social requirement to *stay in role* entails an effort comically conveyed by floundering shifts in vocal delivery—an incredulous pause, a stunned repetition of "that is"—and then by a perplexed and pained facial expression as Tura ventures to finish the line: "that is the question," now inflected to refer to the actor's bewilderment rather than the character's existential dilemma. Finally, the heightened volume and strained articulation of "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind" and "out-*rage*-ous fortune"—lines unthinkingly accented and directed as a moral rebuke to the departing figure—betray a gulf between the pricked ego of a spurned Thespian and the supposed introspection of a suicidal Dane.

Backstage, another performance is being prepared. Maria's intended extramarital dalliance with the naïve young pilot is premised along the lines of two formulaic scenarios: the star-struck fan hunting an autograph from his favorite celebrity actress, and a conventional first interview between gentleman caller and demure belle. It is essential for the scene that Sobinski remains unaware that *he* is the passive partner, just as it is vital that we are not *quite* sure how far Maria intends to exploit his youthful virility for her own gratification. To this end, Robert Stack's flatly sincere manner of blank credulity is well-judged. A scrupulously straight performance in a comic scene, there is no trace of tongue-in-cheek knowingness on the part of the actor—when, for instance, Stack delivers the line, "I can drop three tons of dynamite in two minutes," he does so without comedic inflection, as neither an overpuffed boast nor an affected innuendo (though it *becomes* an innuendo, placed-as-such, with the reverse-cut to Lombard's "Really . . ."). Carole Lombard's performance, by contrast, is comedic in its playful foregrounding of the strategic negotiation of personae. To keep up the act, the character must suppress the gap occasionally emerging between "Maria Tura," the star portrayed in magazines—passive, girlish and coy—and the Maria whose luxuriation in flattery bespeaks



Figure 3.4 Maria Tura (Carole Lombard) remembers the goldfish. *To Be or Not to Be* (Universal, 1943). Digital frame enlargement.

an active and well-versed sexual interest. The scene hinges on the precariousness of role-play, as when Sobinski makes mention of her non-existent goldfish—evidently a forgotten fiction created for her legion of sensitive fans. Lombard’s performance suspends the moment, first smoothing over her puzzlement with a tactful non-response (using the rebound of a girlish giggle to draw breath, smoothing over the anomalous remark), then looking vacantly ahead and asking, “*What goldfish?*”—and finally salvaging the fiction with an over-egged, “*Yes, yes, of course!*” (Figure 3.4) All the world’s a stage; yet in contrast to Benny’s portrayal of floundering, the pleasure we are invited to take in Lombard’s performance turns around the character’s *regaining* of fluency, rather than its loss—a fluency that can flit between personae, between the shy sparkle of the girl who played Kiki and the sudden solemnity of the woman who played Lady Macbeth.

Thinking about comedic performance as a *relation between discrepant personae* can help us grasp, among other things, comedy’s penchant for cross-dressing. In *Some Like It Hot* (Billy Wilder, 1959), a festival of types-being-performed, Tony Curtis plays Joe playing Josephine—so that sharing a midnight bourbon with Sugar Kane engages an incongruous relation between the carnal intentions of Joe and the platonic intentions of Josephine. The performance is comedic in as much as it plays up the actor’s moves between gestures of the cutesy companion and those of

the sexual shark—and, later, of the sex-repulsed sophisticate with a voice like Cary Grant. Another cross-dressing movie, *Tootsie* (Sydney Pollack, 1980), in which an out-of-work actor dresses as a woman to get a part in a soap-opera, presents us with an even more complex intertwining of various named personae: Dustin Hoffman as the actor Michael Dorsey as the actress Dorothy Michaels as TV show character Emily Kimberley. The film's finale—Michael Dorsey's coming-clean, the peeling away of the layers of these personae during a live broadcast of the soap-opera—is a zany illustration of the compulsion to demonstrate one's integrity by means of masquerade. Cameras rolling, the revelation is engineered by way of an absurd back-story (a barely comprehensible summary of twists and turns involving misbegotten offspring, disfiguring illness and a move to Tangiers), delivered in Dorothy's honeyed Southern tones as she descends the on-set staircase. At one point, Michael's blustery improvisation gives way to Dorothy's stuttering (“*and—and—and*”) in a manner that teeters on the edge of collapse: Hoffman's delivery draws out the moment, imparting a thrilling rhythmic effect to Michael's freewheel stutter, building (“*just—just—just*”) to a crescendo that, in the world of the film, can just about pass as Dorothy's melodramatic rendition of, in the world of the soap-opera, Emily's fraught state of emotional climax. The final unmasking, when it comes, takes place in both diegetic worlds simultaneously: the revelation that Emily is a man also exposes Dorothy as a fraud to her colleagues. Yet if the unveiling destroys two personae with a single shot, it also involves the outrageous creation of another: Edward Kimberley, the reckless and cross-dressing charlatan who has disguised himself as a nurse. Hoffman's juggling of incongruous personae reaches a climax when his delicate removal of false eyelashes snaps into the gunslinger pose of the male impostor.

Personae may sound out dissonance both within and across diegetic bounds. Spoof offers a vivid instance of the bounds of diegesis being systematically fuzzed. One way of thinking about spoof is that the film itself is performing—*pretending* to be another film, usually one riven with cliché. With *Airplane* (Jim Abrahams, et al., 1980), the film itself poses as a sloppily made genre picture, as when a *deliberate* continuity error afflicts a cut from Leslie Nielsen's character asleep to the character wide awake. Nielsen's deadpan—a form of acting where the comic twinkle is artfully veiled, allowed to emerge and recede from view—is a vision of sobriety that gently recalls drunkenness, a droll form of sham seriousness, figured in *Airplane* as a parodic performance of a bad straight performance (his previous experience as an often hilariously lousy straight actor being crucial here). Nielsen's doctor is called to act in an emergency by a cabin crew who have made efforts to reassure scared and sickly passengers through a theatrical campaign of loudspeaker announcements, the camp and cheery trolley-push of an air hostess—even, at one point, an impromptu song. When Nielsen's doctor examines a sick lady on board the aircraft, medical practice is likewise placed as an ostentatious performance, a theatrical

show of aptitude corroborated by the magical appearance of forceps from the wings (he reaches out and they are simply handed to him from offscreen by an unseen and inexplicably prepared attendee). The doctor proceeds to discover the source of the problem: cupping his hand over the patient's lower face, he removes a series of eggs from her mouth as she gags and gawks in horror. The action creates an incongruous (yet also somehow fitting) pair of personae, professional physician jostling for space with amateur magician. If the cupping gesture suggests a conjuror's flourish, it recalls the kind of clumsy sleight-of-hand that reveals the trick in the too-careful attempt to conceal. The gesture declares that it's all an act, acknowledging the fact of its own pretence. As with Lewis in *The Ladies Man*, the overtness of comic intent here enacts a precarious suspension of the diegetic realm.

A consideration of how personae are played off against one another in comedic performance may also need to take into account incongruity between the character's personae and the comedic persona of the actor. The practice of having a comedian exhibit a reasonably consistent characterization from film to film, a convention carried over from silent comedy and from the vaudeville stage before it, potentially adds another persona to the mix. The figure of Groucho Marx is a vivid example: here we have an actor playing a pantomimic persona playing a thinly realized character playing a role. These various personae produce an incongruous fusion of energy and cynicism: racing through the motions, Groucho remains at all times fully committed to being non-committal. Similarly, W. C. Fields' predominant persona—imperious, stubborn and emphatic—sounds a note of comic dissonance when he plays Harold Bissonette—cowed, nervous and browbeaten—in *It's a Gift*. But it is also true that, for Harold, husbandly deference is an adopted role, a mask worn to lubricate the wheels of family life. We see this most strikingly in a moment when Harold, now role-playing the patriarch, declares to his daughter that he is "the master of this household"—but mutes his voice in case his wife in the next room should overhear. Fields' performance of Harold's efforts allows us to see through his performance of self, drawing out conflicting aims—the intention to present himself as assertive versus the intention to present himself as compliant. When the wife yells from the next room, his hands leap jittershly to his hat brim and he spins around to answer her call. Fields' performance, in combination with the arrangement of space (adjoining rooms) and offscreen sound, is expressive of a failed attempt to keep two distinct personae separate.

What results is a little satire on social performance that may remind us of Erving Goffman's conception of "impression management." Goffman writes that,

in addition to the fact that precautions are taken to prevent disruption of projected definitions [in social life], we may also note that an intense interest in these disruptions comes to play a significant role in the life of

the group. Practical jokes and social games are played in which embarrassments, which are to be taken unseriously, are purposely engineered. Fantasies are created in which devastating exposures occur [. . .] There seems to be no grouping which does not have a ready supply of these games, reveries and cautionary tales, to be used as a source of humor, a catharsis for anxieties and a sanction for inducing individuals to be modest in their claims and reasonable in their projected expectations.⁹

Whereas not all screen comedy involves the kind of “embarrassments” or “devastating exposures” that we see in certain British TV sitcoms, such as *Fawlty Towers* (1975–1979), the aptly named *Keeping Up Appearances* (1990–1995) and *The Office* (2001–2003), Goffman’s anthropological description of comic activity is illuminating for my purposes here. In particular, the emphasis on intention (“*purposely* engineered” social games “*to be taken* unseriously”) and on comedy’s “intense interest” in the “disruption of projected definitions” resonates with the picture of comedic performance I have wished to sketch in this chapter. Comedy depends on and exercises our skills of recognizing strategies of self-presentation, of discerning and weighing intentionality and of acknowledging varieties of pretence. In the final clause of the quotation above, Goffman shares territory with Bergson in postulating that comedy’s social function is to be found in an inducement of modesty and reasonableness. No doubt an implicit encouragement of conservative behavior is a feature of some comedy, but my sense is that Goffman gets closer to the heart of the matter when he ventures that comedy may provide a “catharsis for anxieties.” If the modern world requires us to negotiate an ever greater range of potentially incongruous social roles and projections of self, then comedy may play a social-therapeutic function, wherein the everyday stress of balancing multiple personae is alleviated by an appreciation of the effort. If this intuition is right, then the vocation of comedy is not so much, as Bergson thought, to regulate social behavior as to reconcile us to social life.

NOTES

1. Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London: Routledge, 1990), 11.
2. A fine reader of comic theory is John Morreall, ed., *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).
3. See Sigmund Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905; repr., London: Penguin, 2002).
4. Henri Bergson, “Laughter,” in *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher (1900; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 84.
5. *Ibid.*, 67.
6. Related matters have been explored in Alex Clayton, *The Body in Hollywood Slapstick* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2007).

7. James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 70.
8. See Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 70, 77.
9. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959; repr., London and New York: Penguin, 1990), 25.

4 Performed Performance and *The Man Who Knew Too Much*

Murray Pomerance



Writing about cinema's conservative tendency to "mirror prevailing society" rather than challenge it, Siegfried Kracauer describes a prototypical narrative situation involving love, loss, sacrifice and tragedy and concludes that in the audience, "Many tears are shed which flow only because crying is sometimes easier than contemplation."¹ The ease of cathartic response, and indeed ease in general, is significant to the bourgeois style, which is centered on the rejection of labor, its spirit, its energy and its social necessity, in a glorification of the self that aspires to a kind of natural inhabitation of an already comfortable world. Sartre notes how in agricultural and aristocratic societies, where true luxury was "the opulent consumption of rare, natural objects by God's elect," the worker "fades into the background once he has put mankind in the presence of nature. Nothing remains of his work but a drop of blood, to heighten the sheen of the pearl and a little surface bloom that allows fruit and meats the better to release their scents."² Kracauer's point is that movies transmogrify and glorify the practical and political realities of life—life as struggle—through a selective

exaggeration and artful juxtaposition that configure a domain of pure and apparently unachieved happening; but my point in quoting him is something else entirely.

A certain chain of relations links spectators to what they watch onscreen: both crying and contemplation reflect engagement, and so they are comparable as responses. Audience engagement accords value to the cinematic image, indeed elevates its value in direct proportion to the intensity with which viewers cling to the life raft of the characters and their situation; and this value consistently rests on what, in the moment of our watching it—watching, as Richard Maltby suggests, doubly: the performer's body and the role he has assumed³—seems to be a round and fulsome reality, what I would call the “reality effect” of cinematic performance. Yet whatever can be seen onscreen has been carefully designed for the eye, and as they work at this design filmmakers know that some behavior is especially, intrinsically visible, more dramatically accessible to audiences and, thus, where cinema is concerned, better for the camera. We might think of film performance more generally as behavior turned expressly toward a particular view—the imperial position of the lens—since no matter what the narrative requirements of a scene, every moment that will come to matter must be arranged by the filmmaking team in such a way as to be caught appreciably and precisely in the rays of light that pass onto the film plane.

One of the many reasons that Alfred Hitchcock has gained so high a reputation as a master of cinema is that he attended loyally to the optical needs of his audience, which is to say the limitations of his camera. He thought constantly of a fundamental characteristic of dramatic performance—that it is optically legible in the context of a relatively recessive optical field. His architecture manifests a visible space, in which a hierarchy of objects—not excluding the bodies of his characters—is carefully placed in view. In a 1982 roundtable discussion for *Cahiers du cinéma*, the British matte artist Alfred Whitlock marveled that Hitchcock

never gave up saying “the audience” . . . while he was talking, he was looking up and there was a screen there. And the picture was on the screen. You know, he never at any time lost sight of the fact that he was making a picture for an audience. So that in talking about it, always from the audience's point of view, he never missed out on anything.⁴

And writing somewhat earlier about performance more abstractly, with some special attention to the mechanics of its staging, Erving Goffman notes not only how “we employ the convention of opening up rooms so that they have no ceiling and one wall missing—an incredible arrangement if examined naïvely” but also how “spoken interaction is opened up ecologically; the participants do not face each other directly or (when more than two) through the best available circle, but rather stand at an open angle to the front so that the audience can literally see into the encounter.”⁵

Sightlines are essential with narrative cinema. The lens forms that fourth wall; typically, it is the lens, acting as factotum for the viewer, that “sees into the encounter.” In screened two-person interactions, the conventional shot/countershot works *as though* performers had momentarily turned away from one another’s direct gaze and toward that of the invisible onlooker since, like Simmel’s *tertius gaudens*, that onlooker is placed in between them as a third who keeps watch, a bystander who silently monitors, evaluates, discerns, concludes and anticipates. Without this sense of the characters “turning away,” we would experience the shot/countershot with a penetrating sense of being looked through and denied ourselves whereas instead, typically, characters *subtly* acknowledge and seem to appreciate our spying presence. Explicitly, however, we are neither acknowledged nor reciprocated. Explicitly, in the fiction, we are not there.

However, not every performance in filmed narratives is devoted exclusively toward an external audience (an audience known to be present by the actors but not directly acknowledged by the characters they are playing). Acting sometimes gains dramatic leverage in being directed to observers who are themselves characters in the story being watched. That is, in some cases a story is opened to the audience’s reception and understanding by way of a performance that some of the characters mount and stage for some of the others, it being evident enough to the characters offering themselves as actors that other characters are watching them but not, apparently, that all this playing and watching is being watched by us. “Not, apparently,” I say, since obviously we are no less aware of this “internalized” performance than of performance itself; yet our awareness does not seem to mobilize the awareness of the “actors” that our actors’ characters are pretending to be. Immersed in their characters, actors have a feeling for their audience: but the audience in this case is inside the drama, characterized by other actors in the cast. The acted “actors” are thus inhabitants of an ecological and existential bubble. As an audience, during such performance-within-performance, we have entirely vanished. Given that every character we see onscreen, regardless of which way he directs his gestures, is being performed in the first place—that is, made up and put on by an actor who takes himself as being invisible during the performance (even when, as with Ava Gardner getting off the train at the beginning of *The Band Wagon* [Vincente Minnelli, 1953], the character and the actor creating her go by the same name)—and that, further, usually the performances one sees in a filmic narrative are treated by the audience as being invisible as such (otherwise the characters dematerialize), instances of characters *explicitly* putting on characters for one another constitute something relatively unordinary, what one could call *performed performances*. Performed performance differs from straight performance in that viewers in the theater audience do not consider it invisible *as performance* while it opens out. Indeed they take note of it bluntly as acting put up for display, even though characters onscreen may or may not see it as acting, too.

Hitchcock has numerous setups of performed performance. The painter-lothario in *Blackmail* (1929) is a case in point, as he plays the piano for the virginal Alice. Mr. Memory's stage act in *The 39 Steps* (1935) is another, as is Charlotte Inwood's rendition of Cole Porter's "The Laziest Gal in Town" in *Stage Fright* (1950), where she is seen from the wings while giving herself over to a packed house. *Vertigo* (1958) is of course virtually a textbook on the mechanism of performers putting on characters who pretend to be actors putting on characters.⁶ Two interesting and contradictory types of performed performance in Hitchcock's work might elicit our consideration: first, the so-called play-within-the-play form, in which an ostensible onscreen rigging enables characters to pretend at being persons other than we have been taking them for, in front of witnesses or audiences who are typically gulled and entertained; and, second, variations on the theme of fabrication (as Goffman puts it), where—for any number of reasons, including fraud, buffoonery, playful or affectionate teasing, trickery or, as we see with Hitchcock's *Saboteur* (1942), an intentional threat to national security—some onscreen personae put on an act that other onscreen personae are strictly unable to detect as such.

I should say about this difference between types at least that in present-day Western society, partly because of the speed of social interactions in modernity and partly because of long-held and religiously supported superstitions and doctrines about the inherent purity of the soul, acting is itself regarded with a degree of suspicion and concern, the general belief being that performing routines in everyday life is tolerable just to the degree that it does not smack of performance at all. Authenticity, credibility and, thus, ultimately, fiduciary trust all seem to depend on behavior that seems unconstructed no matter how constructed it really is. It is perhaps for this reason that performance raised to an art is considered acceptable inside the liberating and plastic domain of entertainment whereas it is considered gauche and immoral in politics and blatantly hostile in military matters. I am raising here a distinction between two forms of performance openly staged as such—performed performance—in one of which the immediate audience knows, and in the other of which it does not, that put-on behavior has been raised for show. Speaking generally, the former type is more likely to be considered "fun": we don't tend to take it lightly when we *discover* that we have been gulled by acting that wasn't obviously clothed as such.

FABRICATIONS

In the case of fabrications, the audience may or may not be in on the charade, and this is the case both onscreen and in the theater. With *Saboteur*, for instance, viewers of the film are to some extent gulls themselves, initially unaware of Fry's *performed* performance as a reclusive and unfriendly—yet

only *ordinarily* unfriendly—chap; unaware, that is, that his unfriendliness is put on, meant to keep strangers at a distance; and only toward the climax coming to see that under the coolness is an “actor,” a second screen character who has been putting on the first: the “real” Fry, as it were, this one to be taken as the authentic version, an anxious and obedient man who ends up clinging for his life to the torch of the Statue of Liberty and who is, of course, himself being played by an actor we at no point attend to (Norman Lloyd). The same setup is repeated, with a nice flashback envelope to contain it, in *Stage Fright*, and fabrication obviously plays a key role in *Vertigo*, to such a degree, indeed, that speaking or writing about this film for naïve audiences, without destroying the pleasure of seeing it, is a vexation. Suffice it to say that in both of these films, characters are put on show for other characters who do not know whom they are looking at because they do not know they are watching a performance, and the films are carefully structured so that neither do we. Even without the deaths that resolve them, the performed performances we can see in these films are stunning and deeply provocative, raising numerous questions about the limits of perception, the ineluctability of the inner self, and the role of sincerity in modern life. In a certain sense, *Stage Fright*, *Vertigo* and, of course, *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) are all films that audiences can see fully and freshly only once, since each contains and turns on a powerfully dramatic unmasking—a performance disclosed as such—that no viewer can truly forget and that corrupts all future viewings. In cases such as these, because the viewer is unaware of the undisclosed performance and therefore unconcerned with it as such, we do not have a strict case of performed performance; we have performance, plain and simple, the performance of that performance being part of what is guised in the story.

The neatest Hitchcockian version of this structure is to be found in *Notorious* (1946), where the sophisticate Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman) agrees to work for American Intelligence against a Nazi cadre founded by her rejected father; her mission, bluntly, is to marry the leader of the gang and report on his activities from inside. We know all along what she is doing and who she really is, but the Nazi (Claude Rains) does not, even though his rather intimidating Wagnerian mother (Leopoldine Konstantine) has her suspicions; and the tension in this fabrication arises from the husband’s slowly gathering a knowledge—from *this observant mother*, no less—that matches ours. At this point, while we certainly see that he is a cold-blooded man involved in utterly nefarious goings-on, he becomes pathetic for the first time (and at film’s end, as it seems he is about to be executed by his associates just at the moment Alicia is rescued by the film’s hero, we weep for him). In general, screen fabrications pit one character’s state of knowledge against another’s and sometimes pit characters’ knowledge against our own. Thomas Scheff’s exploration of some of these variations demonstrates an important mechanism by which our emotional connection to dramatized events can be turned during a diegesis.⁷

PLAY-WITHIN-THE-PLAY

The play-within-the-play operates differently, in that characters who are witnessing it onscreen openly know, and often avow, that they are doing so and as part of this confession openly know and acknowledge the calculated falseness of the acting they are watching: that is, they openly know and acknowledge that what they are watching *is acting*. It is, after all—and must be staged by filmmakers to be—acting that looks like acting (to them, and even more so to us): acting that looks exactly like the acting that audiences are accustomed not to treat as acting. Actors in the play-within-the-play might suddenly turn and gaze into the wings with a canny, “real” expression of awareness—Marlene Dietrich’s posture while singing in *Stage Fright*; and the wings in this case might be any area withdrawn from the attention of the kenning audience: consider Laurence Olivier’s use of the close perceptual space directly around his head as a sort of “wings” in his farewell performance as Archie Rice in *The Entertainer* (Tony Richardson, 1960). In the play-within-a-play structure, character-observers approach the performed performance by self-awaredly suspending “disbelief” while the performance goes on and by “agreeing” ongoingly and openly to the principals and terms on which it is based. While they suspend their disbelief, then, the character-observers are simultaneously aware that they are suspending disbelief (as are we, watching them): and they act as though they know that the character-performers are actors living in their world, not characters living in ours.

Generally with this structure, onscreen watchers pretend, as onlookers to an inside “play,” that they are making the commitment we make in watching them watching: they ostensibly move in their imagination to any required geographical or historical space, they ostensibly accept the reality of any proposed dramatic figures or relationships onstage before them and they are ostensibly concerned about performance outcomes that are purportedly unforeseen. If the characters in the play-within-the-play seem to exist in a naturally unfolding sheath of time, ignorant of their futures, the characters *who are playing those characters* have rehearsed all this and know precisely what is about to happen, all the way to the end. These players-within-the-play are pretending, then, to be alive in an unfolding present. And this very pretense, this make-believe of spontaneous current involvement, is itself merely an apparent current involvement of these performing “actors,” who seem to their watchers totally involved with their little make-believe but unconscious of their own fates, even in the face of the fact that they are being put on by actors who do know what is coming on all interior levels. Further, this happens in the face of the fact that the characters playing these “actors” are played by actors who have invisibly rehearsed even the visible rehearsal and who do know everything about the script that contains the little “script” being played out at the moment. The “watchers” onscreen seem ignorant of their diegetic future, too, just

as the actors who are putting them on are distinctively not ignorant of theirs, within the confines of the performance for the camera. Further, the camera constitutes a kind of fatal boundary, in that beyond its limits and dictates, that is, beyond the “story,” none of the actors we watch knows what will happen next, even in their astute “knowledge” of “what will happen next.”

Goffman draws our attention to a fascinating structural aspect of the play-within-the-play, its relative gaudiness.⁸ In order that audiences may continuously and unambiguously discriminate it from the action in which it is contained, this inner drama, the performed performance, must be of a different order *perceptually*. Usually it is distinctively more stylish or more styled; perhaps cheaper, distinctly *produced* and thus hokier, more outlandish in design or more ostentatiously stagey; or it is played by agents not quite as human as the other actors onstage. The puppet show that the camera glides past during the “American in Paris” ballet number in Minnelli’s film (1951), for example, or the one that Leslie Caron watches with “rapt absorption” in *Lili* (Charles Walters, 1953) demonstrate performer variations, and blunt ostentation of design is evident in typical filmed stage shows in front of an audience, where gaily costumed, colorfully lit and pronouncedly talented singers and dancers entertain people who, like us, have paid to sit and appreciatively (or, as in the case of Jeffrey Cordova’s first production in *The Band Wagon*, unappreciatively) watch. We can think of the vaudeville routines of Gene Kelly and Donald O’Connor in *Singin’ in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952), the Donahue family’s performances in *There’s No Business Like Show Business* (Walter Lang, 1954) and so on. In *Stage Fright*, we are treated to an acting class at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts on Gower Street, London: here, the actors move around in everyday clothing with parts of costumes—a bonnet, for example—added, this producing an unmistakable incongruity that, in company with the words uttered from the stage, makes for an indelible impression of strangeness, an inner “performance.”

THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

Hitchcock’s *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956) gives very clear examples of both types of performed performance (as do many of his films, since the structural aspects of putting on faces deeply absorbed him). We see the play-within-the-play when Jo McKenna, a former international stage star now reduced to the joys of mothering in Indianapolis, serenades her ten-year-old son before going out for an evening. The little show itself is Ray Evans and Jay Livingston’s “Que Sera, Sera (What Will Be, Will Be),” a song that later became a classic of American popular culture but that here gets its premiere, and definitive, performance as Jo (in reality, Doris Day) croons it to attentive little Hank (Christopher Olsen), who is dressing

for bed. The stage for this performed performance is one bedroom of the McKenna hotel suite in Marrakech. The auditorium, as it were, is the bedroom adjacent, where Jo's husband Ben (James Stewart) and his host for the evening, Louis Bernard (Daniel Gélin), pause to listen attentively to the song. Ben is watching the little song-and-dance routine in the mirror as he fixes his necktie, and Bernard is tranquilly ensconced near the balcony under the twilight crescent moon with something like a martini in his hand. "I can't tell you," he says suavely, "how beautifully your wife sings!" Ben answers, all Midwestern pluck, "She's pretty good, isn't she." That Jo is a good singer—Day at the time was as polished as any popular singer on the continent—is not as salient, however, as that here and now with her son she is pretending to be one and her husband is pretending to listen. Jo actually singing, that is, fully embodying the celebrated Jo Conway, star of the international stage, we come to see only much later in the film, when at a foreign embassy soirée she has agreed to sit at a piano and perform: this is the Jo who belts out a tune, who once seduced audiences the world round. The Jo in the hotel room is a character the famous Jo is putting on, far less than a star, yet also more: a happy little chirping domesticated "mother" who the singing star, actually played by a mother (the movie star Doris Day, herself actually played by another mother, Mrs. Martin Melcher), is playing. Moments later, when Jo joins him on the balcony, Bernard can be utterly forward and can give away the game: "Were you on the American stage, Mrs. McKenna?" Indeed, singing with Hank, Jo was projecting her voice, turning her body and gesturing—together putting on a show, yet a show the creation of which was ostensibly present for us as we saw her artfully twirl around, prepare her breathing, posture with her little co-performer and so on.

In their self-awareness as watchers and listeners here, Ben and Bernard also share circumstances with the audience in the Royal Albert Hall during the culminating performance of Arthur Benjamin's "Storm Clouds" Cantata (as does Ben when he listens to Jo at the embassy later on). These ticket buyers hardly entertain the fantasy that the musicians in the London Symphony Orchestra are being fully and only themselves, or that the conductor Bernard Herrmann goes around in everyday life waving a baton. As the conductor conducts, the chorus enunciates, the soloist intones and the orchestra works away, the audience is seeing nothing less than a performed performance, which is to say a staged extravaganza openly grounded as such. During this concert as it is evident to *us*, the characters of the musicians are played not exactly by real musicians taking up these roles but by characters, diegetic "musicians" giving a diegetic "performance," all this being evident at the climactic (and much celebrated) moment when the music is interrupted by an assassination attempt that Jo screams to prevent. As the music crashes to a halt, we suddenly see those musician characters thrown into disarray on the stage, bending over, talking to one another, demonstrating shock and confusion. These confused folk are the characters

who have been playing the performing musicians, characters we meet only at this point in the film; highly trained characters, indeed, as dexterity with instruments is required of them, and it might come as little surprise to learn that almost everyone is being played by a performing musician moonlighting for this film: almost everyone. The man who plays the cymbalist—the key musician in the orchestra, from a dramaturgical point of view in this sequence—is Charlie Quirk, a movie stunt man.⁹ When the concert collapses, we see the musicians playing the “musicians,” characters much like Ben and Jo, yet also actors like Stewart and Day since the diegetic musicians playing “musicians” are played by musicians from the London Symphony Orchestra. The screen audience, likewise, is transformed by the musical collapse, changed from being an “audience” raptly involved in the musical action to a mere aggregation that had been acting the role of audience as long as there was something for an audience to attend to.

Another credulous audience is made up of the guests at the foreign embassy in the film’s finale, where, in a moment of great pathos and charm, Jo will sit at a piano and once again sing “Que Sera, Sera” (Figure 4.1). The audience this time is garbed in tuxedos and evening gowns (among them, actors Pauline Farr, Clifford Buckton and Enid Lindsey) and is as uptight as an audience can be—and also as uptight as the performers playing the role can make an audience appear to be—so they take her performance especially seriously as such and never suspect that she is belting out the tune in order to catch the attention of Hank, who is secreted somewhere in the building. This is a play-within-a-play *and* a fabrication. Jo is onstage, openly, but for secret reasons.

Goffman leads us to see that what all of these cases of play-within-a-play have in common structurally is a drawing of our attention toward the stage-within-the-stage, the movie-within-the-movie, and at the same time *away from* those who sit in front of it, once performers themselves but now just watchers being enthralled. Viewers of screen setups like this, Goffman suggests (writing about staged drama), find

that in being eased out of belief in the play within the play, they are automatically eased into belief concerning the play that contains the play within the play. The more clearly they see that the play within the play merely involves performed characters, the more fully they accept that it is performers who are putting on these characters. But, of course, it is not performers who are putting on these characters; it is characters who are putting on these characters. In brief, a glimpse behind the scenes can be a device for inducing the belief that you are seeing the backstage of *something*.¹⁰

In the Marrakesh marketplace, the gathering of listeners takes on reality just as the Arab storyteller’s act becomes real as an act; in the Albert Hall, the reality of the audience suspended or entranced during a concert

becomes heightened according to our belief in the artifice of the musical show; in the McKenna hotel suite, to the extent that we stand back from Jo's singing with Hank as hokey staginess, we lean into belief in the actuality of the room and the man who has paid to rent it, the man whose turn of fortune is about to wring us through the plot of the film.

In movie musicals about show business, or other films in which the theatrical scene is directly presented, the backstage area, where performers prepare to alter themselves for the audience and also play out their non-performing identities, is typically an actual scene, where often part or all of the stage can be observed in the margins. But often the accessible backstage is less a place than a code: Jo briefly winking at Ben through the connecting doorway between the two hotel rooms, for example, as she sings with her son. Regardless of the proportions of the backstage in which performed performance is mobilized, however, when it occurs a character onscreen watching the ostensible act seems suddenly less like a character and more like a person; less like a construction and more like a constructor; therefore—and this is the central point to which I would wish to draw attention—more like us, “real” people through and through, who knowingly and intentionally, yet also innocently and thus uninterestingly, contribute to the routines we pay to be entertained by. And a second transformation occurs, which is equally potent. Because the show being watched is so transparently false, it takes on the status of “dramatic activity,” *indeed takes this status entirely to itself* because it becomes the locus of the unreal: so that the underlying performer of the performed performance is taken to be real in herself, not dramatic, not fake like the “show” is. But the performer beneath the show isn't a real person; the performer beneath the show is a performer cloaking a real person, in the case of the embassy soirée not Doris Day but Jo Conway McKenna. The play within the play is a technique for gulling the viewer's attachment and belief as regards the status in reality of the principal characters who give and watch it.

In the case of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, Ben McKenna becomes realer for us exactly as he pauses to watch his wife belt a song, and she becomes realer for belting it, for putting on the “Jo Conway” who is belting. At the embassy, I should note, the performance of “Que Sera, Sera” is being given at the Ambassador's request, but all this only because Ben has arranged that he and Jo should come to the party so that the Prime Minister can thank her for saving his life earlier in the evening. It is thus Mrs. McKenna, the tourist, who is the guest of the moment, and when at the piano Jo Conway, the famous artist, graciously agrees to sing, it is a Jo Conway being performed not even by Doris Day but by Josephine McKenna, who walked into the room and placed herself at the piano bench. The more we see Jo Conway as the fake masquerade being worn for an audience's entertainment, the more seriously we take the Jo McKenna who wears that mask. At the same time, the more seriously we invest ourselves in Ben McKenna who is watching. This augmentation of realism is critical in the

case of the McKennas, since the entire film turns on their indomitable—but also middle-class—attitude and spirit, which might be less palpable for us if we were seduced by their similarity to those glittering denizens of Hollywood, James Stewart and Doris Day. Precisely because of the similarity, indeed, we need a little help in realizing Ben and Jo. The performance at the piano is structurally necessary, not just part of the plot.

It was Hitchcock's genius not only to employ celebrated and talented stars on a routine basis but to transform them before our eyes to sympathetic figures who could seem to be as real as we feel ourselves to be when we see them. (Consider, for example, the palpable purity of Paul Newman's presence onscreen in *Torn Curtain* [Alfred Hitchcock, 1966] by contrast with his more ostentatious and unbelievable, but also flamboyant, performances in such films as *Sweet Bird of Youth* [Richard Brooks, 1962] and *Hud* [Martin Ritt, 1963]. Or look at James Stewart obtruding into his incarnation of Glenn Miller for Anthony Mann [1954] in contrast with his performance of Ben McKenna here, structured by the filmmaker for augmented reality.)

As regards the narrative of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, the reality induced by performed performance aids us in accepting the materiality of the embassy and its soirée—the dignitaries in their fancy garb and their wives in elaborate gowns, the liveried servants and the rococo architecture—all as plausible and present actualities rather than artful craftings by the director, location scouts and designers (which they actually are). If the embassy is real, Hank's imprisonment there is real and also dangerous. And thus the Ben McKenna who quietly mounts the marble stairs while his wife sings is real in his search, just as she is real in her singing. Finally, the outcome of the search is realer still. One may apply this logic to any circumstance in which some action is isolated as attendable and is mounted on a tiny invisible stage in front of witnesses who show themselves to be engrossed by it. The more outlandish or constructed, the more openly dramatic the focused performance, the realer seem those who watch it and the space they watch it in; the more like any real watcher watching, too, who must take himself to be indisputably real. But the reverse must also be true. If Ben McKenna becomes a viewer like us when he watches Jo sing, then at the same moment we become like him, that is, we effortlessly project ourselves into him; and as he creeps away from the party, goes up the stairs, searches for the chamber where Hank is kept and bashes down the door—we move with him. The Hitchcockian camera does not merely follow or show the figure, it allies itself with the figure; and so the showing is a kind of self-consciousness. Ben becomes—for us and for himself—an object of fantasy and a cause of vertigo, simply in the sense that we fall for him and with him fall through his story. This is one of the keys to audience engrossment. At the same time, the more effusively Jo Conway sings at the piano, the less we see Doris Day pretending to be Jo Conway singing and the more complete is our belief in Jo McKenna's deep presence. In truth, of

course, neither Jo nor her listeners are there quite in the way that we are, yet this truth demolishes the cinematic vision.

FINALE

Fabrication is another key to realizing dramatic action. In this film, we watch a man named Drayton (Bernard Miles), dressed in minister's garb, sermonizing to his flock during a non-denominational service at a shabby little church called Ambrose Chapel (the exterior of this church played in the film by a real church of a different name, St. Saviour's, Vicary Street, Blenheim Gardens, SW2; and the interior played by Stage 5 at Paramount). But earlier in the film, we met and knew him as a touring Englishman who was doing a report on soil erosion in Morocco. That identity, we can now surmise, was nothing but false. But so, in all likelihood, is this one, especially since (for Hitchcock) the church is the very best place for evil to hide. The congregation does not suspect him as we do (never having seen him in any other role), and therefore we feel not attachment to, but distance from, them. They are being taken in, and we are swift enough to realize it and feel superior. These people are watching a performed performance without recognizing it, without tasting its falseness. By means of their gullibility—telegraphed by Hitchcock through close-ups as they watch—and our continuing awareness of the shamming that they do not detect, we find ourselves turned toward an accentuated belief in their reality *as dupes*. They are not real in being like us; they are real in being seduced, as we presumably are not. (That, in general, viewers of cinema tend to distance themselves from their own seduction while participating in it is a theme that would bear greater study.) And to be taken in, to be as beneath us as we delight in thinking them to be, they cannot possibly be actors who having smartly read this script deftly play it out, but only innocent churchgoers, just as they seem to be. As Drayton masquerades and we notice him doing so—there was a rehearsal sequence upstairs where we literally stood by his side as he brushed his hair and put on this costume—we scan these innocents who know no better than to believe what they see and dole out to them a reality that the fiction calls for.

Again at the symphony concert, fabrication gulls our loyalties. The assassin shows up, clearly (for us) a killer dressed as a sophisticated concert-goer and putting on a show. We follow his moves, but the other paying customers do not. At each instant that we focus on him (and Hitchcock gives us shot after dramatic shot for doing this), this grossly naïve audience spectacularly fails to pay him any heed as the masquerader he so patently is. In this way, we feel superior to them, but we also accept them as real concert-goers, for who else could be so naïve as not to know what is coming or, entranced by their good fortune in being here for this spectacular event, not to care? If they are real, the concert they are listening to is real, and everything that

happens while it plays out is real, too. I should add that in some respects the concert *is* real: a real cantata is being performed by real musicians, at least on the sound track (which was pre-recorded at the Festival Hall); and the cantata is being played out in full except, of course, for that finale chord, which is so emphatically curtailed.

As the audience for a play-within-a-play is real in its cynicism, the audience for a fabrication, not recognizing itself as an audience at all, is real in its sincerity. Yet in the end, it is neither the cynicism nor the sincerity that mark the structure of Hitchcock's usages of these forms, but the flavor of reality that both cynical and sincere audiences equally produce: reality for the moment, to be sure, but reality that can seize the wellsprings of our belief.

Thus, the power and meaning of screen performance are essentially structural, residing not in the motive of the actor who engenders characterization as much as in the way characterization plays into the architecture of the scene. The beings we see onscreen may consciously be watching a performance, a play-within-a-play, or they may unconsciously be dupes of a fabrication; but in either case, we take them seriously as watchers, watchers like ourselves. They are not watchers, however. They are performers performing watching. And their watching, in either case, rather than unfolding spontaneously, as it seems to do, is part of a scheme the outcomes of which these apparent watchers know in advance. Performed performance guides us to believe otherwise, and in this we are finally duped and subjected to the pleasure of cinema.

NOTES

1. Siegfried Kracauer, "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (1927; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 302–03.
2. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Masturbation," in *Modern Times: Selected Non-Fiction*, ed. Geoffrey Wall, trans. Robin Buss (1947; repr., London: Penguin, 2000), 115.
3. Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 380.
4. Bill Krohn, roundtable on *The Birds* with Robert Boyle, Richard Edlund, Harold Michelson and Albert Whitlock, February 2, 1982, English ms. courtesy Bill Krohn, published as "Ils ont fabriqué 'Les Oiseaux,'" *Cahiers du cinéma* 337 (June 1982): 36–48.
5. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 139, 130.
6. For some of the bold implications of this construction, see William Rothman, "Vertigo: The Unknown Woman in Hitchcock," in *Images in Our Souls: Cavell, Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, vol. 2, *Psychoanalysis and the Humanities*, ed. Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 11–43; and Murray Pomerance, *An Eye for Hitchcock* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 214 ff.

7. Thomas J. Scheff, "Audience Awareness and Catharsis in Drama," *The Psychoanalytic Review* 63, no. 4 (Winter 1976-77): 529-54.
8. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 474-75.
9. Herbert Coleman, direct interview with author, July 19, 1995.
10. Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 475.

5 “Brando Sings!”

The Invincible Star Persona

George Toles

To what extent, in our relations with stars, can we dare to rely on our agreeable, often indispensable old impressions? Do we trust the reminders of what we know about a star above the competing awareness that some substantial inner break with the past has occurred? The lingering signs of the person we once were sure of seem to float away from us through an obscuring haze. The force of the familiar, in other words, is mantled with a strangeness that seems either to have supplanted what was formerly “the real person” or to have vexingly blocked access to it, for the time being. In observing Humphrey Bogart’s Dixon Steele assaulting Gloria Grahame in the final scene of *In a Lonely Place* (Nicholas Ray, 1950), for example, do we attempt to rehabilitate our sense of Bogart’s poise, loyalty and emotional assurance (as established in *Casablanca* [Michael Curtiz, 1942]) after it is convincingly undone by a murderous jealous rage? What becomes of a delightful person whose capacity for giving and receiving delight has been severely tampered with? This is linked to the larger question: can a star with a firmly established persona shed this persona completely when he or she ventures into a territory alien to it?

I wish to reflect on the persistence of the star persona—what audiences assume they know about an actor from his or her previous defining roles—and how these assumptions enter into viewers’ understanding of what the conduct of a character, played by a star, *means* in a broad and (necessarily) indefinite sense. My topic of the persona and my way of writing about it are designed to dramatize slippage at every turn, and to argue that such flux in our experience of actors, roles and the question of knowability is not only inevitable but desirable.

BRANDO SINGS!

A propitious scene for an investigation of a star playing hide-and-seek with his established persona is Marlon Brando’s first love song, “I’ll Know,” in Joseph Mankiewicz’s *Guys and Dolls* (1955). Pauline Kael was among the first to notice how often Brando elected to send up his roles in projects

that didn't engage his interest, creating private sources of comedy and baroque delinquency around the "edges" of a movie's unearned seriousness. He would complicate a film's tone by refusing to honor the straightforward stance of the other actors' relation to it; he broke ranks with the consensus view of what was *real* in a dramatic situation, rigidly enforced by moldy genre conventions. Kael applauded Brando for his stealthily disruptive antics and the anarchic freedom of his moods, which she linked to Norman Mailer's eccentric version of authenticity: the hero re-cast as subversive clown.¹

Brando's performance as Sky Masterson in *Guys and Dolls* comes at a point in his career before he became impatient with acting's restrictions. Nonetheless, the challenge of being committed to a musical's unencumbered vision of life, while remaining in touch with his "rebellious" persona, makes *Guys and Dolls* an experiment whose spirit is akin to Brando's later devious maraudings. By the mid-fifties, Brando was established as the seductive child-man, a wised up outsider whose qualities of authentic danger and unpredictability were irresistibly underwritten by a frank sexuality and delicate tenderness (e.g., in his previous roles as Stanley Kowalski, Johnny Strabler and Terry Malloy). During his duet with Jean Simmons in *Guys and Dolls*, Brando appears at first to reduce the volatility associated with him for the sake of a conventional musical comedy courtship rite. In a half-mocking exchange that builds to the actor's unveiling as a singer ("I'll Know"), Brando is allowed to maintain a double-sided awareness of the Salvation Army officer, with whom he flirts in a raffishly self-admiring way.

Sky is trying to win a bet that Sarah will be so quickly taken with him that she will cast her religious scruples aside and accompany him on a brief pleasure trip to Havana. Brando is a con-artist selling what he sees as the extravagant gift of himself to a gullible customer who can hardly begin to fathom the gift's true value. In this song about a hypothetical romance, he teasingly invites her to consider whether such concentrated attentiveness as he is offering her could, against the odds, be sincere. He also uses the mockery to introduce the possibility that he may well have more serious intentions that go deeper than the surface jokiness allows. To complicate matters still further, but in a way that comports with movie romance conventions, Sky may also have feelings that he is himself (as yet) unable to read.

Brando's daring begins with his decision not to downplay the gambler's overbearing cockiness, but not to make himself a figure of fun either. He allows Simmons' Sarah Brown to see through his act while carrying on with it, as though her seeing through it is to be expected, and has little capacity to override the pull of attraction, if that happens to be in play. Brando credits her with the intelligence to be suspicious of his motives and urges her to spar with him heatedly about Biblical knowledge but, even more importantly, about the possibility that she is as caught up in play-acting as he is. He hectors her in the manner of one enamored with the

smooth cadence of his own talk. Yet he also seems past the point of taking any of his own statements seriously, no matter how much of a straight face he adopts. He is eager for her to recognize the blather component in his self-presentation and would have her imagine that he will be relieved to get past it, or beneath it—if she can give him a compelling reason to do so.

This breaking away from frivolous jibing might require her to cast aside her own form of blather and join him, less protectively, “out in the open.” Because it is not musical comedy romance (polished, soft, well-behaved) that he brings into the room with him, but the headier fragrance and menace of unequivocal eroticism. The flesh-impact of an aggressively confident presence continually slices through the pleasantries and evasions of proper courtship talk. Something soulful is also flickeringly in evidence, behind the mask of tough bravado, which Brando’s Sky is too quick to acknowledge *is* a mask. So perhaps it isn’t; the soulfulness, if real, seems connected to Brando’s impatience with acting itself. He is always striving to locate a position beyond the reach of “mere” impersonation and distrusts his gifts for producing every kind of performable response to another’s felt *wishes*. If one can flawlessly mimic whatever emotional state or combination of states circumstances call for, how can one expose oneself *ever* without the likelihood of deception? What Brando would have Jean Simmons do for him, if she proves resourceful enough to find the key, is to free him from the burden and curse of feigning. Suppose she gave him not the faintest signal that she expects or is hoping for a certain type of acknowledgment or showy demonstration or proof of his interest in her. Without such external prompts, he could honestly consider what he could become for himself and explore his own scatteredness, a volatile confusion from which the actor in him is always half-turned away. Responding to others’ perceived needs as fellow actors so often requires him to settle for a premature clarity (as when one answers a question before one has adequately considered it). At such times, Brando seems to feel, one is selling a response rather than legitimately having one.

Sky Masterson is a surprisingly good fit for Brando, given that his driving self-assurance is both a comfortable, even necessary persona as well as a trait that he secretly chafes against. Everyone in Sky’s cheerfully disreputable circle seems to depend on his air of certainty—the sense that he knows what the score is at all times and fearlessly bets on what he knows “in advance.” His calling card is his invincible bright strut, and without that he loses both the “sky” and his unstrained mastery of his gambling life. Undoubtedly, the deepest conflict in this agreeably light film is the unscripted war between Brando and his co-star male rival for the privileges accruing to Masterson’s position. Frank Sinatra was a supporting player in this Goldwyn production (cast as Nathan Detroit rather than the coveted role of Sky), and he made it clear from his first day on set that both he and non-singer Brando had been absurdly and damagingly miscast.² The intimidating, unconcealed disdain of Sinatra shadows Brando’s work in this role, especially as the stage

is set for his first “trial by song.” What Brando is gambling on, then, is his preparedness to woo Sarah (and perhaps Sinatra) in song, in his own voice. “I’ll Know” must manage to reach and overpower Sarah convincingly with resources that are thoroughly untested and that seem alien not only to Brando’s disposition but his intricate quest for authenticity. Could a highly stylized Broadway show tune be the means by which he could escape the coils of romantic blather and the pressure to act falsely?

The song is structured as a statement by Sarah, to which he vocally responds in kind. The set-up would seem to demand Brando to mirror a prospective lover’s conventional demands that he “be” a certain way in order to warrant her trust. As he draws near the moment where he must join the song, he almost appears to blame Sarah for the slick and quasi-genteel dimensions of his con-artist’s act. He implies that though she may be sincere in expressing her dislike for these qualities, and the way that he wields them like weapons, part of her *insists* that he fulfill her expectations in precisely this manner. “You are relieved to have me be the egotistical showman and the insolent sinner, because that allows you to operate in this awkward preliminary round of courtship from a place where you feel unexposed. You coyly refuse anything that might alarm you—namely, a word or action that is rash, raw, or unguarded. As long as I conform to the facile role of wastrel—the unrepentant sinner who chooses himself over God—you can pretend that the two of us are not moving with startling swiftness toward a physical brink. You can hold yourself apart from me and imagine that you are looking down in moral superiority, enshrined in your pity and justified indignation. But where are we actually positioned? I at least know full well that I am not *only* where I pretend to be, locked in this beside-the-point debate about beliefs.”

Brando has the opportunity to observe Simmons as she makes her way, self-deceptively, through the entire first performance of “I’ll Know.” When he begins to sing, he will offer the song back to her as a considered reply. His vocal re-statement of her prior assertions is presented to her, and to the audience, on a different emotional ground. Simmons performs almost every phrase of her version as a willed retreat from him. She literally turns her back on Brando as she gives full vent to her longing for a love that is instantly clear (known “at a glance”) and free of trepidation and misgivings. She no doubt conjures up for herself a figure that corrects all the excesses of Brando’s loutish, sportive boyishness, and dilutes the looming physicality of his presence. But there can be no doubt that this trickster who plays so irresponsibly with words and who disguises whatever feelings he may possess has prompted her to sing. In fact, he has made singing imperative at this juncture, if only to ward off his tantalizing menace. In the willed certainty of her dreamy refuge, she can put all of her stirred up feelings in the safe keeping of a man who is softly strong, and not gaudy—a placid lover (not unlike a musical’s juvenile lead) for whom Sky’s bedeviling deceptions would be unthinkable.



Figure 5.1 Marlon Brando shifts the terms of “I’ll Know” from wistful monologue to a smilingly goading direct address in *Guys and Dolls* (MGM/UA Home Video, 1955). Digital frame enlargement.

When Brando commences his musical reply, he is still the brash, transparent salesman, but he adds to his previous pitch one indisputable mark of vulnerability: he declares his willingness to sing to her without the security of jest (Figure 5.1). Brando himself risks the failure of his expertise by putting both his voice and the sincerity of his ardor to the test—in her presence, and ours. What exactly does he offer Simmons emotionally as the wistful terms of this hypothetical love lyric shift, and what does he hold in reserve? By not seeking a private space to commemorate his feeling, as she did in her rendition (cut off from his line of sight), he suggests that his romantic quest does not involve vital, hidden aspects of himself. Simmons’s version of “I’ll Know” implies that metamorphosis and release will accompany the discovery of the right partner. When this ideal lover comes forward, and she knows “right away,” she will emerge fully from the elaborate covering behind which she conducts her secret imaginative life. Brando counters that he is already the figure of his own imagining, that what he brings to a romantic relationship will not be a decisive break from his immodest, expansive and intrepid “surface manner,” but a dazzling enhancement of his already ebullient sense of self-worth. Romantic attachment, then, does not automatically entail self-interrogation or the forsaking of self-reliance; perhaps it means instead the confirmation of an already choice set of qualities, which will extend their reach by being esteemed by and shared with another.

Brando’s singing voice lacks musical comedy *finish* or a grand size. It is only a short step beyond his soft, conversational voice, and it is beautiful

to watch him present this small, modest thing as though it were itself the key to his value. As he sings, all his other behavioral means of manifesting freedom from doubt and constraint—his astonishingly graceful movement, his precise, commanding, wide-open gestures, his conspiratorial grin, his flirting with his own hat as his hand secures it—align themselves with his voice. His full physical presence protects and projects it, so body and voice unite as one and seem to envelop the whole room. Simmons is the consistent object of his attention, but for all his vocalized praise of love, he is simultaneously playing hard to get. “Though I’m looking right at you, I’m not entirely sure that you’re the one I have in mind. I’m willing to confide my deepest romantic hopes to you, but that may be because they’re still a matter open for speculation. Singing to you gets me wondering what it *will* be like when I know. But I can’t quite see that day or that person yet.” Because of this delicate, playful indecision, Brando is able to be both inside the love song (imagining being lovestruck) and watching himself perform it (as one who is still waiting to arrive at his longed-for happiness). He is auditioning as a singer on film, and thus it seems appropriate that he is on the threshold of offering a fully committed love song. Brando is presenting a dress rehearsal of the complete statement that Sky will one day perform “all out,” and thus seduces Sarah by making her yearn for him to bring her into focus with a finality that is no longer a tease—that is, to *know*.

Brando reserves his most superb piece of effrontery for the immediate aftermath of the song. Musical comedy convention allows for him to kiss the reticent Salvation Army officer at the close of his singing courtship, and to do it in the impetuous spirit of one who has been sweet-talking her from the start but who is also, more than he is aware, smitten. Brando ups the ante of permissible liberties—and defiantly shatters every musical comedy precedent—by making his kiss a joltingly real physical attack. His forceful grabbing and Simmons’ physical resistance dispense with the appearance of genteel artifice altogether. As the stability of tone ruptures, Brando signals to us that he is still “Marlon Brando,” that the real hardness within him has not yielded to the song’s pliancy; the sexual danger of his persona (so evident in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Wild One* and *On the Waterfront*) has been in play all along. What has been tender and scampish in his singing has been backed, steadily, by the visible intimidation that intrigues Simmons and legitimately alarms her. Thus, Brando undoes the restraining wall between romance and naked sexual hunger that securely governs most Broadway musical wooing.

DURBIN HATES TO SING

Brando’s aim in the *Guys and Dolls* scene is to establish unexpected continuity between his acting persona and his approach to singing. But directors and actors can collaborate in creating subtle barriers to knowing even in a setting rife with the star’s habitual cues and fixtures. In Robert Siodmak’s

1944 film noir, *Christmas Holiday*, Deanna Durbin transforms the singing style and persona that, in her view, have too rigidly and insipidly defined her, into a troubling hiding place.

James Harvey manages to demonstrate in his descriptive commentary of Durbin's introduction in *Christmas Holiday* everything that a carefully prepared entrance can do for an actor who is (presumably) well-known to us.

[T]he camera . . . pan[s] slightly to watch [a] woman walk . . . toward the bandstand. She steps onto it, turns, and starts, in the far background of the shot, to sing. It is, of course, Deanna Durbin. . . . But the girl-woman we see here . . . looks depressed, a bit irritable, and tough. And the shock compounds with her commencing to sing—facing the dance floor, settling herself on one hip in that décolleté body-molding gown, arms hanging at her side, and still situated in the background of the shot. . . . Her singing is impassive, laconic, almost sullen—like a vocalized pout. . . . You're not only aware of the sequence's skill and stylishness, but you're even more aware of how risk-taking it is: taking the star's first song number, which is also the occasion of her much-overdue first entrance—not to mention presenting her like *this*—then throwing it all away.³

Every sight that we see leading up to Durbin's entrance is a calculated preparation for the star's appearance, and yet at the same time the visual and aural logic of the presentation derails the pleasure of recognition. Whatever we suppose we know in advance is teasingly confirmed, then twisted out of shape. No sooner do we find her than we feel we are promptly being denied real contact—the intimacy we feel we're entitled to with always docile Deanna.

The camera strategically keeps its distance from Durbin, even after following her intently in her cross to the bandstand. While it is utterly expected that Durbin should turn to reveal herself for the first time as she is about to perform a number, it is disruptive to encounter her doing this from the wrong viewing distance. She is too far away from us to fulfill our demand for emotional access. This character has no power to convey a sense of her importance to an audience, even after she begins her song (Frank Loesser's "Spring Will Be a Little Late This Year"). Neither we nor her diegetic audience can be commanded, much less carried away, by her voice. Moreover, we cannot penetrate the doldrums and distaste for her task that envelop her like a fog. She does not locate the performing energy she requires or the provisional definition that comes from claiming vocal talent as a secure possession; indeed, her style of singing seems lazily borrowed from someone else. The singer is not disposed to give anything of herself to her audience; her very contempt feels withheld, as though exhibiting that much of a true attitude would still involve sharing. In a sense, she hasn't really turned around yet, despite the fact that she is now more or less facing the

customers. Durbin is mentally and emotionally absent, and she threatens to disappear from her own awareness as well as that of the restive crowd.

Throughout her lament about late arriving spring, Durbin herself is prevented from arriving, dramatically. The wisps of intrigue and furtive activity on the dance floor draw focus away from the lethargic performer, who can't hold her own against these competing bits of atmosphere. Durbin is, in fact, so removed from the unfolding drama that she is not paying heed to its flow, nor awaiting some desired point of connection with her own interests to announce itself. To the extent that she is seeking or waiting for anything, it is merely the end of her song. She will endure what she has to endure to get there, through the pointless “showing” of what she hasn't got to give. Singing, she visibly suggests, cannot address or relieve what ails her, not on this occasion, perhaps never. With corrosive irony, Siodmak highlights the single audience member fully alert to Durbin's onstage activity. It is an elderly gentleman who bargains with a waiter about securing her sexual services for a modest price. Money and a card change hands. These items easily succeed in trumping the song's dim, enervated presence in the room. The money signals that the old man's passion surpasses and thus claims more dramatic interest than any other desire in the singer's orbit, including her own. She is eclipsed by an off-in-the-corner, grubby transaction launched by an inconsequential stranger.

Thus, as we have seen, the elements a director wishes to alter in a viewer's typical response to a star are most likely to be unsettled after a preliminary *reminder* showing. The viewer confronts the reliable context and personality supports for the awaited performer and then experiences a bending in their transmission. As a result, one becomes conscious of what one must newly contend with in the act of *feeling* the familiar guise of the star disintegrate. The persona's power to supply definition is manifestly revoked while we are involved in remembering its previous effect on us. As that old power is sacrificed in our sight, we are naturally more attentive to the claims of the usurping power that tries to fill its place.

In *Christmas Holiday*, we are obliged to contemplate a star in a condition of unknowability for a striking interval before we can *have* her face at close range. Once closeness of a readable, sympathetic sort is restored; we can begin to “repair the damage” of initial strained relations. But a suspicion of the star has been lodged in us and sets us at odds with our anticipated, immediate comfort in her proximity. With Durbin we are accustomed to believe that there is no mystery about her at all; she is simplicity itself. So, we need to find our way back to the Durbin we count on being instantly available to us onscreen, as a mirror for our own sunny valor and capacity for straightforwardness. She has inexplicably betrayed us by not allowing us the satisfaction of greeting her on the terms of effortless kinship. She is oddly determined to resist our efforts to “get to her” by the surest means of all: her singing. As we might in the case of an obscurely altered close friend, we sense that time and separation have accomplished something

hurtful. “What has happened to her in the time since I last beheld her? I can’t account for the shift and am disturbed by what I feel now. I must wait patiently for signs of the person I recall to re-emerge.”

STEWART’S DIZZY SPELL

The “unknowability” of stars can also be tempered by the sense that they may not always be fully in control of themselves, and that a film may offer the tantalizing prospect of exposure. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that our most rewarding involvement with stars has an immoderate, intemperate aspect to it. We project ourselves into the regulated excesses of star conduct, when the star’s character strays from the zone of acceptable thoughts, feelings and dimensions that keep us, as well as the star, basically honorable and safe. Our relationship with the star is invigorated by our sudden intuition that something new about her/him is being disclosed.

If our identification with a star can often seem like an intemperate act of temporary bewitchment or possession, it is natural for us to be attuned to kindred manifestations of possession in the star her/himself. Stars take on parts but also, on occasion, appear to be “taken over” by some aspect of role-playing, as though certain kinds of acting conviction are involuntary, the result of a star’s susceptibility to the lure of what is most damaged and uncured in her/himself. A star does not readily play into these areas of the psyche, but it would be strange if what is most disordered within did not seek expression, regardless of the star’s well-honed instinct for self-protection.

James Stewart’s Scottie Ferguson in *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) offers an emblematic illustration of the star as a man possessed (Figure 5.2). Stewart depicts a literal victim of possession (spawned by romantic fixation), and in the throes of this possession, his eyes register the same strain and isolating chill that we discern in Cary Grant in *Notorious* (1946). As a point of entry to *Vertigo*’s dream narrative, the director anchors us to Stewart’s promise of sure-footed equanimity, an ordinary, even bland sort of groundedness. Although Stewart’s Scottie is attempting to cure himself of a traumatic rooftop mishap that led to a policeman’s death, Stewart gives ample signs of being still in contact with a shrewd, crankily amusing, unmystified world view. When we hear Gavin Elster talk to Stewart’s Scottie about a wife who wanders helplessly—lost, out of phase, out of control—we take instruction from Stewart’s bemused skepticism on how to regard such matters. Like Stewart, we are sensible outsiders, far enough removed from dangerous sorts of possession to look at them dispassionately, to examine their pattern and offer a cautious appraisal. Our identification with Stewart’s persona, this time around, is meant to assure us that we don’t, in fact, wish to be possessed ourselves, that we are on the side of rational cures for exotic (and erotic) ailments. Our confidence that Stewart, in spite of his vertigo condition, is not the possessed entity—Madeleine is—makes us think that our task



Figure 5.2 It is natural for us to be attuned to kindred manifestations of possession in the star himself. James Stewart in *Vertigo* (Universal Studios Home Video, 1958). Digital frame enlargement.

will be to spy on delirium rather than to be swallowed up in it. But, as I've already noted, identification with a star always lives on the border of unwitting trance: we secretly long to fall, vertiginously, under a star's spell and be taken over. The more control we initially feel in the process, the greater the likelihood of a dream-like surrender.

On our first viewing of *Vertigo*, we might reasonably wonder early on whether James Stewart has been miscast as a romantic obsessive and whether he is too old to inspire credibly a much younger woman's fierce interest. But as we continue to attend to him in the role, we are likely to register neglected affinities between romantic obsession and other forms of Stewart-affiliated idealism. We might also become aware of a resemblance between the punitive fury of a "betrayed" lover and the pain that causes the disappointed idealist to abandon his commitments (as witnessed in his defining roles in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* [Frank Capra, 1939] and *It's a Wonderful Life* [Frank Capra, 1946]). As for Stewart's age, were he to be younger, his position as an aspiring lover would be too strong: he would be have too much "freedom and power" (of the sort Gavin Elster talks about) to work harm from a commanding position. Stewart's well-established middle age builds a crucial weakness and insecurity into the romantic equation, even if the film never directly alludes to this plain fact of his situation. To the many other *brinks* that James Stewart occupies in the course of *Vertigo*, let us add the brink of being no longer desirable, a sense of losing his last grand moment.

In his initial scene with Barbara Bel Geddes, Stewart is not only expressing relief at his pending escape from a “corset” and unspecified physical infirmity (his main prop in this lengthy exchange is an aggravating cane), but he also seems resigned to a scaling back of ambition and emotional investments that one associates with premature decline. He is a man settling into his crotchets and a fear-based touchiness, which are neatly complemented by the “surprising store of credulity” that Stewart also crucially brings to the role.⁴ From the beginning of his career, Stewart understood how to make a potentially derision-worthy “greenhorn” status into an unlikely touchstone for the most admirable human qualities. To quote Chesterton’s description of Charles Dickens’ Mr. Pickwick: “He will always be ‘taken in.’ To be taken in everywhere is to see the inside of everything. It is the hospitality of circumstance. . . . [L]ike a guest, the greenhorn is taken in by Life. And the skeptic is cast out by it.”⁵ In *Vertigo*, Stewart starts out as a skeptic (as we see in his first lengthy exchanges with both Barbara Bel Geddes’ Midge and Tom Helmore’s Gavin Elster) and as a person thoroughly proficient at fending off claims on his affection, or even on his emotional memory. He gradually works his way (through a self-hypnotizing period of stalking Kim Novak’s Madeleine) to a re-connection with what we take to be the actor’s *natural* disposition—a large susceptibility to romantic wonder—complicated here by deception and desperation.

Importantly, for the first half of the film, our awareness of these deviant strains in his conduct is held in check by the enticing familiarity of Stewart once again entering into a state of enchantment—especially pronounced in his initial vision of Madeleine at Ernie’s, and his contemplation of her subsequent reveries. The physical distance that separates him from Madeleine as he pursues and spies on her seems somehow analogous to the distance separating Stewart from his younger, extravagantly responsive self: amenable to every worthy invitation to commit himself irrevocably. We want him to close the gap, and embracing Madeleine’s dilemma seems the surest means to do it. But if the revived Stewart is “taken in” by the hospitable dream of Madeleine’s possession, life assuredly “casts him out” before long. His extreme susceptibility leaves him open for a paralyzing defeat, and his apparent loss of the one he loves unleashes a maelstrom of madness. When he returns to passion a second time, his need to believe turns asphyxiating, and when he discovers *how* he has been deceived, the little bit of truth he gets hold of further unhinges him and makes him a demonic scourge.

Stewart’s disintegration in *Vertigo* follows the course outlined in my discussion of Deanna Durbin. The actor is initially at variance with the figure we know him to be, then takes hold of the abandoned familiar persona afresh, which we observe through the veil of disquieting complications. Without adequate warning, we soon find ourselves helpless and adrift with him. He has ironically become the victim of what we had previously deemed his most appealing attributes. The actor’s projected confusion about how his once more than sufficient equilibrium and clear-sighted perspective have

deserted him and sowed the seeds of a ruinous tyranny become the viewer’s confusion as well. James Harvey is right to call Stewart’s performance as Scottie Ferguson “transfixing.”⁶ It attains this quality *not* by leaving the Stewart persona behind, but by engendering fathomless darkness at the very heart of what we recognize as Stewart’s safe, devoted, commendably cautious decency.

MITCHUM CONTROLS THE SUNSET

Often when stars discuss their approach to film acting, or theories about acting in general, what they are actually talking about is how a persona is coordinated with the demands of a particular role. The actor may well forget how much canniness and shrewd adjustment are required to reckon with the force of an established persona. Even for a “no bullshit” actor like Robert Mitchum, his persona must find a way to mesh with the contours of a given role as well as with the problem of “being” in a film world. Dave Hickey offers a remarkable distillation of Mitchum’s theory of acting by imaginatively paraphrasing the actor’s own reflections on his technique, which Mitchum articulated during his appearance on a local talk show. Here, Hickey as “Mitchum” makes the case that it is his persona that typically enforces the impression of authenticity and slow motion implacability onscreen.

When you do move, even to pick up a teacup, you have to move *at a speed*. Everything you do has to have pace, and if you’re the lead in a picture, you want to have the pace, to *set* the pace, so all the other tempos accommodate themselves to yours. In a furious action scene, for instance, if you move a little more slowly and a little more deliberately, you control the tempo. Everyone else looks out of control. Or, let’s say your character is standing on a bluff looking at a sunset. The sunset is big and still, so if you move—just glance around to resettle yourself on your feet—the sunset wins. You look weak. If you *don’t* move, you control the sunset. If that’s what you want to do.⁷

As one reads, one can see exactly how Mitchum would “set the pace” with his lazily inexorable gait, and how he controls the sunset, without breaking a sweat. But the physical reality conjured in Hickey’s speech requires an actor with precisely the size and grace and riveting impassivity of Mitchum to make this kind of deceptively simple sense. Whatever is placed next to Mitchum in one’s mind’s eye gladly knuckles under to his unassuming power. Other actors would fare less well with this tactic of relentless intimidation, and it would prove coarse and reductive if they “set the tempo” with a low-rent swagger or made a concern with power relations the universal standard of measure. Mitchum seems to be as unmindful



Figure 5.3 Mitchum's unhurriedness comes from a reluctance to push himself into the artifice of dramatic action. Robert Mitchum in *Cape Fear* (Universal Studios Home Video, 1962). Digital frame enlargement.

of his raw strength and imposing bulk on camera (generally) as Rita Hayworth is of her sexual almightiness in her “Put the Blame on Mame” number in *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946).

Like Hayworth's *Gilda*, the key to his effectiveness is his freedom to concentrate on something other than what he naturally, and irresistibly, projects. Mitchum sets the pace by appearing to give no thought to pace. His unhurriedness seems to come from a reluctance to push himself *into* the artifice of dramatic action. He doesn't appear to have any notion that he is setting an example by his way of leading or paying close attention to others' movement in relation to his own (Figure 5.3). He seems colossally indifferent to all the “let's pretend” requirements of doing a scene, but somehow his indifference simmers rather than remaining static. When he responds to others alertly and sensitively in his exchanges with them, each show of involvement feels like an unlikely, last-moment victory over the detachment that nearly (but never wholly) defines him. We cannot decide whether we prefer the attractive inner seclusion of his phlegmatic temperament or the sight of him being roused from it to a sharper, more animated life. What we can never fully grasp with Mitchum, but try to work out in the course of identifying with him, is where the energy that so consistently outwits his inertia comes from.

Too often critics and casual moviegoers alike assume that a too easy knowability onscreen is a mark of an actor's limitation, his entrapment in type. My contention is that no film actor can escape typing altogether,

and that even if it were possible, it would not constitute a gain for his or her art. The assumption that a full transformation from role to role is the supreme aspiration of a gifted performer is a holdover from theatre-based standards of measure, and I would question its validity even in the domain of live performance. The most fertile engagements that we have with anyone, offscreen as well as on, arise from a consistent back and forth movement between what we feel we know (which affords comfort and security) and what is disruptively mysterious. Stars have a heightened sense of how to keep known and unknown very near to each other, and how to make both engender magnetism. This double allurements is perhaps the central reason for their wondrously renewable vitality.

NOTES

1. Pauline Kael, *Kiss, Kiss, Bang, Bang* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968), 193–95.
2. Kenneth Geist, *Pictures Will Talk: The Life and Films of Joseph L. Mankiewicz* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1978), 256–60.
3. James Harvey, *Movie Love in the Fifties* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 268–69.
4. *Ibid.*, 32.
5. G. K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 98.
6. Harvey, *Movie Love in the Fifties*, 32.
7. Dave Hickey, “Mitchum Gets Out of Jail,” in *O.K. You Mugs: Writers on Movie Actors*, ed. Luc Sante and Melissa Holbrook Pierson (New York: Pantheon Books), 17–18.

Part II

Reception

**Film Acting, Audiences
and Communities**

6 “Look at Me!”

A Phenomenology of Heath Ledger in *The Dark Knight*

Jörg Sternagel

In order to effectively identify the importance of acting in film, there are two essential requirements: first, the realization that film acting is an integral, meaningful and vital element of film, and, second, the recognition of film acting as actually being *acting*—similar and equal in esteem to stage acting. As Cynthia Baron and Sharon Carnicke put it, “in theater and film, combinations of performance and nonperformance elements operate together to clarify and amplify the connotations already embedded in the individual components of the production.”¹ The voice, movements, rhythms, expressions and gestures of the film actor are as central to film and the experience of the film’s spectators as any other constructive principle. The spectators “make meaning out of the selection and combination of all filmic details, sifting through slight changes of framing as well as changes in actor’s energy.”² As a spectator establishes an engagement with an actor’s artful performance choices, the actor’s activity and creativity is fully acknowledged—including the composition of significant bodily gestures and facial expressions. Thus, the actor in film is an acting human being who changes and selects; the actor plays with energy and both communicates and meets with the spectator in close interrelation.

Obviously, it is not just the star but the whole cast that is part of the experience of film and acts out meanings. As James Naremore stresses, “the experience of watching them involves not only a pleasure in storytelling but also a delight in bodies and expressive movement, an enjoyment of familiar performing skills, and an interest in players as ‘real persons.’”³ Where meanings are acted out, where performances are set, the enjoyment of the spectator watching these performances does not exclusively lie in the pleasure of following the plot, but in watching the various performances enacted by members of the cast itself. The performances of the actors correlate with the spectators’ experiential event of watching these performances in action. They face the image of a dynamic film creation reaching them through the moving bodies of the film actors, through the presence of the actors’ voices, movements, rhythms, expressions and gestures—a presence acted out for the audience’s benefit. Accordingly, there is a process of embodied

engagement with and understanding of every single film actor that closely operates with the knowledge and acknowledgment of perception on both sides of the screen. As a result of this awareness, all performances should be defined as filmic elements that create meaning, but also sensual as well as physiological effects. The analysis of these performances enables a coherent sense of the experience of film and the actors. It stresses bodily activity and perception, adopting a phenomenological mode of description and links image, mind and body, meeting in close interrelation: the spectator watches the film and becomes involved with the *other*, the film actor. The spectator's body is an active part of the experience, in conjunction with both the film and the actor, and with the perception and expression of time, space and subjectivity—the perception of the visual and the visible. The chapter contributes to the acknowledgment of the existence of the actor in film and offers an approach that relies on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Lévinas and Gilles Deleuze. In an exemplary way, it points to the spectator's experience of the actor Heath Ledger in *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008).

THE POSSIBILITY OF THE OTHER: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE FILM ACTOR

In the preface of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty elaborates on the philosophy of phenomenology, bringing perception into a prominent position and showing how the body plays a decisive role in perception, expression, speech, sexuality, space and the relation to others. Thus, he defines phenomenology as the study of essences, in which “all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example.”⁴ He continues by pointing out that these “essences” are also brought back “into existence” by the philosophy of phenomenology, but he does not expect “to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their ‘facticity.’”⁵ It is exactly this “facticity” that serves as a starting point for a study of the essence of experience, as well as a starting point for the experience of film and film acting. It allows a direct description of experience as it is, without “taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide.”⁶ Hence, phenomenology serves as a close descriptive method that, as David Kaplan stresses, “is based on the idea that experience is always relational,” and that “every instance of experience has its reference or direction toward what is experienced.”⁷ The aim of this method is “to identify the essential or invariant features of experienced phenomena.”⁸

One of these experienced phenomena is film, and the phenomenological description of film aims at an understanding of how it affects the spectators. The description of the experienced phenomenon is always drawn from

the spectators' own knowledge of the world as it is there before any possible analysis of them. An observable phenomenon is "not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making—it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions."⁹ Therefore, it is important to identify phenomenology as the study of human experience, the study of the ways things present themselves. Here, subject and object are seen as inseparable, and phenomenology is defined as existential, because it deals with the embodied nature of human consciousness and points to a description of bodily activity and perception.

In a movie theatre, the spectator makes sense with the film actor: *s/he* is alarmed, *s/he* is active, *s/he* responds to and tries to be prepared for the unforeseeable. *S/he* directs her/his attention to the unknown and meets with the actor who shows her/him that special way of being in the world, while the actor's words and gestures communicate with each other through the medium of the spectator's body. "Like the sensory aspects of my body," writes Merleau-Ponty, the words and gestures "are immediately and mutually symbolical, precisely because my body is a ready-made system of equivalents and transpositions from one sense to another"; all senses translate each other "without any need of an interpreter, and are mutually comprehensible without the intervention of any idea."¹⁰ The actor's body enables bodily activation for the spectator. Her/his body is directed toward the spectator and is available for her/him in different tactile values, either in every detail or in any detail. Thus, the following claim applies to both actor and spectator: "My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my 'comprehension.'"¹¹

Within this phenomenological framework, then, the film actor's body is also an instrument of comprehension, and the actor is not thought about or intellectually analyzed; *s/he* is thought through and sensually perceived. The body and the voice of the actor directly appeal to the spectator: *s/he* is attracted to them or just distracted by them; *s/he* follows the action—fascinated, or even bored; *s/he* experiences voices, movements, rhythms, expressions and gestures; *s/he* gets carried away or is even mortified; *s/he* recognizes her/himself in the actor's art and is part of an experience in which his/her own body correlates with the experience of the other body. *S/he* remains seated in her/his chair in this special situation of perception, in this situation of forced distance, where *s/he* cannot meet the actor in person, in the flesh, but nevertheless experiences a direct link to the actor on the screen. This experience with the actor is realized as a virtual experience with the actor's body. We meet with the actor in a situation of surprising perception. The actor's body draws our body into her/his own movements. Both meet within mutual structures of embodied experience, where the alien is part of the experience—that is, where the alien of the other equals or overcomes the spectator's own sense-making and sensual possibilities, where these possibilities are questioned by the other.¹²

So, the spectator is confronted by the presence of the actor and experiences the subjective perception of the other in the image—in the actor’s art that opens itself to the world and comparably appears as intentional as his own behavior. This confrontation is based on the affective qualities of the actor’s expressions, for example, and directs one’s attention to both responsiveness and mimesis as well as to the perception of expression and expression of perception.¹³ It is also understood as an intersubjective confrontation and an alterity, in which correlations between the self and the other exist. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty analyzes the context of these correlations between the self and the other and initially proposes that “we must discover the origin of the object at the very centre of our experience; we must describe the emergence of being and we must understand how, paradoxically, there is *for us* an *in-itself*.”¹⁴ The body discovers the world in constant perception and positions us in the world; the body enables different dimensions of experience and generates sense through creative expression. Later, in “The Film and the New Psychology,” Merleau-Ponty clarifies that the expression of the other is made visible in film. The filmic image is both the visible expression of the perception of film and the object of the perception of the spectator. It is understood as an image of increased perception re-creating the relation to the world, enabling man to discover himself in the image:

This is why the movies can be so gripping in their presentation of man: they do not give us his thoughts, as novels have done for so long, but his conduct or behavior. They directly present to us that special way of being in the world, of dealing with things and other people, which we can see in the sign language of gesture and gaze and which clearly defines each person we know.¹⁵

The actor’s experience is visible because of her/his bodily expression. Its sense is grasped as indicated: not “read” as an intangible sign, but realized as bodily activation of the spectator.

Hence, a phenomenology of the actor stresses the mutual structures of embodiment among film, performer and spectator. Here, one analyzes the power of expression in the “montage of noises and sounds. . . . The expressive force of this montage lies in its ability to make us sense the coexistence, the simultaneity of lives in the same world, *the actors as they are for us and for themselves*, just as, previously, we saw Pudovkin’s visual montage linking the man and his gaze to the sights which surround him.”¹⁶ This rhythmic montage organizes itself within a spatial and temporal order in front of the spectator. “The actors as they are for us and for themselves” are perceived by their bodily articulation, movement and interaction.¹⁷ For the actors and any other creative participant in the production, film offers opportunities to “seek out palpable symbols and to trace their visible and sonorous monogram”; as a result, “the meaning of a film is incorporated

into its rhythm just as the meaning of a gesture may immediately be read in that gesture: the film does not mean anything but itself.”¹⁸ For the spectator, then, “a movie has meaning in the same way that a thing does: neither of them speaks to an isolated understanding; rather, both appeal to our power tacitly to decipher the world or men and to coexist with them.”¹⁹ The spectator co-exists with the actor who turns to her/him, to her/his ability “to decipher the world or men.” We watch the film and become involved with the actor—an involvement in which our body is an active part of the experience with *both* film *and* actor, as well as the perception and expression of time, space and subjectivity, which is to say the perception of the visual and the visible in its entirety.

In her phenomenology of film, Vivian Sobchack refers to these descriptions of Merleau-Ponty—his definitions of essences—and emphasizes the ability of film to make visible the reversible and chiasmatic structure of human vision. “This structure emerges in the lived body,” she writes, “as systematically both a subject and an object, as both visual (seeing) and visible (seen), and as simultaneously productive of both an activity of seeing (a ‘viewing view’) and an image of the seen (a ‘viewed view’).”²⁰ Film is thus redefined as a body that the spectator discovers and locates:

The “film’s body” is not visible in the film except for its intentional agency and diacritical motion. It is not anthropomorphic, but it is also not reducible to the cinematic apparatus . . . it is discovered and located only reflexively as a quasi-subjective and embodied “eye” that has a discrete—if ordinarily prepersonal and anonymous—existence.²¹

For Sobchack, then, the material existence of the film is embodied. It has another existence that is not co-terminous with the existences of the director and the actor, for example. The body of the film is invisible, pre-personal and anonymous for the spectator. It is both the object and subject of perception and expression, enabling both the experience of intentional behavior and bodily perception of the other. It is assumed as an intersubjective experience.

In a later study of Jim Carrey, Sobchack outlines an approach that highlights the experience of the film actor as an experience of a human body—a body that is visible, personal and non-anonymous. Elaborating on corporeal intelligence and comprehension on both sides of the screen, she is “particularly interested in quite literally ‘thinking through’ Jim Carrey’s body—that is, trying to match this extraordinary performer’s complex and critical ‘corporeal intelligence’ with some form of analysis and description adequate not only to it but also to our own ‘corporeal comprehension’ of it as his audience.”²² Sobchack “thinks through” Carrey, whose body creates and acts out a proximity to the spectator. Carrey activates and re-sensitizes his own body. He is seen, experienced and perceived as a performing human being and an acting person. Here, with the focus on

a microanalysis of the body, he is not solely interpreted and identified as a representative character, an established type or even a well-known star. His physical performance, his moving and acting body, is scrutinized without being exclusively directed to the figural motivation in a narrative and to any possible textual links and clues. Sobchack chooses Carrey's interpretation of the Riddler in *Batman Forever* (Joel Schumacher, 1995) as one example and stresses:

after a major performative outburst of rage, the Riddler coyly asks, "Was that over the top? I can never tell." And, indeed, a great part of the pleasure (or dismay) we feel watching Carrey perform is his own immense and unfailing energy—a not-to-be-stopped life force or "vitalism" (both impulsive and compulsive) that makes manifest his performative joy or drivenness in precisely going "over the top."²³

The phenomenologist highlights the acting abilities of Carrey, whose corporeal expressivity also draws the viewer's attention. "Riddle me this, riddle me that," he croons, "Who is afraid of the big black bat?" With his hyperbolic gestures, floundering moves, candy-colored glasses, question-marked cane and almost-shrieking voice, Carrey acts out fury in a virtually unbalanced rhythm and successively establishes an energy that gradually intensifies one's experience with the film in general and our experience of him as a villain in particular. In accounting for these experiences, Sobchack quotes Lesley Stern: "Thus linked together in the cinematic experience, the performer's body and the spectator's body could be said to constitute and literally *incorporate* a 'loopy system of energy transference' that 'circulates in an erratic manner among actor, the film itself and the viewer.'"²⁴

In a study of this dynamic system, to think through the actor means to regard the actor as an agent making sense. It means to allow the actor an existence and to enable him to enter.

THE GRIPPING PERFORMANCE OF HEATH LEDGER IN *THE DARK KNIGHT*

The phenomenological approach as suggested here reflects on the dynamic system between actor and spectator. It seeks to contribute to an understanding of the multiple possibilities with which film affects its spectators, while focusing on one possibility, the performance of Heath Ledger in *The Dark Knight*. The chapter decidedly discusses this actor in this particular film, because it maintains the experience with Ledger as the Joker as the most affective reason for the film's economic success at global box offices, as a sensual phenomenon that can ideally be scrutinized and described in these terms. Our experiences with actors are also virtual experiences with the actors' bodies, in which we are confronted by the presence of the actors

and experience the subjective perceptions of the others in the image. Thus, our confrontation with the very presence of Ledger merits special attention here especially because it appears as highly affective, gripping and breath-taking, even compared with other performances by the same actor, or other performances of the same character by other actors in earlier filmed versions of the Batman comic franchise.

Like Gloria Swanson at the end of *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950), Heath Ledger, in his memorable interpretation of the Joker, is always ready for his close-up in *The Dark Knight*. From his very first entrance, Ledger directly appeals to the spectator as the threat he is supposed to be in all of his appearances throughout the film (Figure 6.1). This version of the Joker does not allow any opportunity to retreat from what is happening onscreen. Ledger enters as a Joker with long, dark, partly green and greasy hair, imperfect and sweaty clown’s make-up, black gloves and the obligatory purple zoot jacket combined with corresponding vest, shirt and trousers. His threat is experienced via the detailed face, the moving body and its often interrupted rhythm, the changing voice, the wild expressions and turbulent gestures. During the first encounter, the spectator meets with him in situations of surprising perception; subsequently, the body of Ledger draws the body of the spectator into his own movements. Both meet within mutual structures of embodied experience, where the alien is part of the experience. The spectator is confronted by this omnipresence on the screen. S/he experiences the subjective perception of the other in the image, in Ledger’s art, that opens itself to the world and equally appears as bodily and intentional as her/his own behavior. The intentional behavior of the



Figure 6.1 Heath Ledger throws himself at the camera with his interpretation of the Joker in this first, transient and extreme close-up in Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* (Warner Home Video, 2008). Digital frame enlargement.



Figure 6.2 Heath Ledger as the Joker threatens both Rachel Dawes (Maggie Gyllenhaal) and his spectators in *The Dark Knight*. Digital frame enlargement.

spectator thereby changes its shape between mimetic fondness or resentment depending on what s/he sees and hears, emerging from personal experience while orienting toward film and actor, toward the ways in which the film shows itself and the variations of how the actor acts out movements, gestures and words.

In a phenomenological reflection on the perception of acting in this sense, Merleau-Ponty discusses the experience of others, including the experience of actors: “What I learn to view as the body of another person is the possibility of movements for me. The actor’s art is therefore only an extension of the art which we all possess. My bodily schema directs itself to the perceived world and to the imaginary as well.”²⁵ The perceived world of the philosopher presents the world on stage, and the perceived body is the body of a stage actor:

A form, which is common to both visual and tactile perceptions, is the link between the other person’s body and my own. The two bodies can therefore communicate through the different perceptions. Everything transpires as if the other person’s intuitions and motor realizations existed in a sort of relation of internal encroachment, as if my body and the body of the other person together formed a system.²⁶

While this is an analysis of the perception of the stage actor, the analysis of our perception of Heath Ledger’s voice, body, rhythm, movement, expression and gesture—the significance of them—comparably represents the basis for the process of watching and understanding as one of resonance

and affect. The spectator actively responds to the actor and energetically acts within a visual, auditory and tactile field. S/he co-exists with the film actor in a “relation of internal encroachment,” whereby his body and the other’s body form a system—a system in which her/his body is absorbed by Ledger’s insistent voice, the licking of his lips, his nervous face, his terrifying gaze, his threatening posture, his quick gestures and his sudden moves (Figure 6.2). Ledger’s art is one that the spectator also “possesses”: it is a “form, which is common to both visual and tactile perceptions,” and it too forms a “link” between his body and my own—a way for our two bodies to “communicate through [our] different perceptions.”

Ledger’s art, however, is also an art that is dependent on other stylistic decisions of filmmaking. It is an art that the spectator perceives differently than the art of an actor on stage, for the film actor’s affective qualities are subject to another modality of perception. The face can be at the center of perception, while the rest of the body may be out of frame. In order to appreciate the impact of such formal and tactile emphasis on an actor’s performance, we might turn to Gilles Deleuze’s meditations on the cinema.

Within a taxonomy of moveable signs that initiate movements between the self and the alien, the visible and the invisible, Deleuze classifies filmic images in a system of movement-images according to their content, and reflects on frame and shot, framing and cutting, composition and montage. He defines variations of the movement-image as perception-image, affection-image and action-image. In the presentation of the affection-image, Deleuze discusses the face (and hands) of Martin LaSalle in *Pickpocket* (Robert Bresson, 1959): “It is the construction of a space, fragment by fragment, a space of tactile value, where the hand ends up by assuming the directing function which returns to it in *Pickpocket*, dethroning the face.”²⁷ Compared with early cinema, the close-up successively gives way to medium shots, and the faces loses its tactile values to other body parts, but also to props and landscapes. The filmic space replaces the virtual body. The values within the image change. They influence the perception of the spectator and are an important part of the confrontation with the film actor: voice, body, rhythm, movement, expression and gesture are set within the frame in various ways and thus enter the center of perception in different values. Here, the moving body of the actor in a rhythm, his expression and posture as acted out, draw the attention of Deleuze, who considers the whole acting body in the time-image: “‘Give me a body then’ is first to mount the camera on an everyday body. The body is never in the present, it contains the before and after, tiredness and waiting. Tiredness and waiting, even despair are the attitudes of the body.”²⁸ The body of the actor is immanent in the image as material of affection, as an element of behavior that initiates thought.

Deleuze’s remarks on American cinema and Method acting allow further insights into the taxonomy of the film actor. One variation of the action-image inspires a cinema of behavior where the inside of a character appears on the outside: “It is in itself, and directly, an element of behavior,

sensory-motor training.”²⁹ But, the body of the film actor is more than material of affection, more than an element of behavior appearing in the action-image as a genetic sign. The body of the actor is an intentional body whose experience can be seen and perceived because of his bodily expressions. The body serves as bodily activation for the spectator. Directed toward the spectator, the body is available for her/him in different tactile values, either entirely or in detail, as in the two variations of the Joker.

The spectator’s co-existence with Heath Ledger proves to be completely different from her/his co-existence with Jack Nicholson and his interpretation of the Joker in *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1989). Ledger’s performance is more corporeal, and hence more affective and appealing to the spectator, than Nicholson’s performance. With Ledger’s Joker, we experience a voice that is constantly interrupted by smacking lips and behold a wild, nervous face, terrifying gazes, threatening postures, quick, turbulent gestures and sudden moves. With Nicholson’s Joker, we experience a well-known sonorous voice and behold a well-known face with extroverted, grim gazes, hectic postures, languidly controlled gestures and portioned moves. Subsequently, we perceive an actor who offers variations of his art he already learned to bring to the screen at an early stage of his career: variations with which we correspondingly are familiar from preceding memorable performances in films like *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (Milos Forman, 1975), *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980) and *The Witches of Eastwick* (George Miller, 1987), whereas affects from extraverted performance choices might prevail.³⁰

Watching Ledger in *The Dark Knight*, however, the spectator experiences more situations of surprising perception: the body of Ledger draws the body of the spectator into his own movements more excessively than does Nicholson’s body. Here, Ledger offers variations of his art he never got the chance to bring to the screen at an earlier stage of his career: variations with which we correspondingly are not familiar from preceding memorable performances in films like *Monster’s Ball* (Marc Forster, 2001), *The Brothers Grimm* (Terry Gilliam, 2005), *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) and *I’m Not There* (Todd Haynes, 2007), whereas affects from introverted performance choices might prevail.³¹ In *The Dark Knight*, then, Ledger and the spectator meet within structures of embodied experience, where the alien is apparently part of the experience—where the alien of the other clearly overcomes the spectator’s own sense-making and sensual possibilities.

The spectator is permanently confronted by this presence and experiences the subjective perception of the alien in the image, in Ledger’s art. The confrontation is fully based on the affective qualities of Ledger’s facial expressions. This is his face value. While the surface of Nicholson’s face, the mask of the Joker, is thick and impermeable, the surface of Ledger’s face, his mask, is thin and permeable (Figures 6.3 and 6.4). While Nicholson’s make-up does not fade and his smile remains in place, Ledger’s make-up does fade, and his smile stays on.



Figure 6.3 The mask of Jack Nicholson’s Joker is thick and impermeable, as if shaped in plaster: his make-up does not fade and his smile stays on in Tim Burton’s *Batman* (Warner Home Video, 1989). Digital frame enlargement.

Ledger’s face, then, successively exceeds the understanding of the spectator, and its presence, to follow Emmanuel Lévinas, “thus signifies an irrecusable order, a command, which calls a halt to the availability of consciousness. Consciousness is put into question by a face.”³² The spectator’s consciousness is put into question by Ledger’s face; s/he is



Figure 6.4 The mask of Ledger’s Joker is thin and permeable, as if painted in watercolors: his make-up fades but his smile remains in *The Dark Knight*. Digital frame enlargement.

overwhelmed by its virtual presence, s/he is disturbed in her/his own intentionality and is constantly addressed. Ledger's face therefore speaks to her/him, it divests and manifests itself before her/him. "This is what the formula 'the face speaks' expresses," says Lévinas, "The manifestation of a face is the first discourse. To speak is before all this way of coming from behind one's appearance, behind one's form—an opening in the openness."³³ The actor's face speaks before coming from behind its appearance, while dripping through its mask, while even coming out of the dark like the face of Marlon Brando in the role of Colonel Walter E. Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979), where his face appears out of the dark and "speaks." From its "manifestation," further discourse is initiated at the end of the film. As opposed to Brando's face, however, Ledger's face determines the discourse of the whole film. It enters the perceived world in an omnipresent manner from its beginning. It is always ready for its close-up and persistently penetrates the understanding of the spectator, who becomes aware of difference and emphatically tries to answer as two gazes meet "one another in this unconventional situation through the suppleness and precision with which the actor has 'rendered' his role."³⁴

Ledger creates his Joker with just such "suppleness" and "precision." He manages to call forth an interrupted rhythm from within himself, independent from editing and framing. This rhythm is not easily predictable for the spectator and shows itself on his face—where every part is moving beneath the transparent mask, where everything is challenging and threatening. Along with his mask, his costume, his playing cards and his weapons, and in interactions with antagonists Maggie Gyllenhaal, Christian Bale, Gary Oldman and Aaron Eckhart, Ledger plays with his body and acts out the perception of an other himself. He "himself makes imaginary objects appear at the extreme point of his gestures," a kind of "magic" that "is not a physical force operating on us like a pharmacodynamic agent, but rather consists in gestures which make objects emerge from the world's surface."³⁵ While these objects do not exist, they are nevertheless "as significant, and perhaps more significant, than any object seen. Magic maintains the gaps in which other people's behavior becomes visible."³⁶ These moments, in which other people's behavior becomes visible, appeal to the spectator in general and appeal to her/him specifically in *The Dark Knight*. Here, one faces moments of surprising perception in Ledger's behavior that differ from one's own behavior and intrude into one's world. In detail, Ledger's face organizes in front of the spectator, its expression constantly challenges the spectator and its gaze forestalls the spectator in every shot. His face does not appear as expected; it enters as something other. It appears in movements, it takes place. His alien face confronts the spectator, resists his own subjectivity and, for this reason, surpasses his own sensual understanding.

NOTES

1. Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 6.
2. *Ibid.*
3. James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 2.
4. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (1945; repr., London, New York: Routledge, 2002), vii.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. David M. Kaplan, “Recent Philosophy of Technology,” in *Readings in the Philosophy of Technology*, ed. David M. Kaplan (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 91.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xi, xii.
10. *Ibid.*, 273.
11. *Ibid.*
12. These remarks on the correlation between the self and the other are inspired by the responsive phenomenology of Bernhard Waldenfels, who comprehends our experience as an experience that does not start from our own intentions, but from something that appeals to us, that disturbs us and forces us to respond. See Bernhard Waldenfels, *The Question of the Other* (New York: The State University of New York Press, 2007), 9–14.
13. See Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York, London: Routledge, 1993), xiii–xix, 19–32. With Taussig, mimesis is understood as bodily activity. See also Walter Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 2, 1931–1934, ed. Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (1933; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 720–22.
14. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 82, 83.
15. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Film and the New Psychology,” in *Sense and Non-Sense*, ed. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (1945; repr., Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 58.
16. *Ibid.*, 55. Merleau-Ponty refers to Pudovkin, but seems to be pointing to Lev Kuleshov and his experiments. For a discussion of these experiments, see Baron and Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance*, 33–37.
17. Merleau-Ponty, “The Film and the New Psychology,” 55.
18. *Ibid.*, 57.
19. *Ibid.*, 58.
20. Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 150.
21. Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 66. See also Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3–50.
22. Vivian Sobchack, “Thinking through Jim Carrey,” in *More than a Method: Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance*, ed. Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Frank P. Tomasulo (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 277.
23. *Ibid.*, 283.

24. Ibid., 277. See also Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros, "Introduction: Descriptive Acts," in *Falling for You: Essays on Cinema and Performance*, ed. Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros (Sydney: Power, 1999), 25.
25. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Experience of Others," 1951–1952, trans. Fred Evans and Hugh J. Silverman, *Review of Existential Psychology & Psychiatry* 18 (1982): 53.
26. Ibid., 52.
27. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Haberjam (1983; repr., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 108. Here, Deleuze discusses the shift from movement-image to time-image, when movement as the primary characteristic of cinema before World War II is superseded by time as the primary characteristic of cinema after World War II.
28. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (1985; repr., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 189.
29. Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 158. For further elaboration on Deleuze and performance, see Elena del Río, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008). For interfaces between the theories of Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty, see Elena del Río, "Alchemies of Thought in Godard's Cinema: Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty," *SubStance* 34, no. 3, issue 108 (2005): 62–78.
30. Robert Kolker elaborates on the main cast's easily remembered art in *The Shining*: "Precisely because the structure of the film is so broad as to be almost parodic, and the acting of Jack Nicholson and Shelley Duvall exaggerated to the point where they threaten to become abstract commentaries on the conventional figures of the horror film psychotic and his intended victim, the whole text keeps moving beyond the expectations it sets up." See Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness. Penn, Stone, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 163.
31. For one description of Ledger's choices, see Dennis Grunes, "Haunted by Memories: *Brokeback Mountain*," *Senses of Cinema* 39, May 5, 2006, http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2006/39/brokeback_mountain/. Grunes realizes *Brokeback Mountain* was a turning point in Ledger's career and situates the actor's performance within a wider body of work: "Ledger has nicely erased his vacuous pretty-boy image and given us all a big surprise. . . . A performance like this doesn't come from nowhere."
32. Emmanuel Lévinas, "The Trace of the Other," in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (1963; repr., Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 352. From a phenomenological perspective, there is also a "trace of the other" in the filmic image: the face of Ledger, for example, is experienced as "an irrecusable order, a command" in front of the screen; it challenges the spectator out of its analog or digital presence.
33. Ibid.
34. Merleau-Ponty, "The Experience of Others," 53.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.

7 Is Acting a Form of Simulation or Being?

Acting and Mirror Neurons

William Brown

In this chapter, I shall theorize ways in which the discovery of mirror neurons might enrich our understanding of screen acting. It is not that cognitive neuroscience shall be made to wade into the study of acting and declare it redundant or bankrupt. In various respects, mirror neurons only reinforce what certain theorists and practitioners of acting have long since believed: namely, that “realism” in acting is achieved through minimizing the amount of visible acting that is going on. But, in the name of interdisciplinarity, mirror neurons and other cerebral processes discovered by cognitive scientists certainly do have input to give into the study of acting and performance, not least in helping us to understand how acting works. Indeed, the applicability of a number of these neuroscientific findings were discussed at the April 25, 2007, roundtable at New York’s Philoctetes Center, featuring contributions from neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese, actors Blair Brown, Joe Grifasi and Adam Ludwig, Alexander Technique pioneer Tom Vasiliades and performance therapist Robert Landy.¹

The theory of acting that I wish to put forward here is in some senses reverse engineered out of a theory of audience identification that is premised on the discovery of mirror neurons. Mirror neurons suggest that audiences quasi-experience the same emotions as the actors that they see onscreen, which in turn suggests that actors should “mirror” the emotions that they wish to portray. Most pointedly, we might say that this cerebral “mirroring” should take place for those actors seeking to give a realistic portrayal of a character. This in turn suggests that this theory has most relevance to actors seeking to inhabit a role, be that through the use of projective imagination associated with the “System” of Constantin Stanislavski (and his American acolytes, such as Stella Adler, herself a peer of Vasiliades) or through the use of personal memory that is Lee Strasberg’s (and others’) “Method.” However, while the existence of mirror neurons might suggest that actors pursue realism in the development of their techniques, we should bear in mind that mirror neurons fire anyway, and performance might therefore be adapted according to precisely what emotions, if any, the actor wishes his or her audience to “mirror.”

MIRROR NEURONS

In the 1990s, neuroscientists discovered mirror neurons in the macaque. In short, they found

a unique set of premotor neurons that appeared to respond both when a monkey performed an action and when it sat motionless observing another individual performing an action. . . . These neurons were named “mirror neurons” for their unique property of firing to both observed and performed actions.²

It was also discovered that the same neurons would fire in the macaque as when observing a human performing the same actions—i.e., the same neurons fire in the macaque when observing a different species perform actions as when observing the same species perform the same actions.³ And it was subsequently discovered that the same neural mechanism is observable in humans. We, too, have a similar system of action execution/action observation in the brain.⁴

The potential link between this phenomenon and the relationship of film to the cinematic spectator is evident: when we see actions onscreen, we too fire the same neurons as would be fired were we to perform those actions, only we do not physically move. We might contend that cinema is a unique experience, and that watching a film that somehow we know is a fiction is not the same as watching real life. However, that many neuropsychological studies of perception involve precisely the use of films to measure what happens in “natural viewing conditions” would appear to subvert this contention; if a distinction is to be made between viewing films and television and viewing reality, then we may well find that many psychologists and cognitive neuroscientists have in fact been carrying out Film Studies without directly knowing it. For present purposes, then, it would seem that mirror neurons fire irrespective of the medium.⁵

That said, it should be noted that the initial findings of neuroscientists were based on *goal-oriented actions*. In other words, images of actors or objects alone do not induce the same responses; an actor must be observed to interact with an object or behave in such a manner that the goal of the actor is made clear if the observer’s mirror neurons are to fire.

In addition to these mirror neurons that fire when we see an actor onscreen perform an action, there are also neurons in other regions of the brain that function in relation to the perception of and attention to faces. Singer and company suggest that “regions associated with feeling an emotion can be activated by seeing the facial expression of the same emotion, a phenomenon described as emotional contagion.”⁶ Put another way, “these regions [of neurons that mirror pain in others] are fundamentally different from sites subserving mirror neurons that respond when performing or watching a conspecific performing particular movements.”⁷ However, for

present purposes, I shall argue that, if not the same neurons, nor even the same kind of neurons, these “emotional” neurons do still function by “mirroring” those of the conspecific whose face is observed.

Furthermore, and in contrast to emotional contagion, Singer and her colleagues demonstrate that “empathic responses can be elicited automatically in the absence of an emotional cue (such as facial emotional expressions) through the mere presentation of an arbitrary cue [a written message] that signals the feeling state of another person.”⁸ To this end,

empathizing with the pain of others does not involve the activation of the whole pain matrix, but is based on activation of those other second-order re-representations containing the subjective affective dimension of pain. . . . [These] form the basis for our ability to form subjective representation[s] of feelings that allow us to predict the effects of emotional stimuli with respect to the self. Second, they serve as the neural basis for our ability to understand the emotional importance of a particular stimulus for another person and to predict its likely associated consequences.⁹

The phenomenon of affective pain neurons (if not sensory pain neurons) firing in our brain when observing or being told about the pain of others, they argue, allows us to empathize with the pain of others and to “mentalize”—that is, “to understand the thoughts, beliefs and intentions of others.”¹⁰

It is important to understand that *seeing* emotions in others leads to the firing of (some of) the same neurons as would be fired were we to feel that emotion ourselves (in the case of pain, the observer experiences a “somato-motor representation” of the observed individual’s pain).¹¹ This provides a neurological basis for empathy. Even in the case of observing an emotion that one has not seen before, “viewing facial expressions triggers similar expressions on one’s own face, even in the absence of conscious recognition of the stimulus.”¹² Interestingly, and at the same time, “when the physiological state of two individuals is more closely matched, they are more accurate at perceiving each other’s feelings,” an observation that also leads to the theory occasionally put forward that physiological states, including facial expressions, can shape our emotions as much as emotions can shape our facial expressions.¹³

MIRROR NEURONS AND CINEMATIC EMPATHY

With regard to the human face, the close-up has been of interest to film theorists ever since Belá Balázs formed his theory of the close-up as offering a means of pre-linguistic communication.¹⁴ Meanwhile, Carl Plantinga has more recently put forward a theory of cinematic facial recognition, which, without any reference to neuroscience, also observes that spectators “mimic

the facial expressions of people we see on film and video,” as well as recognizing the existence of emotional contagion (something that Plantinga uses to explain group reactions while in a crowded cinema).¹⁵ Furthermore, the more general elicitation of empathy in the cinema has been a topic of interest to film theorists and philosophers for some time, and a survey of recent work on the topic might mention Plantinga, Torben Grodal, Murray Smith, Berys Gaut and others.¹⁶

An understanding of the wider mirror neuron system that I am defining here (both goal-oriented action mirroring and facial and emotional mirroring) would lend more weight to Plantinga’s analysis of the human face, as well as allowing his theory to expand beyond the analysis of mere cinematic techniques (facial expression as conveyed through the use of close-ups, shallow focus and point-of-view structures). Specifically, we might begin to understand the inherent attraction of the human face to viewers and the “natural” way in which empathy can be aroused beyond the contrivances of cinematic technique and practice. In contrast, philosophers of cinematic empathy, including Berys Gaut, could use the discovery of the mirror neuron system to emphasize more fully a system of empathy based not just on point-of-view shots (we empathize with a character because we see what she sees) but also, and perhaps more fully, on shots that show us the character/actor who is suffering. We empathize with a character because we see her more than because we see what she sees. To give Gaut his due, he does acknowledge that “the reaction shot, too, can invite us to imagine seeing from a character’s perspective,” but he does not linger on this point.¹⁷

In fact, few film theorists or philosophers have to my knowledge employed the mirror neuron system as a means of enhancing our understanding of empathy for film characters. Grodal mentions that mirror neurons update and confirm the theories of first-person emotions put forward in his book, *Moving Pictures*, but does not pursue the matter further than a quick reference.¹⁸ Daniel Shaw uses mirror neurons to refute Noël Carroll’s contention that movie goers and characters do not and cannot share the same feelings, but again only in passing.¹⁹ And Shaw’s argument indirectly finds support from Tarja Laine, who similarly uses mirror neurons to put forward her argument that films and spectators “feel towards each other.”²⁰ Outside of Film Studies, philosopher Dieter Lohmar uses cinema as an example in his consideration of mirror neurons and the implications that they have for phenomenology, but the mirror neurons that he considers are only those associated with physical actions (the first kind described above, whereby monkeys seeing fire the same premotor neurons as monkeys doing).²¹ However, he does not take into consideration the processes of “emotional contagion” that have been discussed by various neuroscientists and psychologists in recent times and that I have outlined above.

The action-related mirror neurons do, as Lohmar suggests, help to establish the idea of a *physical* cinema, whereby an exciting chase scene is made exciting not just because of the editing and *mise-en-scène*, but also because

we fire the same neurons as those running. This also suggests that the cinematic experience of sensations is not based solely on illusion, but on the audience co-experiencing the actions depicted in the film. However, the second type of mirroring, namely, emotional contagion, which Lohmar overlooks, suggests a further level of empathy based on the mimicry of the emotions expressed by those characters whose faces we see (and the close-up, by virtue of its ability to magnify and make clear the emotional response of characters to their situation, emerges here as a technique that can explicitly draw our attention to a character's emotional state). It suggests an empathy for the physiological manifestations of an emotional state (e.g., we see a character running away and our brain fires the same neurons as if we were really about to run away). But also, if we get to see their face (and, after Decety and Jackson, via other cues if we do not see their face), we can understand the *emotional reasons* for those actions (i.e., we feel what the characters feel).

The discovery of these “emotional” mirror neurons naturally affects our understanding of cinema audiences. Mirror neurons may explain why some performances elicit greater empathy than others, even when, once more, we are supposed to feel dislike for or, at the very least, distance from that character. Of course, none of this is to rule out cinematic technique, whereby the filmmakers choose to give us privileged access to different emotions from different distances and for different lengths of time. But the “natural” way in which we empathize is there to be exploited by cinema, as well as in certain cases to frustrate the intentions of the filmmakers, for not only may mirror neurons allow us to empathize with a character whose facial expressions we see, but this may also allow us to sympathize with and therefore “like” characters who are otherwise intended to be evil. Viewers sensitive to and “mirroring” the emotions of a villain can bypass the usual moral barriers that might typically prevent us from liking an “evil” character, thereby bringing us closer to that villain, even when we are supposed to be rooting for his enemy, the hero. Bearing in mind the nature of some mirror neurons as based on facial recognition, there is potentially a privileging of the close-up as technique and by extension the cinema as art form, for cinema can “naturally” elicit such complex responses. By which I mean to say that we can like bad guys in spite of our condemnation of their evil deeds, perhaps even, therefore, in spite of ourselves. (Although we could argue conversely that those art forms that elicit great emotional responses without recourse to the “natural” mechanisms of cinema, especially the close-up, display even greater artistry.)

Furthermore, these advances in neuroscience also have implications for our understanding of acting—although, as with audience empathy, not much has to my knowledge been made of this in terms of studies of acting and acting methods. Rhonda Blair ends *The Actor, Image, and Action* by speculating on how mirror neurons, with their system of “unmediated” communication between brains, may well cause us to shift

our understanding of stage acting.²² And Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke also argue briefly how mirror neurons confirm that screen acting is as important a component of cinema as editing and cinematographic techniques—an argument that they use to elevate screen acting to the same “heights” as stage acting, not least because the gestures and expressions of the actors become the locus of meaning in film and not the cinematic techniques used to convey them.²³ Baron and Carnicke perhaps overstate their case by claiming that it is the actor alone who conveys meaning with regard to cinematic performance, as I should like to discuss presently. But it is by way of providing more than just a brief reference to mirror neurons that I should like to consider more fully what their implications are for Film Studies and, in particular, our understanding of screen acting, as both potential performers and viewers.

THE KULESHOV EFFECT REVISITED

Stephen Prince and Wayne E. Hensley have pointed out how Lev Kuleshov’s famous experiment with actor Ivan Mozzhukhin is a given of Film Studies.²⁴ That is, in Kuleshov’s experiment, audiences allegedly interpret the same image of an actor as conveying different emotions based purely on the other images that are placed before and/or after it. A shot of Mozzhukhin might be followed by a shot of a coffin, meaning that viewers read Mozzhukhin as being sad; but when his face follows images of food, he is understood as being hungry; and when following images of a child, his mood is interpreted as being happy—even though Mozzhukhin’s expression does not change, because it is the same image of the actor that is used in each case.

As Prince and Hensley note, “there is virtually no information available about Kuleshov’s actual method and procedure.”²⁵ Nonetheless, they do their best to re-create his experiment, only to find that “viewers were not demonstrating a Kuleshov effect.”²⁶ Mitigating circumstances for this failure might include questions of culture (Prince and Hensley’s subjects live several thousand miles and seventy years apart from Kuleshov’s), and Kuleshov having perhaps encouraged his audience to give him the response he wanted. From Prince and Hensley’s analysis, therefore, we might surmise that it is *not* as a result of a framing context that emotion is conveyed to an audience. More likely, it seems, the audience responds to the facial expression of the actor whom they see. And if the actor conveys “no emotion,” then the audience, in line with how mirror neurons function, does not feel any either.

However, Dean Mobbs et al. have also re-created Kuleshov’s experiment, although in a different way to Prince and Hensley, because Mobbs and his team contrasted “subtle happy and fear faces . . . with positive and negative movies, respectively”—rather than using just “neutral” faces

“lacking expression.”²⁷ Using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), Mobbs et al. found that, at the cerebral level (as opposed to basing their analysis on audience feedback, as per Prince and Hensley), context does play a role in establishing the emotional disposition of a character: “when identical faces are juxtaposed with contextual movies of different valance, attributions of facial expression and mental-state are altered.”²⁸ However, they also found that “when congruent facial emotion and context are paired, subjects are most shifted in their attributions.”²⁹ In other words, Mobbs et al. found that contextual images do influence our understanding of a character, but that the strongest response is elicited when context and the emotional response to that context seem to work in conjunction. Righart and de Gelder have reached similar conclusions when analyzing the spatial context of facial expressions (i.e., a happy face in a “happy” scene, as opposed to being shown before and after in separate shots).³⁰ No doubt this has a cultural element (what constitutes a “happy” occasion and therefore elicits a happy face is not necessarily universal), which does therefore appeal to the audience’s prior knowledge regarding what kind of a response they should expect in a certain situation (or what is here termed the *framing context*). Nevertheless, the actor’s expression as much as its context helps us to understand/identify the emotions of an actor/character. Even Mobbs, then, contradicts Kuleshov, who felt that “[n]aturalistic, emotive performances by actors were not considered . . . to be essential to cinema.”³¹ Perhaps I should clarify: actors are not essential to cinema at all (since there are enough films, mainly experimental ones, that do not even feature actors, but which we are happy to term “cinematic”). But when actors are present, viewers do identify with them emotionally. This would tally with the existence of mirror neurons, even if, for example, music in films does also help to cue our emotional response, and even if the general “mood” of a film and the “ticking together” of audience members (i.e., emotional contagion among audience members and not just from screen to audience) similarly have a role to play.³² Indeed, why a multiplicity of factors should not and cannot work in conjunction is beyond criticism. But by isolating the performer, we can detect their important, perhaps even pivotal, role in determining the emotional response to an image that includes, and perhaps even centers on, an actor.

ACTING: SIMULATING OR BEING?

Marco Iacoboni, who like Vittorio Gallese is a pioneer in the discovery of mirror neurons, has also analyzed how an observer’s brain will fire the same neurons when watching a hand perform a task as when the observer performs that task for himself.³³ In some senses, this merely repeats the findings of others concerning goal-oriented mirror neurons. However, Iacoboni and colleagues showed pictures of a disembodied hand to observers.

In other words, the observers did not see the face or even more than a bit of forearm attached to the hand of the person performing the task. By this rationale, the body of an actor also plays a key role in eliciting a response—or making a connection with—an observing audience member.

There is more than one way to skin a cat; similarly, there are no doubt multiple ways in which an actor can achieve a performance of great emotional depth, not least in cinema that makes of performance a technological construction.³⁴ However, I should like to suggest in this section that an actor's performance depends on his/her using his/her whole body to perform, perhaps regardless of whether or not the frame of the camera delimits what amount of that body we can see. By "using their whole body," I mean that an actor must incarnate the emotion that he/she wishes to convey, even if temporarily, and even if said emotion can then be "switched off" like a light switch. At the moment of performance, the "best" performance will eliminate as much visible performance as possible. The "best" performance will not be a simulation, but it will involve an attempt to experience "for real" the emotion in question, and for the following reason: If mirror neurons suggest that an audience can in fact feel the same emotion as the performer, then it would logically follow that the more genuine emotion the performer allows into his/her performance, the more genuine will be the audience's emotional response (provided that this is the goal of the performer and/or his/her director).

Antonio Damasio and Joseph LeDoux both argue that feelings and emotions are not separate from the body and that we do not just feel them mentally but also experience and express them physically. Feelings—which "constitute the subjective experiences we know our emotions by and are a hallmark of an emotion from the point of view of the person experiencing the feeling"—have their roots in the body and can be measured by such things as galvanic skin responses.³⁵ Antonio Damasio goes so far as to state that "[i]f you do not have a skin conductance response, it does not appear that you ever will have the conscious body state characteristic of an emotion."³⁶ In other words, if the body cannot convey or feel an emotion, neither can the brain.

A particular example that Damasio discusses concerns the difference between emotion-related movements and voluntary movements. "[T]he motor control for an emotion-related movement sequence is *not* in the same location as the control for a voluntary act. The emotion-related movement is triggered elsewhere in the brain, even if the arena for the movement, the face and its musculature is the same."³⁷ In other words, a different part of the brain controls our face muscles when we smile because we genuinely are feeling happy (emotion-related movement) than when we smile simply for the sake of it (voluntary, or non-emotion-related, movement)—*even though in both cases it is the same face muscles that move*. With regard to acting, therefore, it would appear that performers wishing to elicit similar responses in their audiences to those being felt by their character should not

just “act” an emotion voluntarily (the theory being that we would pick up on the “fakeness” of the gesture), but should do so emotionally, which is to say with their whole body. They should smile for real.

Rhonda Blair acknowledges how actors must draw on personal and other memories in constructing a performance:

the actor, in a modified and heightened form that involves both core and extended consciousness, which manifests in the autobiographical self, brings together and manipulates conscious elements of history, memory, and given circumstances to unlock imagination and responsiveness “in the moment” as effectively as possible.³⁸

In other words, there is a distinction to be made between how an actor performs an emotion and how an audience “mirrors” that emotion. For, when an audience “mirrors” the emotion of an actor onscreen, it does so across space: the viewer sees the actor performing an emotion and “mirrors” that emotion accordingly. For the actor at the moment of performance, however, there is no other person present whom he/she can mirror. Instead, he/she must “mirror” or, for want of a better term, re-create/experience as “wholesale” as possible an emotion drawn from personal and collective memory and/or the imagination (in addition to interacting with actors and the setting in which the performance is taking place). In other words, where for the cinema viewer there is a “mirroring” across space, for the performer there is a “mirroring” across time. Turhan Canli et al. seem to confirm this when they say that the same parts of the amygdala are activated during an emotional experience as when recalling that emotional experience.³⁹ In other words, to remember events—especially emotional events, which Canli and colleagues believe that we remember with greater intensity than “normal” events—is in some respects to “mirror” those events.

However, since mirror neurons fire across space anyway, the actor who seeks to “mirror” an emotion across time (drawn from memory or otherwise) undertakes a task that is likely harder than simply “mirroring” an emotion in front of him/her. After Elizabeth Wilson, actors must use the resources at their disposal to “imaginatively reconstruct” and not just represent something that has happened in their past, all the while adjusting it to present circumstances—a task that, when done well, requires no mean amount of talent.⁴⁰

If, as Damasio and LeDoux argue, an emotion is measured by its physical/bodily manifestations as much if not more than it is simply a “state of mind,” then the actor must also adopt the physical or bodily dimensions that an emotion entails. Rhonda Blair suggests that Susana Bloch’s ALBA Emoting Technique allows actors to convey an emotion physically—rather than just mentally.⁴¹ However, given that the physical and the mental are linked, in that there is “feedback” between body and emotional states (looking sad can make us feel sad, which makes us look sad, etc.), it is not

so much that Bloch/Blair is wrong as that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the body from the mind. Blair herself seems to admit this when she says that, “by adjusting the body state, by changing physical behavior, the actor can effect and change emotion and, hence, feeling.”⁴² Accepting this feedback loop between body and emotion, we reach what is perhaps a surprising conclusion: if an actor truly wants to convey feelings of sadness to an audience that will “mirror” the emotions on display, the actor must not just simulate an emotion (since presumably only a simulation of the emotion will be mirrored by the audience), but must in fact feel that emotion for him/herself. In other words, acting involves a state not just of simulation or representation, but a state of *being*. Or better: it is not that the actor simply has to “be there” in front of the camera—an argument that would put us back in the realm of the Kuleshov Effect—but that the actor must actually experience in their performance the emotion that he/she wishes to convey.

CONCLUSION: MORE STUDY REQUIRED

An understanding of mirror neurons can affect how we understand screen acting, as both a practice and in theory, as well as how we understand our responses to screen acting as audience members.

This is not to say that the meaning of a performance is entirely the work of an actor, since all other aspects of the filmmaking craft can and perhaps do enhance or at least modify an actor’s performance, which does in part remain “technological” in construction. Furthermore, I am only really describing here a kind of acting, one that has as its goal the representation (or, more accurately, the transference via emotional contagion) of an emotional state to an audience. Many “great” and deeply affecting screen performances can rely not on the portrayal of emotions, but quite the opposite: on the performance of a character whose reactions to, say, adverse situations, is surprising (for example, stoical) rather than to-be-expected and hackneyed. I am not saying, therefore, that “sad” moments in a film demand sad or obviously sad acting (which is not to mention the fact that elements of sadness might manifest themselves differently in different cultures). Emotions themselves are subtle and manifest themselves in the smallest gestures, perhaps even in invisible responses (such as hair standing on end). Acting that conveys the subtlety of an emotion must therefore itself be subtle. Perhaps more than that: if acting is recognized as acting, then it perhaps is not subtle at all; convincing acting—acting that via the mirror neuron system encourages in spectators the same emotional state—should not be recognized as acting at all. The exception here, of course, would be instances in which an actor wants the audience *not* to be convinced and to mirror the acting of an emotion, rather than that emotion itself—particularly if the actor is playing someone who is acting an emotion rather than

experiencing it. The actor must *become* the role, an argument that shares common features with Strasberg's Method acting.

Since this theory of acting is reverse engineered out of audience responses to acting via the emotional contagion of the mirror neuron system, I must admit that my argument is at least in part speculative. We may find that, with further and more specific research, there are adjustments to be made. For example, what mirror neuron research does not often discuss is the accuracy with which humans can mirror emotions. That is, how obviously does someone have to be happy in order for happy mirror neurons to fire? Can someone just think happy thoughts, which have only minute physical manifestations, in order for someone else to "mirror" that happiness? Even if we do not consciously see those minute physical manifestations, are they index enough of an emotion that we can indeed "mirror" it? How often are we utterly wrong about the mental state of a person based on appearance alone? Furthermore, how are we to know that there is not, in the special circumstances that constitute film viewing, an implicit contract at work, whereby the actor *can* act "obviously" (i.e., badly?) and still convince the audience of the veracity of their emotions—not necessarily as real emotions but as, precisely, acted emotions? How subtle are mirror neurons, by which I wish to ask: if we in our everyday lives are sometimes "acting" and sometimes "being," not least because we consciously regulate our behavior precisely to give a certain impression to others, then do our mirror neurons mirror the fact that others are acting a certain emotion, or do they just fall for that emotion? Can we "mirror" an act of an act, e.g., when an actor is playing an actor who is acting sad for a film-within-a-film, but whose character is in fact not really sad at all?

Picking apart these subtleties is a task that remains for scientists, perhaps (hopefully) in collaboration with film students. But the discovery of mirror neurons marks the beginning of a development and an enrichment of our understanding of screen acting, both as a practice and in theory, as well as our understanding of character identification and audience empathy. May the research continue.

NOTES

1. The roundtable is available to view online at the following address: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loB-Lg0X1qo>. Last accessed 24 October 2010.
2. Lindsay M. Oberman, Jaime A. Pineda and Vilayanur S. Ramachandran. "The Human Mirror Neuron System: A Link Between Action Observation and Social Skills," *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 2, no. 1 (2007): 62.
3. Dieter Lohmar, "Mirror Neurons and the Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2006): 8.
4. For overviews, see Vittorio Gallese, "The 'Shared Manifold' Hypothesis: From Mirror Neurons to Empathy," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8, nos. 5–7 (2000): 33–50; and Giacomo Rizzolatti and Laila Craighero,

- "The Mirror-Neuron System," *Annual Review of Neuroscience* 27 (2004): 169–192.
5. Interestingly, various neuroscientific experiments use audiovisual media as a cue and draw from such experiments conclusions about viewing "reality." See, for example, Bartels and Zeki's use of the opening moments of *GoldenEye* (Martin Campbell, 1995) to investigate the "free viewing of natural scenes" in Andreas Bartels and Semir Zeki, "The Chronoarchitecture of the Human Brain—Natural Viewing Conditions Reveal a Time-Based Anatomy of the Brain," *NeuroImage* 22, no. 1 (2004): 419–33.
 6. Tania Singer, Ben Seymour, John O'Doherty, Holger Kaube, Raymond J. Dolan and Chris D. Frith, "Empathy for Pain Involves the Affective but Not Sensory Components of Pain," *Science* 303, no. 5661 (2004): 1158.
 7. *Ibid.*, 1160.
 8. *Ibid.*, 1158.
 9. *Ibid.*, 1161.
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. Alessio Avenanti, Domenica Bueti, Gaspare Galati and Salvatore M. Aglioti, "Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation Highlights the Sensorimotor Side of Empathy for Pain," *Nature Neuroscience* 8 (2005): 958.
 12. Jean Decety and Philip L. Jackson, "A Social-Neuroscience Perspective on Empathy," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 15, no. 2 (2006): 55.
 13. *Ibid.*
 14. See Béla Balász, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Dover Publications, 1970): 60–88.
 15. Carl Plantinga, "The Scene of Empathy and the Human Face on Film," in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion*, ed. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 243.
 16. For concentrated examples of relevant studies, see Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith, eds. *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
 17. Berys Gaut, "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film," in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion*, ed. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 213.
 18. Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings and Cognition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). See also Torben Grodal, "The PECMA Flow: A General Model of Visual Aesthetics," *Film Studies* 8 (2006): 6.
 19. Daniel Shaw, "A Rejoinder to Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*." *Film-Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (2008): 146–47. See also Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (London: Blackwell, 2008), 185ff.
 20. Tarja Laine, "Affective Telepathy, or the Intuition of the Heart: *Persona* with *Mulholland Drive*," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 7, no. 3 (2009): 336.
 21. Lohmar, "Mirror Neurons and the Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity," 6ff.
 22. Rhonda Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), 106–09.
 23. Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 59–60.
 24. See Stephen Prince and Wayne E. Hensley, "The Kuleshov Effect: Recreating the Classic Experiment," *Cinema Journal* 31, no. 2 (1992): 59–75.
 25. *Ibid.*, 65.
 26. *Ibid.*, 68.

27. Dean Mobbs, Nikolaus Weiskopf, Hakwan C. Lau, Eric Featherstone, Ray J. Dolan and Chris D. Frith, "The Kuleshov Effect: The Influence of Contextual Framing on Emotional Attributions," *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 1, no. 2 (2006): 95.
28. *Ibid.*, 100.
29. *Ibid.*, 103.
30. See Ruthger Righart and Beatrice de Gelder, "Rapid Influence of Emotional Scenes on Encoding of Facial Expressions: An ERP Study," *Scan* 3 (2008): 270–78.
31. Prince and Hensley, "The Kuleshov Effect," 61.
32. For an examination of the relationship between film music and emotional response, see Jörn Töpper and Stephan Schwan, "James Bond in Angst?: Inferences About Protagonists' Emotional States in Films," *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications* 20, no. 4 (2008): 131–140. For a consideration of the role of emotional contagion, see Uri Hasson, Yuval Nir, Ifat Levy, Galit Fuhrmann and Rafael Malach, "Intersubjective Synchronization of Cortical Activity During Natural Vision," *Science* 303 (2004): 1634–40.
33. See Marco Iacoboni, Roger P. Woods, Marcel Brass, Harold Bekkering, John C. Mazziotta and Giacomo Rizzolatti, "Cortical Mechanisms of Human Imitation," *Science* 286 (1999): 2526–28.
34. See Mark J. P. Wolf, "The Technological Construction of Performance," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 9, no. 4 (2003): 48–59.
35. Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (London/New York: Phoenix, 1998), 329.
36. Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (London: Vintage, 2006), 209.
37. *Ibid.*, 140.
38. Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action*, 66.
39. Turhan Canli, Zuo Zhao, James Brewer, John D. E. Gabrieli and Larry Cahill, "Event-Related Activation in the Human Amygdala Associates with Later Memory for Individual Emotional Experience," *Journal of Neuroscience* 20, no. 19 (2000): 99–103.
40. Elizabeth Wilson qtd. in Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action*, 74.
41. *Ibid.*, 46–48.
42. *Ibid.*, 69.

8 The Bond That Unbinds by Binding Acting Mythology and the Film Community

Kevin Esch

“A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing.”

—Oscar Wilde

The fifteenth annual Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Awards presentation in January 2009 could not have taken place at a more charged time for the union representing film and television actors. Then in contract negotiations with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, SAG had recently begun debating whether to strike—a possibility finally averted by ratification of a new contract in June. The awards ceremony—which the SAG Awards website notes is “the only national network television show to acknowledge the work of union members”—presented a perfect opportunity, then, if SAG wished to plead its case before the viewing audience.¹

The nature of SAG’s introductory rhetorical appeal that evening was illuminating, in its turn to what I’ll be calling the mythology of acting. It also strikingly displayed the two public faces of Hollywood actors—the artisan and the worker—one more often visible than the other. The first revealed itself with an opening series of actor reminiscences. Each actor in turn described a formative moment in his or her career: character actor Victor Garber playing Tom Sawyer at age twelve and getting his first laugh; Phylicia Rashad’s first moment in the spotlight as an elementary school mistress of ceremonies; Tom Cavanagh, at his childhood audition for *Alice in Wonderland*, being told to “Act better!” (by the director, his mother); *Slumdog Millionaire*’s Anil Kapoor running away from home at twelve to try out for his first role; *The Office*’s Jenna Fischer discovering, as a struggling actress and temp office worker, that her part-time job was perfect background research. Each concludes with the actor telling us his or her name and saying, “and I’m an actor.” The stories are comforting in their similarities and familiarity, despite the disparities in fame, experience, and performance medium; they also present a united front—an actorly solidarity that slyly

evokes the broader battle in which the Guild was engaged. The second face of the actor revealed itself more openly minutes after, as Tina Fey accepted an award for her work on *30 Rock* (NBC, 2006–). Thanking her young daughter for her patience, Fey said, “Someday she’ll be old enough to watch *30 Rock* reruns on the Internet, and understand where Mommy was going at 6 a.m. every day for all that time—and she’ll look up at me and say, ‘What do you mean you don’t get residuals for this?’” Her blackly comic allusion to the most-discussed aspect of the negotiations—actors’ residual payments for online re-broadcast—ended with Fey exhorting her daughter, “Take care of me when I’m old and broke!” Rare is the moment in an industry awards show when a star performer acknowledges she is also an industrial worker, let alone one in a collective bargaining unit.

In his famous book on the Method, *A Dream of Passion*, Lee Strasberg describes “the problem of communication”: “Our society has spent so much time and has achieved such startling results with the discovery of new mechanical processes of communication, but we have somehow forgotten that the process of living demands the ability to respond, to make contact, and to communicate one’s experience to another human being.”² Yet the mechanical processes are only a fraction of the problem: as Benjamin has famously argued, the system of capital under which filmmaking operates encourages a fetishistic over-identification with film performers, leaving us with the consumption of an image rather than immediate human contact.³ The cynical respondent, confronted with the contrast between Phylicia Rashad’s and Tina Fey’s SAG Awards moments, might conclude that Fey was the one speaking truth to power in a period of labor crisis, and that the warm bonhomie Rashad and her compatriots expressed was just a myth, a pleasant fiction papering over the unpleasant facts. In fact, I think what we witness here in the opening minutes of the SAG Awards *is* myth, but in the richer sense of the term: an idea or set of ideas that may be in part fictional, but are also foundational to the way we understand the world—think of the Horatio Alger myth in American culture. In this chapter, I argue that the mythology of acting—the ritualized stories that we tell about actors, that actors tell to us, and that actors tell each other in the process of becoming actors—is vital for the preservation of a utopian sense of human connection and community among actors and audience. Without myth, the alternative is the stark and incomplete recognition of film actors solely as distant workers. It would be as if we removed the moving, bonding “I am an actor” opening from the SAG Awards and left only: “You don’t get residuals for this?” To understand the continuing hold that film performers have on us, both sides are necessary.

The concept of myth has fallen on hard times in Film Studies, but I think it is worth excavating and recuperating from its past associations in the discipline so as to reveal its continued usefulness, particularly to historians of film acting. The first part of this chapter revisits myth’s complicated intellectual history and its ties to Film Studies, and it considers the need in film historiography

for what Joseph Mali has called “the mythical turn.” In the second section, I suggest why studies of film acting especially would benefit from this historiographic treatment, why myth is the best term to describe the stories surrounding actors, and what work these myths perform for the cinematic community. Jean-Luc Nancy’s theoretical writings on myth and community are central to my argument here, as they offer a way toward conceiving acting myth as a progressive force for constructing a community of viewers and performers that is based not in a system of exchange, but in a utopian striving for kinship.

I conclude with a practical provocation for scholars of film acting, calling for an end to (or at least a reduction of) a practice that has served to deter acting scholars from thinking in terms of the mythology of their subject: namely, the close reading of film performance. For too long, scholarly work on film performers has tended to fall into two camps, each with its own methodologies and textual approaches: formalist studies of acting “itself” and industry-minded analyses of stars as labor and/or celebrity. It is as if one side has taken up the assertion “I am an actor” as an incentive to understand the creative work of the performer, while the other side has been galvanized by the rhetorical query “You don’t get residuals for this?” to study the exploitation of the actor’s creative work *as* labor. In what follows, I propose the beginnings of a reconciliation of this divide. I call for “distant readings” over close readings, shifting the analytical gaze away from individual performers and toward *the performance of “acting”*—within the industry and the community at large—as a kind of productive labor in and of itself. Perhaps some will object that by doing this we are not really talking about film acting anymore; yet I think that such a “distant reading” provides a clearer way of understanding the continuing hold that performance has on viewers, actors and scholars all.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MYTH AND “MYTHISTORY”

Within Anglo-American Film Studies, the differing definitions and analyses of myth in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes were a key part of the academic maturation of the discipline in the early 1970s. This can be seen in the structuralist and semiological writings of Christian Metz, Umberto Eco, Vladimir Propp and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Inevitably, the powerful and flexible interpretive systems of structuralism and semiology were also critiqued. Such criticisms included charges of a lack of historical specificity, overly ambitious and reductive schema and, in relation to film, the difficulties of applying structures based on spoken language to a film “language,” which may be incomparable.⁴ The time for myth in Film Studies is not over, however. What Film Studies needs is a way of thinking about myth that is less structuralist and more historiographic. Though it has sometimes been forgotten, we can see in Barthes and Lévi-Strauss in particular this way of thinking about myth as well.

Barthes and Lévi-Strauss were writing about myth at about the same time: Lévi-Strauss' "The Structural Study of Myth" was published in 1955, Barthes' *Mythologies* in 1957. Lévi-Strauss' theory of myth emphasized a "deep structure" that governed the sign systems of traditional myths and arranged them in a synchronic series of binary oppositions, regardless of historical provenance. As an anthropologist, he believed mythic thought was particular to "primitive" societies, and consequently that the modern view of the world depended on science and history (though he also noted that "nothing resembles mythical thought more than political ideology").⁵ By contrast, Barthes extended the concept of myth to modernity, describing popular mythologies—wrestling, plastic, children's toys—that distort the historical and contingent by appearing natural and outside of time. "I wanted to track down," he writes, "in the decorative display of what-goes-without-saying, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there."⁶ Like Lévi-Strauss, however, Barthes gives great weight to the Saussurean system in his conception of myth as a "second-order semiological system," which is comprised of tiers of signifiers and signifieds and thus bears some linguistic similarity to Lévi-Strauss' logic.⁷ Yet the similarity I want to point to instead is the fundamental historical, or more properly historiographic, resemblance between these two mythologies, which can be seen in each author's references to the famed nineteenth-century French historian Jules Michelet.

Michelet's *History of the French Revolution* occupies vital territory in both Barthes' and Lévi-Strauss' myth structures. Dan Edelstein has written compellingly on the need to re-examine both authors from a historical, rather than a linguistic, perspective, so as to recognize "how linguistics often served more as a scaffolding, than as a foundation for structuralist ideas."⁸ In particular, the presence of Michelet—about whom Barthes wrote, "Michelet does not naturalize morals, he moralizes nature"—illustrates the relationship between myth and history.⁹ Lévi-Strauss' concept of the double structure of myth originates not with Saussure, but in a passage from *History of the French Revolution*. His incorporation of Michelet is instructive and worth quoting at length:

[Myth] explains the present and the past as well as the future. This can be made clear through a comparison between myth and what appears to have largely replaced it in modern societies, namely, politics. When the historian refers to the French Revolution, it is always as a sequence of past happenings, a non-reversible series of events the remote consequences of which may still be felt at present. But to the French politician, as well as to his followers, the French Revolution is both a sequence belonging to the past—as to the historian—and a timeless pattern which can be detected in the contemporary French social structure and which provides a clue for its interpretation, a lead from which to infer future developments. Michelet, for instance, was a politically

minded historian. He describes the French Revolution thus: “That day . . . everything was possible. . . . Future became present . . . that is, no more time, a glimpse of eternity.” It is that double structure, altogether historical and ahistorical, which explains how myth, while pertaining to the realm of *parole* and calling for an explanation as such, as well as to that of *langue* in which it is expressed, can also be an absolute entity on a third level which, though it remains linguistic by nature, is nevertheless distinct from the other two.¹⁰

Though Lévi-Strauss arrives at the “linguistic nature” of myth, the explanatory force of myth’s dual structure rests with Michelet. Linguistics thus becomes the scientific rationale for an essentially historical argument that, at another level, lies outside of history.

Whereas Lévi-Strauss’ interest in Michelet largely depends on one crucial quotation, Barthes’ connection to Michelet has already been clearly established by his intellectual biography of the writerly historian in 1954. Published just before *Mythologies* (though written mostly simultaneously), Barthes had not yet embraced semiology in *Michelet*, but his literary analysis of the natural motifs in Michelet—the de-mythifying of Michelet’s myths—is in effect a prototype of the analysis of myths he would subsequently perform. Additionally, Barthes’ definition of theme in *Michelet* is analogous to his definition of myth, both being marked by repetition, a two-tiered sign system and meaning within an ideological framework (which for Barthes meant either the Left or the bourgeoisie). As Edelstein puts it, “[E]ven chronological overlap” between the two works “does not explain how little ‘the linguistic turn’ affected Barthes’ methodology.”¹¹ By re-viewing Barthes and Lévi-Strauss in this way, we can appreciate anew myth’s historiographic value, rather than having it obscured by the structuralist focus on language.

Where we should look for history, in events or in words, has of course occupied historians for millennia. Joseph Mali has traced throughout Western historiography the classic debate between mythical and traditional approaches to history. Beginning with Herodotus, who wished to preserve and elucidate the histories of cultural myths, and Thucydides, who saw these myths as ritual distortions of historical truth and promoted rational pursuit of knowledge, Mali discusses the importance of myth in the histories of Michelet as well as Livy, Giambattista Vico, Jacob Burckhardt, Aby Warburg, Ernst Kantorowicz and Walter Benjamin. While as a discipline history has tended to favor the analytical Thucydidean approach, the emergence of newer cultural histories has led to an appreciation of myths as “foundational narratives” whose distortions of the past actually illuminate the history of the present. Mali advocates reviving what he calls “mythis-*to*ry,” which he argues is in its “recognition of myth” the quintessentially modern historiographic mode; following Paul de Man’s essay on Nietzsche,

he defines “modern” as the desire to break from the past and start anew while at once realizing the impossibility of breaking with a past that is mythically “linked” to the present “by a temporal chain that gives them a common destiny.”¹² In other words, modernity is only possible through the failed attempt to become modern. In order that the discipline itself become modern, Mali argues, historians must embrace the “mythical turn” in their own historiography.

Mali is not making the case for mythistorical practice out of an abstract desire for modernity, however. “The ‘crucial test’ of mythistory,” he writes, “indeed of any form of modern historiography, is whether it offers a new explanation for what is really ‘modern’ in contemporary history, to wit, the devastation of Western civilization in the totalitarian revolutions and wars of the twentieth century.”¹³ Hayden White has offered a similar understanding of myth’s significance under the modern era. What he calls the “modernist event”—industrialized mass genocide, for example, or systematic environmental destruction—so rejects historical understanding and representation that sense can only be made of it through appeals to either myth or melodrama—either the founding of the state of Israel or Steven Spielberg’s film *Schindler’s List* (1993), to suggest two divergent responses to one event.¹⁴ The disenchantment that attends these incomprehensible events compels the historian to examine the modern mythologies that are erected around them. Benjamin describes the task as “dialectical enchantment,” simultaneously appreciating the utopian possibility of the ancient myths that lie buried and warped within their contemporary forms and recognizing in their distortion the cruelty and alienation of modern capitalist society.¹⁵

In its examination of the human figure’s shifting representational status from painting to photography to film—from pre-modern to modern—Benjamin’s canonical essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” provides a rare mythistorical approach to film study. Previous to mechanical reproduction, painting and literature were cult forms, unique works created by and accessible to only a few. The ritual element of these works, expressed by the autonomous, unapproachable “aura” surrounding a painting like the Mona Lisa, is diffused when the artwork can be rendered on a poster or viewed in a bound volume. The invention of these reproductive technologies—the printing press, photography and eventually cinema—democratizes the viewer’s relationship to the work of art and “emancipates [it] from its parasitical dependence on ritual.”¹⁶

Rather than being parasitical, ritual and myth become dialectically involved with the artwork. The aura of the actor, for example, is dependent on his physical connection to the audience; but for the screen actor, this connection vanishes, to be replaced instead by the construction of the “cult of personality” apart from the film. This capitulation and recapitulation of the mythic status of the actor is prefigured by an earlier passage where Benjamin describes the transition from painting to photography:

But cult value does not give way without resistance. It retires into an ultimate retrenchment: the human countenance. It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography. The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face.¹⁷

As in photography, the human figure of the film actor carries with it the echoes of past stage performers, even as the film medium itself erases any aura of his own.

By suggesting that film history needs its own mythistory, I do not mean to equate filmmaking or the film industry with “modernist events” such as the Holocaust or, more recently, the 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, it is clear that Hollywood, in its current massively globalized form, is the apotheosis of late capitalist enterprise: taking advantage of tax incentives and cheap labor with “runaway production” abroad, dominating both domestic and foreign markets and making significant competition with it—even within the industry, as the SAG contract battle demonstrates—all but impossible. The figures are well-known but worth reiterating: in the United Kingdom in 2000, for example, 75.3% of tickets sold were for U.S. films; in France, 58.3%; in Germany, 81.9%; in Japan, 64.8%; and in Australia, 87.5%.¹⁸ The “dream factory” of Hollywood’s classical era exported presumptively American beliefs and attitudes to a worldwide marketplace.¹⁹ Contemporary Hollywood, while arguably internationalized and de-nationalized in favor of a “global monoculture,” still draws formally and ideologically on the shared culture of Hollywood’s studio era.²⁰ Hollywood’s ideological expansionism brings to mind Benjamin’s writings on German fascism. As Mali writes, fascism “was so successful because it thrived on and revived . . . mythology, which, in itself, pertained to authentic perceptions of the nation . . . but has now been usurped by and for the destructive technology of oppression and expansion.”²¹ But the ways in which both fascism and Hollywood imperialism rely on ideological exportation and oppression again focuses only on one side of the equation and reveals only a partial understanding of Hollywood’s mythistory. Looking more closely at the mythology of film performance will bring back to the surface those mythic echoes of the past that usually lie buried beneath the business practices of contemporary Hollywood.

THE MYTHOLOGY OF ACTING

To this point, I have argued why a mythistorical approach might benefit our understanding of film history. But why should we more properly be calling the discourse surrounding actors and their craft “myth?” Why not simply call it “discourse,” and call the network of statements and beliefs by

and about actors a “discursive formation?” In his work on stars, Richard deCordova has productively explained how the actor cannot be comprehended in strictly formal terms, as an image on the screen, but instead as a confluence of external texts that interact with the screen performance to “create” the actor.²² However, I think the term mythology is more appropriate in this circumstance than discourse for the way in which it emphasizes oral traditions central to acting. In the telling and re-telling of stories, in the struggle to find the words to convey impressions, actors and those who watch them create myths around them.

For American dramatic film acting of the last fifty years, the dominant and thoroughly mainstream mythology has involved the teachings of Stanislavsky, which his American disciples gradually transformed into a group of techniques and principles loosely called “Method” acting, emphasizing “truth,” “reality,” and “honesty” of performance.²³ One of the fundamental elements of this mythology is performance’s resistance to narrativization—even, as Sharon Carnicke has noted in her germinal work on Stanislavsky, verbalization.²⁴ The actor cannot create the “truth” essential to Method acting by following step-by-step instructions, nor can she or he give a concise description of how she or he got there when it is concluded. This is especially true when we are talking about Stanislavsky and his System (the name of which belies its amorphous, continuously developing nature), which laid the foundation for what would eventually become American “Method” acting. The dissemination of these techniques has relied heavily on the creation of lore, a body of orally transmitted knowledge with constantly changing contours and terminology.

For example, Richard Boleslavsky, a Stanislavsky student at the Moscow Art Theatre and among the first teachers of the System in America, may have been largely responsible, because of his thick accent, for the creation of the musical “beat” as a Method metaphor for the units into which the actor divides the play; Stanislavsky’s original term was “bit” (*kusok*). Harold Clurman of the Group Theatre, which predated the Actors Studio, and Studio coach and guru Lee Strasberg famously regaled their students with “lectures, anecdotes, and harangues,” further shaping and directing the mythology of the Method.²⁵ Even today, the importance of orality and common mythology to the Actors Studio can be seen in the television interview show *Inside the Actors Studio* (Bravo Cable, 1994–) with James Lipton, in which actors discuss their craft at length, frequently reference Method teachers and terms and even answer the question, “What is your favorite word?” at the end of the show.

Re-envisioning a history of film acting, then, necessitates the examination of these actorly myths: the stories that we relate to define actors and the tales they tell to understand themselves (even those who define themselves in opposition to such myths, such as the pragmatic performer Spencer Tracy, or many British actors), and how those myths change over time. A mythistorical approach would recognize film acting’s indissoluble ties to

its past mythologies, even as contemporary ideas of acting strain against those ties. It could help illuminate how these myths operate within, and respond to, the economic circumstances of the contemporary late-capitalist entertainment industry.

But for what purpose do these acting myths continue to operate? What is their ongoing value to the cinematic community? The work of Jean-Luc Nancy helps us better understand the close connection between myth and community. In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy begins his discussion of myth with a tale of a group of people gathered together, listening to a storyteller, and in the listening becoming a group, a community, where previously there were only singularities. “The story often seems confused; it is not always coherent; it speaks of strange powers and numerous metamorphoses,” Nancy writes. “It names things unknown, beings never seen. But those who have gathered together understand everything, in listening they understand themselves and the world, and they understand why it was necessary for them to come together.”²⁶ Herein lies the dual nature of myth, both fiction and foundation. Furthermore, and most importantly, the performance of recounting is as mythic as the myth that is recounted; the scene of acting-out is as storied and familiar as the stories told.

Myth and its mythic performance, however, do not simply and happily form communities, Nancy writes. By creating a shared culture, they also establish a contrasting outside to that inside, negating as they affirm, denying difference among community members and promoting assimilation. Nancy calls this member assimilated under myth a “common being”—emphasis on “common”; to grasp the danger of this consequence more easily, we might instead call these “common beings” the *Volk*. Nazi mythology—which defines a people with a shared history in opposition to those who do not share it—is the logical extension of myth’s (will to) power, and Nancy reminds us why “in this sense, we no longer have anything to do with myth.”²⁷ Yet because myths cannot simply vanish, such a suppression of myth may only allow its proliferation and renewed power—witness the recent resurgence of the Nazi right in Germany. Therefore, in order to both acknowledge the continued place of myth and counter its dangerous essentialism, Nancy proposes the *interruption* of myth, or what he calls “being-in-common.” In this understanding of myth, myth continues to exist, but never becomes totalizing. Because there can be “no community outside of myth,” interrupting myth—that is, breaking the circuit whereby myth essentializes the community—means interrupting the community: in other words, preserving difference and singularity in the midst of the community. “Being-in-common”: the individual active and differentiated within the community, not passively subsumed by it to the exclusion of those outside it.

How does this change in myth’s status occur? Through what Nancy broadly calls “literature,” a term that includes writing but also encompasses

any form of communication that “merely communicates—in the sense that what it puts into play, sets to work, and destines to unworking, is nothing but communication itself, the passage from one to another, the sharing of one by the other.”²⁸ This “literature,” based in myth but not consumed by it, is a passage that, unlike myth, never becomes a closed circuit. Such a communicative act does not suppose an audience as much as *exposes* them, bringing them into contact with the outside while preserving the inside.²⁹ Through “literature,” Nancy is proposing an alternative communal bonding, “a bond that forms ties without attachments, or even less fusion . . . a bond that unbinds by binding, that reunites through the infinite exposition of an irreducible finitude.”³⁰

Though Nancy remains resolutely abstract in his discussion of myth and its interruption, I argue that acting mythology, particularly as it exists in the Hollywood film industry, operates as just such a Nancyan “literature.” As I said earlier, Benjamin laments the warping and distortion of classic myths under the alienating regime of modern capitalism—the aura of the actor largely overtaken by the cult of personality, for example. The twisting of acting myth into fetishistic over-identification with the performer-as-object creates the same kind of closed, narcissistic, exclusionary community of performers and viewers that Nancy describes under myth—a kind of filmgoing *Volk*, as it were. Laura Mulvey famously called for a change in classical narrative film structure that would destroy the viewer’s passive voyeuristic/narcissistic pleasure and install and free the audience into “dialectics [and] passionate detachment.”³¹ For film acting, acting mythology works to achieve this same dialectical response, at once recognizing our shared humanity and exposing our singular difference (the “bond that unbinds by binding”), instead of dissolving our difference under the spectacular myth of capitalism. To put it another way, acting myth strives to recognize difference—“the sharing of one by the other”—both within and without the interrupted community of capital.

FROM CLOSE READING TO DISTANT READING

I want to conclude this largely theoretical discussion of acting and Film Studies by offering a practical suggestion for moving toward a more mythohistorical methodology. In one of the very few comprehensive treatises on film acting, Vsevolod Pudovkin argues that film technology demands a radically different acting practice.³² Reliance on the script and director results in a mechanical performance, and thus Pudovkin believes the actor must become more involved in other elements of the production, so as to successfully integrate his performance into the final film. Realizing that an actor’s performance depends on camerawork and editing, he insisted that the actor must have a role in both; he even suggests that a film actor should choose his own roles, rather than having himself chosen for a part (which

assumes, of course, that the actor is the best judge of aptitude for a part). If the film performance is going to transcend its industrial framework, the actor must become more than a tool within the process and instead assume greater artistic control over it. Clearly this is a radically actor-centric conception of film practice, one barely approached by even the most ensemble-friendly Hollywood production, or by those with powerful stars who can exert atypical control over the final product or run a vanity project into the ground. The industry has long since passed the point where such a practice was even conceivable, if indeed it ever was. Hollywood has had to develop alternative methods for sustaining the mythical sense of actors' artistic control over their craft—the sense that there is an “inside” to film acting that is distinct from, and not controlled by, the outside forces of the industry. The inside that says “I am an actor” becomes a vital counterweight to the outside that asks, “You don’t get residuals for this?”

Film acting studies has, in its emphasis on close reading, tended to reinforce this myth of control, of the inside of a performance—even as star studies, construing actors' work as cultural labor interacting with and responding to social and industrial forces, has typically focused on the outside. Close textual analysis as a practice, of course, has done much to define the boundaries of film studies as a discipline and to define the film text as the object of that discipline, as John Champagne has argued.³³ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's widely used neo-formalist textbook *Film Art: An Introduction* is only the most prominent example of the power of close analysis to frame a discipline. Yet acting is, I think, something of an extraordinary case in Film Studies: it is popularly fetishized to a far greater extent than other aspects of Hollywood filmmaking largely because its production elements by design tend to remain less visible.

Close reading has been the way this fetishism is expressed in Film Studies: Charles Affron on Greta Garbo in *Queen Christina* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1933), James Naremore on Marlene Dietrich in *Morocco* (Josef von Sternberg, 1930), Roberta Pearson on Henry B. Walthall in *The Avenging Conscience* (D. W. Griffith, 1914) and other Biograph films, among many other examples.³⁴ Take Affron's description of manipulating Garbo through his VCR: “Garbo can die for me around the clock. I can stay her in that final moment of her life; I can turn the sound off and watch, turn off the picture and listen, work myriad transformations in speed and brilliance, and then restore the original without losing a particle of its intensity.”³⁵ On the one hand, I hardly mean to deny the worth of closely analyzing a performance, as Affron does, for like any close reading, the value rests in the discovery of subtlety and nuance that enriches meaning. And yet, I cannot help but agree with Naremore's assertion that Affron is expressing “the erotics of textual analysis”—an expression familiar to any film acting scholar.³⁶ By focusing on the minute decisions that construct a film performance, the acting scholar continues to build up the mythology of film acting, remaining, like the blind men with the elephant, too close to the myth to judge it well.

Some distance must be taken from the film performance so that the mythology of film performance can also be examined.

The attempt through close reading to illuminate the “inside” of a performance bolsters the rhetoric of performance that actors, with good reason, themselves perpetuate. The creation of closeness, connection, of a sense of “being inside,” is both the ultimate goal and the greatest challenge for the actor. Tortsov, the Socratic figure in Stanislavsky’s volumes, insists actors must not settle for emotional fireworks, for spectacle:

We are not interested in hit and run impressions, here today and gone tomorrow. We are not satisfied merely with visual and audible effects. What we hold in highest regard are impressions made on the emotions, which leave a lifelong mark on the spectator and transform actors into real, living beings whom one may include in the roster of one’s near and dear friends, whom one may love, feel one’s self akin to, whom one goes to the theatre to visit again and again. Our demands are simple, normal, and therefore they are difficult to satisfy. All we ask is that an actor on the stage live in accordance with natural laws. Yet because of the circumstances amid which an actor has to do his work it is much easier for him to distort his nature than to live as a natural human being. So we have had to find means to struggle against this tendency toward distortion—that is the basis of our so-called “system.”³⁷

Though Stanislavsky is not concerned with the forms of distortion and consumerist spectacle visited on the film actor, Tortsov’s warning clearly still applies, if not more so. The question of how to move an audience, how to “transform actors into real, living beings,” is all the more important for the film actor—for the work must be done at a remove, from the “outside” of the cinema. In addition to changing the terms of film acting analysis, then, a “distant reading” approach can illuminate our social need to perpetuate the possibility of being moved from a distance by screen performers. What sociological or communitarian function is satisfied by the continual re-inscription of acting mythology—by actors, by the public and by film scholars?

The Marxist philosopher Ernest Bloch wrote in *The Spirit of Utopia*, “Someone who is deeply moved must close his eyes.”³⁸ The utopian strain evident in actors’ rhetoric may seem at first hard to reconcile with the rigorous and disinterested analysis of the standard film scholar. After all, at their best, screen performers elicit passion and inspiration from their audiences, and perhaps even a sense of the possibility of connection and action across socioeconomic divides; traditional Film Studies is ill-equipped to deal with these reactions, to quantify or measure them in any meaningful way (beyond the occasional reader-response form). Yet the desire to connect, “to make contact,” to feel that we are more than “cogs in an enormous wheel,” is a consistent acting philosophy whose operations we

must consider even—especially—when faced with Hollywood’s greatest, most alienating, self-congratulatory corporate spectacles.³⁹ I’ll end with an example from yet another awards show, the Academy Awards ceremonies—the epitome of all that is willfully hypocritical about the global film industry. On accepting the Best Actress Oscar for her portrayal of June Carter in *Walk the Line* (James Mangold, 2005), Reese Witherspoon echoed one of Carter’s favorite lines when she said, “I’m just trying to matter.” To this our knee-jerk response might be to point to her vintage Christian Dior dress and lavish jewelry, gaze at the extravagant surroundings, take in the hundreds of cameras beaming this spectacle to hundreds of millions and smirk knowingly at the possible insincerity of such a line.

If we close our eyes to this immediate input, however, we might better hear how the actor’s words follow in a history of acting myth with which we are quite familiar. The visual splendor of the moment may distract us from the future possibilities such a statement offers, however ephemeral and fleeting. “[A] world without utopian longings is forlorn,” writes Russell Jacoby, “For society as well as for the individual, it means to journey without a compass.”⁴⁰ Acting myth is the compass that endeavors to provide direction, to performers and their viewers, through the disorienting Hollywood landscape.

NOTES

1. “Why the SAG Awards Are Unique,” *Screen Actors Guild Awards*, <http://www.sagawards.org/unique>.
2. Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method* (New York: Plume, 1988), 201.
3. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Sohn (1935; repr., New York: Schocken, 1968), 217–52.
4. See, for example, Stephen Prince, “The Discourse of Pictures: Iconicity and Film Studies,” *Film Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (1996): 16–28.
5. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myth.” 1955. Quoted in Dan Edelstein, “Between Myth and History: Michelet, Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, and the Structural Analysis of Myth,” *Clio* 32, no. 4 (2003): 407.
6. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 11.
7. *Ibid.*, 114.
8. Edelstein, “Between Myth and History,” 413.
9. Roland Barthes, *Michelet*. 1954. Quoted in Edelstein, “Between Myth and History,” 409.
10. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myth.” 1955. Quoted in Edelstein, “Between Myth and History,” 400–01.
11. Edelstein, “Between Myth and History,” 410–12.
12. Paul de Man, “Literary History and Literary Modernity,” in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed., ed. Paul de Man (London: Routledge, 1986), 150.

13. Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 29.
14. Hayden White, "The Modernist Event," in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, ed. Vivian Sobchack (New York: Routledge, 1996), 17–38. For a similar line of thought, see Louis O. Mink, "Narrative Form as Cognitive Instrument," in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 129–49.
15. For one of the best descriptions of dialectical enchantment, see Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Sohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 111–40.
16. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 224.
17. *Ibid.*, 225–26.
18. Allen J. Scott, "Hollywood and the World: The Geography of Motion-Picture Distribution and Marketing," *Review of International Political Economy* 11, no. 1 (February 2004): 55.
19. Ruth Vasey has demonstrated the influence that the international market had on classical Hollywood as well, dictating representations of sex, politics, religion, and other issues. *The World According to Hollywood, 1918–1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).
20. On the de-nationalization of Hollywood and "global monoculture," see Charlie Keil, "'American' Cinema in the 1990s and Beyond: Whose Country's Filmmaking Is It Anyway?," in *The End of Cinema As We Know It: American Film in the Nineties*, ed. Jon Lewis (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 53–60; on contemporary Hollywood's debt to the studio era, see Hilary Radner, "Hollywood Redux: *All about My Mother and Gladiator*," in *The End of Cinema As We Know It*, 72–82; and also, demonstrating that it is not a recent phenomenon, part three of Robert B. Ray's *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930–1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 247–360.
21. Mali, *Mythistory*, 282.
22. He rightly notes that people were performing in films for more than a decade before they were described as "actors." See Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 18–21.
23. Though the "Method" was developed by Strasberg at the Actors Studio, it has come to stand for the techniques espoused by related acting coaches as well, most notably those of Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner, whose approaches may differ somewhat but whose ultimate goal is the same.
24. Sharon M. Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 8.
25. *Ibid.*, 57–59.
26. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor and others (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 44.
27. *Ibid.*, 46.
28. *Ibid.*, 65.
29. *Ibid.*, xxxvii.
30. *Ibid.*, xl.
31. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 7th ed., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (1975; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 722.
32. V. I. Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting*, trans. and ed. Ivor Montagu (1933 and 1935; repr., London: Vision Press, 1958).

33. John Champagne, ““Stop Reading Films!’: Film Studies, Close Analysis, and Gay Pornography,” *Cinema Journal* 36, no. 4 (1997): 76–97.
34. See the following: Charles Affron, *Star Acting: Gish, Garbo, Davis* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977), 178–84; James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 131–56; and Roberta Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 99–119.
35. Charles Affron, *Star Acting*, 5.
36. James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 31.
37. Konstantin Stanislavsky, *Building a Character*, trans. Elisabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1949), 280.
38. Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918; repr., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 144.
39. Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion*, 200.
40. Russell Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 143.

9 From Being to Acting

Performance in Cult Cinema

Ernest Mathijs

Take One

Jean-Claude Van Damme: Can't you see what's going on here? This man is dying!

Joey Tribiani: Aaagghhhhh.

Director: Cut.

Take Two

Van Damme: Can't you see what's going on here? This man is dying!

Joey: Aaagggghhhhh!

Director: Cut.

Joey: Aaaggh!

Take Three

Van Damme: Can't you see what's going on here? This man is dying!

Joey: Aaaaagggghhhhh!! Mommy!

Director: Cut.

Take Four

Van Damme: Can't you see what's going on here? This man is dead!

This scene occurs in Episode 2.13 of the American sitcom *Friends* (Warner Bros., 1994–2004). It takes place on a movie set, where aspiring actor Joey Tribiani (Matt LeBlanc) appears as an extra in a scene with martial arts star Jean-Claude Van Damme (played by himself). The scene's success depends on the complicity of an audience that (1) is aware of certain acting traditions and skills; (2) is ready to link that awareness to popular, vernacular views of certain actors; and (3) is willing to have its expectations, appreciations and interpretations of acting explode in a carnival of signs. Ultimately, only if an audience is willing to engage in a cultist



Figure 9.1 Acting about acting: Jean-Claude Van Damme as himself in *Friends* (Warner Home Video, 1994). Digital frame enlargement.

manner with the text does it “work.” Within the narrative of the episode, both Tribiani and Van Damme are clichéd types of actors: namely, the bit/repertory actor cast to inject realism into the story (an injury in this case), and the hero whose onscreen image pervades his offscreen appeal (who remains “himself” in all situations) (Figure 9.1). Outside the narrative, but within the framework of understanding presented by the episode, Tribiani and Van Damme are parodies of two oppositional approaches to acting: namely, the hyper-Method actor (the actor who becomes the part) and the mega-celebrity star (the part who becomes the actor). Both approaches—“impersonation” and “personification”—and their various manifestations (as “acting about acting,” “repertory acting” and the “cameo act”) will be at the center of this chapter’s consideration of their cult receptions.¹

CULT CINEMA AND ACTING ABOUT ACTING

In this section, I will outline some tools of acting in cult films and isolate what I believe to be a key feature of cult acting, namely, “referential acting.” *Excess* plays a key role here, as it serves as the common denominator for cult acting. Acting in cult movies has been described in the most ungenerous of terms—most of them related to the perceived excessiveness of such performances: hamming it up; being “over the top”; relying on winks and nudges

instead of skill (Joey Tribiani calls it “smelling the fart”—pausing for a beat when it is uncalled for as if taking in imaginary applause for a witty retort or a dramatic exit); being repetitive, un-nuanced and one-dimensional; self-indulgently exploiting offscreen reputations instead of genuinely investigating a character; and being overly invested in bodily display—gross, unattractive, preposterous, gratuitous (too loud, too naked, too self-aware).

“When you speak of cult movies, you speak in extremes,” says critic Danny Peary.² That is certainly true for “off-beat,” “atypical” or “lunatic” performances, which are frequently connected to specific reception niches—connoisseurs of the child star, the hardboiled cynic, the athlete, the sex bomb, the bodily disabled. Cult acting is ornamental. Johnny Depp’s parts, for example, consistently contain hyperbolic accessorizing (and not just in his baroque turn as the eccentric Captain Jack Sparrow). In cult acting parlance, yelling is to be understood as screaming or shrieking, deadpan becomes somnambulism, mad becomes demonic or Grand Guignol, melodramatic becomes schmaltzy and so on. Each of these descriptors of excess acknowledges, at least implicitly, the conditions of their receptions. Welch Everman observes that acting in cult films depends on the reception of the entire career of an actor—onscreen *and* offscreen.

[A film] might become special because it marks one of the first efforts by an actor. . . . *The Terror* is a cult film partly because of Jack Nicholson’s early appearance in a starring role. A brief appearance by Tom Hanks in *He Knows You’re Alone* adds a lot to an otherwise pedestrian slasher flick, and *Donovan’s Brain*—already a fine film—gets an aura boost from the presence of Nancy Davis, who would become First Lady Nancy Reagan. [A movie] might also gain special cult status because it features a late appearance by a fading star . . . [such as] Yvonne DeCarlo and John Ireland in *Satan’s Cheerleaders*.³

A core part of the excess that typifies acting in cult films is the fact that many of these films are explicitly *about* acting. Numerous cult films are intertextual syntheses of movies-quoting-movies, as Umberto Eco has it in his famous article on *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942).⁴ Cult films are also often set in story worlds in which the act of performing is built into the narrative: circuses, sideshows, asylums, musical or theatre stages, classroom presentations, the negotiation of prep school peer pressure and even the “theatre” of World War II in Rick’s Café in *Casablanca*. The attention in cult receptions to the way in which “performative surroundings” frame the stories of films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), *Freaks* (Tod Browning, 1932), *All About Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950), *A Star Is Born* (George Cukor, 1954), *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975) and even *Behind the Green Door* (Artie and Jim Mitchell, 1973) testifies to the importance of exaggerated reflexivity.

Tools of Acting in Cult Cinema

What does this stress on excess mean for the actual performance techniques in play? According to James Naremore, the eight key tools employed in acting are mimesis (imitation), ostentation (showing off), characterization (impersonation or the development of a persona, a “personal story” or motivation to frame action), polysemous expression (where one and the same posture reveals different emotions when placed in contrast with other images—one can think of the Kuleshov experiment here), referentiality (the role of other actors or their physical arrangement in giving meaning to an act), expertise (expressive skill), authority (experience and command) and “received action” (the transformation of ordinary behavior into performance by virtue of its bracketing within a theatrical frame or “anaphora”).⁵ In some respects, Naremore’s approach to acting is similar to that of Constantin Stanislavsky’s “System” and its diverse successors, particularly in his consideration of mimesis, characterization and authority. But Naremore’s approach differs in two respects: it seems to re-value some of the more formalistic aspects of acting (an aspect that is also called into attention by Aaron Taylor in his introduction to this volume), and it at least implies an audience reception. The omission of the audience from most writings on acting is indeed a sad affair.⁶ Naremore only writes summarily about audiences, but he does acknowledge that “received acting” depends on audience perception, and he admits that ostentation and referentiality only achieve meaning in situations where they “separate audience from performer, holding other gestures and signs up for show.”⁷ It is for these reasons that Naremore’s categories are a helpful point of departure for analyzing acting in cult films.

Acting as seen through cult receptions challenges and re-arranges many of Naremore’s tools, even if it does not quite obliterate them in the way that much criticism of performances in cult movies suggests. The biggest differences occur in the areas of acting that rely heavily on “normalized” relations between reality and representation, especially aesthetic understandings of realism and the logistics of moviemaking supporting them. Because the degree of realism of a cult movie is generally low, mimesis and characterization need to be understood as imitative explorations of formal conventions rather than imitation of reality or a search for psychological motivation. The way actors in cult films feed off genre conventions—and then exaggerate them—is a staple observation in the appreciation of cult cinema.⁸ Impersonation in cult acting needs to be taken literally, as a kind of copying of a previously established template that is essentially indistinguishable from the previous occurrence. In spite of Richard Dyer’s comments on the retroactive re-interpretation of Bogart’s contemporary image, the cult of Humphrey Bogart is a good example of such deliberate lack of distinction.⁹ Indeed, Umberto Eco reinforces this lack when he proposes that *Casablanca* is cinema that comes from cinema, claiming, “*Casablanca*

is a cult movie precisely because all the archetypes are there, because each actor repeats a part played on other occasions, and because human beings live not ‘real’ life but life as stereotypically portrayed in previous films.”¹⁰ Of course, the actors in *Casablanca* had no choice. As the much-storied tale of the confused production of the film confirms, there was no finished script, and actors had to resort to stock performances because there was no story arc available.

This perception of a lack of “direction”—frequently tied to low production values—that is so typical for cult movies has implications for Naremore’s notions of referentiality, expertise, authority and “received action”—all of which depend heavily on the logistics of the production and the talent of the crew. Even cult films whose logistics and direction were as flawless (or flawed) as *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), *The Brood* (David Cronenberg, 1979), *Showgirls* (Paul Verhoeven, 1995) or *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001) are frequently affected by this impression. Moreover, presuppositions about “directionless” performances have created the persistent perception that, in general, acting in cult films is very much a rogue enterprise, a case of “being thrown out there,” of being left to one’s own (limited) devices, exploited even, instead of being part of a smooth system. The performances of Oliver Reed in *The Brood* and of Patrick Swayze in *Donnie Darko*, for example, are nearly always linked to their innate “arsenal” of talents and evaluated more in terms of their offscreen images of living “hard” than in terms of the directing talents of David Cronenberg or Richard Kelly.¹¹ Equally, the reception of the acting of Elizabeth Berkley in *Showgirls* is almost unanimously reviled, either because of her supposed lack of talent, or because of the way her talent was inappropriately exploited by the moviemakers.¹² These elements bespeak a certain kind of referentiality, but not as we know it. We will return to that referentiality shortly.

The tools of acting less affected by (or indeed thriving under) cult reputations are in essence formalist, be they idiosyncratic or iconoclastic. Ostentation, generally reviled as a “proper” acting technique unless used in utmost moderation, is probably the most widely mentioned tool of acting in cult receptions, mostly because of its close affiliation to exaggeration. The acting careers of Judy Garland, Orson Welles, Tim Curry, Klaus Kinski, Bruce Lee, Sylvia Kristel, Pam Grier, Roger Moore or William Shatner, and the careers of Jean-Claude Van Damme and Joey Tribiani, too, are unthinkable without ostentation. Ostentation certainly characterizes every monster role—e.g., in the vampire subgenre, which plays up the bewitching physical excesses of its monsters: from the hunched shoulders and pointy ears of *Nosferatu* (F. W. Murnau, 1922) to the pale, abstinent brooders in *Twilight* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2008).

“Polysemous expression,” too, has widely been regarded as a pejorative component of acting, and the famous Kuleshov experiment that (allegedly) demonstrated how identical acting could produce different viewer emotions

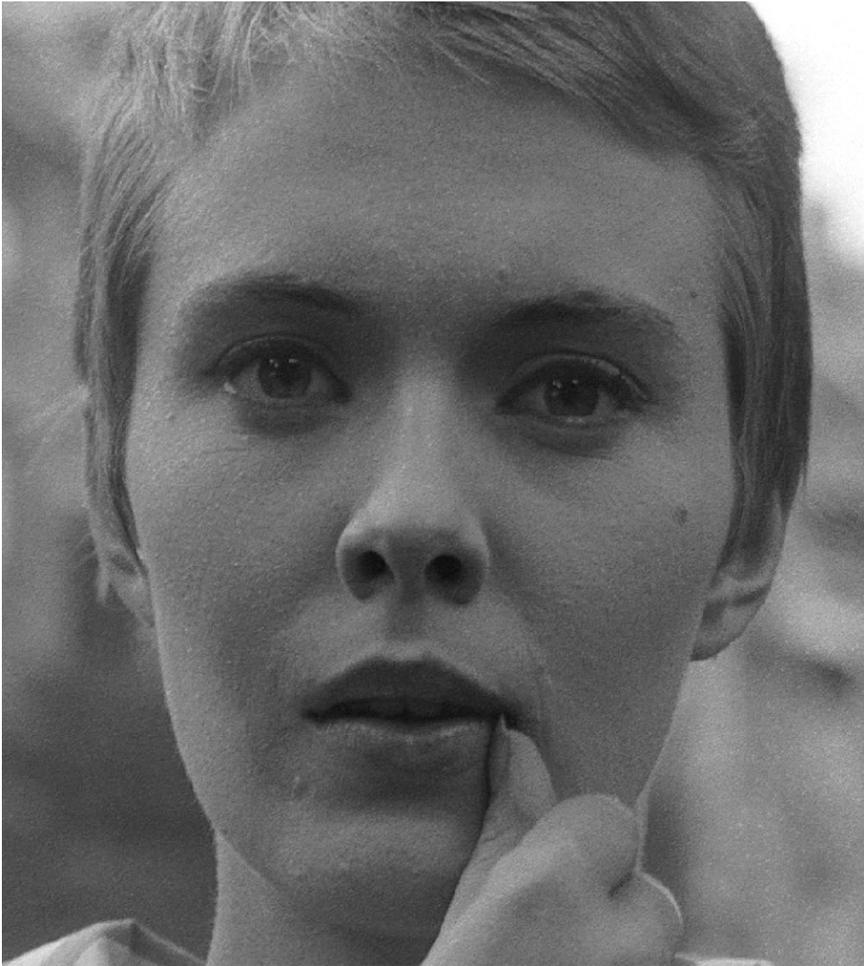


Figure 9.2 Polysemous expression: Jean Seberg imitates Jean-Paul Belmondo imitating Humphrey Bogart in *Breathless* (Criterion Collection, 1960). Digital frame enlargement.

through montage has done little to correct that image. Yet the expressive homogeneity of an actor with (sometimes deliberately) limited mimetic range or a minimal emotional repertoire is a crucial dimension in cultist contexts. We recall that polysemous expression refers to the variance in emotions and meaning that is produced by juxtaposing an actor's familiar or recurring gestures, movements, poses and expressions with varying images. The crucial point here is that in the case of cult acting, *polysemous expression refers less to a skill than to the management of a reception category*. A notable example is Jean Seberg, whose career was riddled with criticisms of her ineptitude to take charge of a role. However, a posthumous biographical

documentary, *From the Journals of Jean Seberg* (Mark Rappaport, 1995), reconstructed the Kuleshov experiment (with Seberg's face instead of that of the original actor, her rumored father-in-law, Russian star Ivan Mozhukhin) in order to demonstrate Seberg's polysemous expression was—as Jean-Luc Godard had intended it in *Breathless* (1960)—an asset for cultist appreciation (Figure 9.2).

Within the arena of cult cinema there is a strong connection among the tools of polysemous expression, received action and referentiality. If they are considered beyond the logistics of on-set filmmaking and editing and regarded as tools through which popular visibility and public image can become part of the assessment of the performance (as more and more studies of stardom tend to do), they virtually collapse into one concept.¹³ The cornerstones of acting in cult cinema would then be considered as follows: (1) holding the same facial or bodily posture to reveal different emotions that are only recognizable when placed in contrast with other images, including those from outside the film; (2) working with the mechanisms of the medium's public reputation in communicating expressions ("evil" not as a result of actor direction, but as a reflection on another performance's expression of "evil"); and (3) working not just with reference to other actors but also to all of popular culture (as, again, Eco suggests *Casablanca* does) in striking poses that reflect meanings with culture-wide resonance.

Referential Acting

I propose to call the tools of acting that thrive in the production and reception of cult cinema *referential acting*: the self-conscious design of a performance on the basis of a previous one, often by the same actor, but also based on real-life templates, exemplary models or clichéd stereotypes, including homage, quotes, plagiarisms and allusions. Referential acting has affinities with the presentational character of a magician's stage show, being rife with winks, nudges and signature gestures (and even direct address). It is the kind of acting in which meaning in an activity is only achieved by dint of its reference to another act—one outside the closed caption of the performance frame. With referential acting, the referent is not just a gesture, act or performance that preceded it in the same scene or even the same film, but can also be considered as an actor's mobilization of her or his professional persona, or even as an act that has become culturally canonical or clichéd. Referential acting can be a matter of saying "I'll be right back" in a horror film, or it can be identified as the ingénue's naïve smile, the fainting lady's hand against her forehead or the detective's raised eyebrow (all examples from one segment in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*).

In *From Dusk 'till Dawn* (Robert Rodriguez, 1995), for example, audiences are given series after series of such references (Figure 9.3). In the Titty Twister strip-joint, the narrative pauses and an announcer (Danny Trejo!) tells us that nightclub dancer Satanico Pandemonicum (Salma Hayek) will



Figure 9.3 Acting as intertextual reference. Spot the cameos in this shot from *From Dusk 'till Dawn* (Alliance Home Entertainment, 1995). Digital frame enlargement.

appear “for our viewing pleasure.” As she begins her act, we catch close-up glimpses of some of the onlookers: Tom Savini, Fred Williamson, Cheech Marin and Greg Nicotero! What are they doing here? Their referential acting is a road sign that prefaces, accompanies and reinforces the story’s switch from road movie to vampire flick, and it prepares it for cultist receptions.¹⁴ At points, the referent can be personalized: Sharon Stone crossing her legs in any performance after *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992); William Shatner using the word “beam” outside the context of *Star Trek* (ideally followed by an ostentatious gesture—see *Airplane II* [Ken Finkleman, 1982]); or *any* of the performances in the *Star Trek* prequel (J. J. Abrams, 2009), a film modeled solely for cultists. Referential acting brings representational acting back to presentational performance, to the *acting* itself—the activity that is undertaken by the performer.

FROM BEING TO ACTING

Up until this point, I have limited my discussion to professional approaches to acting that see the actor as a trained specialist—as an expert with skills and talent that can be applied, tested, molded, perfected and reapplied. The conception of the actor as specialist is a common one, especially since the evolution of acting’s professionalization runs more or less parallel with that of cinema. That acting has not always been readily identified as a craft or form of creative labor is illustrated by a development in two types of acting that have particular resonance in cult cinema: namely, “repertory acting,” and “cameo acting.” Both have moved from an emphasis on “being” to

“acting”—from amateur yet cunning injections of unfiltered “worldliness” into the systematized and professionalized tools of make-believe.¹⁵

Repertory Acting

Repertory acting, also referred to as “character acting,” stresses versatility in acting range, but formulaic repetitiveness in terms of the depth and kind of role one plays. Historically, the term “repertory acting” refers to the demands of the theatre repertory company, where the rotation of roles meant a small troupe of actors had to skill themselves in mastering a wide variety of smaller parts. In screen acting, where troupes are a rarity and rotation occurs across films and serials, the term became replaced by “character acting” because of the characteristics of the roles involved. The term “repertory acting” remains in use as an overarching term that also covers theatre, but the addition of terminology referring to the exploration of a role is a strong indication of how the approach has changed.

Today, repertory acting falls in between the embodiment of what Stanislavsky would call a character (a well-rounded, deepened role) and what Naremore would call a type (a stereotypical, one-dimensional role). Rudolf Arnheim describes the individuated possible person played by a character actor as “exaggerated and caricaturized” (“man as he is” instead of “man as he should be”).¹⁶ Such a character tends to be played by a minor player, “with a face and voice so vividly eccentric that it saves writers and directors a good deal of trouble.”¹⁷ Character actors tend to specialize in a small variety of roles, for which they are known. In that sense, their expertise does save writers and directors a good deal of trouble indeed. Their affiliation with certain roles also means character acting is often limited by the demands of genres. The “vivid expressiveness” of character actors makes the look, shape and posture determine the role and, hence, the acting. As such, the rapport with audiences can only be of a certain kind, and by virtue of its repetitiveness, it can become somewhat more intertextual and referential than mainstream cinema usually requires.¹⁸

As can already be inferred from Naremore’s and Arnheim’s observations, repertory acting is rooted in bodily display (not just the head, but the entire body). Its origins lie in *typage*, a performance tradition that

depends on cultural stereotypes, but, more important, it emphasizes the physical eccentricities of actors (often, by preference, nonprofessionals). Kuleshov argued that “because film needs real material and not a pretense of reality . . . it is not theater actors but “types” who should act in film—that is, people who, in themselves, as they were born, present some kind of interest for cinematic treatment.”¹⁹

Naremore is at pains to distinguish *typage* from typecasting or character acting by insisting on a shifted focus from the body to the face and voice,

and from amateur to professional acting. In doing this, he follows a familiar direction taken by most writing on repertory acting: toward an increased perception (and indeed self-perception) of character acting as *professional* acting, and away from any criticism of insensitivity toward potential connections between physical eccentricities, disability and acting. In short, he identifies a move from “being” to “acting.”

Because cult receptions tend to have fewer qualms about discussing the use or exploitation of physical abilities and agilities, this move has taken a lot longer to be completed in discussions of acting in cult films. In fact, there is still some ambiguity as to the situation of repertory acting within cult films—ambiguity that aids the perpetuation of cult reputations. For instance, when Linda Williams describes melodrama, horror and pornography as “body genres” that rely heavily on the solicitation of emotions through explicit bodily displays (tears, injuries, sex), she essentially discusses what Naremore would call *typage* but what actually counts as repertory acting in these particular genres.²⁰ Indeed, only cult receptions persist in discussing the technical aspects of physical sex acting as both professional *and* amateur (with minute distinctions between the performances of well-endowed porn stars like John Holmes or Ron Jeremy, or ethereal skinny girls like Lynn Lowry). Posture matters as well. The exemplary case here is Giovanni Lombardo Radice (aka John Morghen), whose anguished look and lean and mean physical demeanor have brought him much work as the victim of the most horrible deaths in gore horror films such as *Cannibal Apocalypse* (Antonio Margheriti, 1980), *City of the Living Dead* (Lucio Fulci, 1980), *House on the Edge of the Park* (Ruggero Deodato, 1981), *Cannibal Ferox* (Umberto Lenzi, 1981) and even *Gangs of New York* (Martin Scorsese, 2002). Discussions of Radice’s performances infer there is an innate, natural or amateur aspect to his acting.²¹ The entire reception of *Freaks*, too, is saturated with observations on the “being” of the freaks, as distinct from their “acting.”

In sum, the tools of referential acting have only gradually entered discussions of repertory acting in cult cinema. And yet, considerable attention is still devoted to “good old” ostentation—as a form of being—and to more refined skills, or more complex connections with culture at large.

Cameo Acting

A similar development can be charted in the cultish uses and reception of cameo acting. In essence, a cameo act is a short appearance by a publicly known person who is instantly recognizable—and therefore harder to accept as a character than as him or herself. Originally, cameo acts appeared as themselves (“being”) or as non-descript extras within a scene, but gradually their significance has increased to include larger, speaking parts (“acting”). Cameos add pleurably intertextual and reflexive dimensions to a movie, and are therefore staple features of cult cinema, either in their

planted form, as publicity stunts to provoke audience reactions, or through their receptions, when audiences start noticing recurring appearances independently. Cameos exist in numerous categories: winks to the past like Marlene Dietrich in *Touch of Evil* (Welles, 1958), Bela Lugosi in *Plan Nine From Outer Space* or Patrick Swayze in *Donnie Darko*; rock stars like Alice Cooper in *Prince of Darkness* (John Carpenter, 1987); effects crew like Tom Savini (numerous zombie films since 1978); scream queens like Barbara Steele in *Piranha* (Joe Dante, 1978); or perennial repertory stars like Barbara Bouchet in *Gangs of New York*. Recent decades have seen an explosion in complexly intertextual cameos. Examples include E. T.'s flash of recognition toward a child in a Yoda costume in *E. T. the Extraterrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1984); Dirk Benedict's character, Face, pointing to a man dressed up as a *Battlestar Galactica* Cylon robot in the credit sequence of *The A-Team* (Universal Television, 1983–1986); Schwarzenegger's and Stallone's stabs at each other in *Twins* (Ivan Reitman, 1988) and *Demolition Man* (Marco Brambilla, 1993); or John Ratzenberger's cheeky comments in *Cars* (John Lasseter and Joe Ranft, 2006) on his recurring Pixar cameos.²² After Keith Richards' well-publicized cameo in *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* (Gore Verbinski, 2007), one could ask if the technique has not been exhausted.

Each of these categories and instances, fuzzy as they are, are complicated by the peculiarities of their receptions. For the sake of clarity, we will concentrate on the director's cameo. The most famous of director cameos in the history of film are undoubtedly Alfred Hitchcock's. If any of Hitchcock's films have cult appeal (as many critics believe), the cameo parts of the master of suspense, and their receptions, are integral to that reputation.²³ Other well-known examples of directors' cameos, also linked to cult status, include the appearances of Martin Scorsese (in *Taxi Driver* [Scorsese, 1976], *Dreams* [Akira Kurosawa, 1990], *30 Rock* [NBC, 2006–2010]) and John Waters (in *Something Wild* [Jonathan Demme, 1986], *Sweet and Lowdown* [Woody Allen, 1999], *Seed of Chucky* [Don Mancini, 2004]).²⁴ Their functions as endorsers and "engines of intertextuality" are essential for their receptions.

Since *Into the Night* (John Landis, 1985), films have become inundated with director cameos. In Landis' film, horror film director David Cronenberg is one of a dozen directors making an appearance.²⁵ Shortly after his appearance in *Into the Night*, Cronenberg's arguably best-known cameo occurred in his own film, *The Fly* (1986). Mark Kermode describes with delight how he formed a bond with one other viewer during a screening of *The Fly* when both of them audibly expressed their surprise at recognizing Cronenberg in the cameo role of the gynecologist aborting a mutant fetus: "While everyone else cringed, the two of us chuckled smugly from opposite sides of the auditorium, like ships signaling each other in deep fog."²⁶ The anecdote demonstrates how Cronenberg's appearance changed Kermode's and his elusive co-viewer's mode of reception. In bringing about this change, Cronenberg's presence was as totemic as that of any star.

The skills involved in a cameo performance are limited, though not necessarily uncomplicated. The actor is to “be her/his public self,” which means the act of imitation is transferred into one of “being,” which essentially destroys any verisimilitude a scene with a cameo tries to achieve. It collapses the referent of the referential act into the reference. Yet that “being” cannot be too far removed from the demands that “acting”—in its various manifestations as characterization, polysemous expression and received action—put on the scene (after all, the cameo scene still needs to be “cut into” the whole of the film). The tension between these two demands of acting and being is often solved through tricks and props. In Kermode’s example, Cronenberg’s potential lack of polysemous expression and received action is masked, literally, by having his face partly hidden behind a surgical mask. Any kind of garment, accessory or make-up can fulfill the same function (Tom Savini’s zombie-like make-up used in his cameos—which Kermode mentions further on in his article—even fulfills a double function here, as both marker and concealment).²⁷ Physical distinction (such as age) can function as a mask: for many viewers, the confrontation with the “older” Brigitte Lahaie in her cameo in *The Ordeal* (Fabrice Du Welz, 2004) constitutes such a break from the memory of her as a much younger female vampire in Jean Rollin’s exploitation movies that it works as both a cameo and part of the narrative. Camera movement and framing too can solve the tension between these demands—as is demonstrated in *Annie Hall* (Woody Allen, 1977), when Woody Allen abruptly pulls Marshall McLuhan into the frame so that the renowned communication theorist can silence a moron who vociferously misinterprets McLuhan’s work while in a queue at a movie theatre.

A cameo performance is a form of referential acting. Much of the impact of a cameo role resides in how it creates and substantiates a complex web of interconnected details—an entanglement that is crucial to the reception of cult cinema. Recognizing a cameo part requires a cultural effort from the viewer (one that is closely linked to what Mark Jancovich has called the subcultural capital of cult receptions).²⁸ By recognizing a cameo, a viewer displays a firm knowledge of, and deep commitment to, a form of cinema. Sharing that knowledge and commitment is central to the reception. At the same time, cameo roles have to add something to the film. It means something to *The Fly*’s reception that Cronenberg appears at exactly the moment of abortion (a dream sequence, but also one that links well to themes prevalent in his other films)—it becomes a marker for meaning. Without the reception, the marker is meaningless, but without the marker, the reception loses significance. A most apt theoretical notion for this double emphasis is that of the anaphoric gesture: the referential act that does not reveal its referent—polysemous until it is connected with a reception and a meaning.²⁹ If Cronenberg had only ever made one cameo appearance, it would have meant (next to) nothing.

Because Cronenberg has made more than twenty-five cameo appearances, however, a degree of “acting” has crept in to his appearances. Cronenberg’s first roles were undertaken in support of his own work: he is an extra in the trippy *Palace of Pleasure* (John Hofsess, 1966–1968), in which he appears semi-nude, slipping into bed with a man and a woman; he also plays an extra in both *Shivers* (1975) and *Rabid* (1977). However, Cronenberg’s cameos started to increase in frequency after he had become a “cult star”—not for acting but for directing. Most of these parts occur in the wake of his breakthrough as the “Baron of Blood” (a popularity that was hailed by fanzines such as *Fangoria* and *Cinefantastique*) and as a “cultural hero” of Canadian cinema. In other words, these cameos were only recognized as moments of “acting” well after other Cronenberg cameos had been accepted as such. Therefore, they have only become meaningful as markers many years after they happened, as capsules of information for diehard fans for whom Cronenberg had become a totemic figure in expressing their strong affiliation with the horror genre and/or Canadian cinema.

Notably, though, Cronenberg has only appeared portrayed a director twice. In *Trial by Jury* (Heywood Gould, 1994), where his approach to the craft is one that references exploitation cinema: he is seen with a call-girl on his arm, mingling with mafia gangsters; in *Barney’s Version* (Richard J. Lewis, 2010), he is a tired director who passively shoots an episode of a soap opera. In most other cases, he manages the double tension between “being” and “acting” by sticking to stock characters: project manager in the film that normalized the use of directors in cameos *Into the Night*; gynecologist in *The Fly*; obstetrician in *Dead Ringers* (David Cronenberg, 1988); homicidal doctor in the horror classic *Nightbreed* (Clive Barker, 1990); cold-blooded and mild-mannered contract killer in the indie *To Die For* (Gus Van Sant, 1995); director of the board of governors of a hospital that illegally trades in body parts in *Extreme Measures* (Michael Apted, 1996); the voice of a car impound clerk in *Crash* (David Cronenberg, 1996); gas company administrator in *Last Night* (1998); compassionate Catholic priest in the mutilation-obsessed horror-thriller *Resurrection* (Russell Mulcahy, 1999); and—again—bureaucratic doctor in *Jason X* (2001), the tenth installment in a franchise that rose to fame parallel with him and the directorial debut of one of his former effects designers, Jim Isaac.

For Adam Lowenstein, Cronenberg’s roles as “murderous embodiment[s] of bureaucratic disembodiment” allow viewers to disconnect themselves from seeing him only as himself.³⁰ At the same time, of course, these characters reflect the familiar themes that viewers recognize from Cronenberg’s own movies. They also represent Cronenberg’s public and historical connection with themes in Canadian cinema and the horror genre. This is even more striking if we consider Cronenberg’s lesser-known roles in the vampire movie *Blood and Donuts* (Holly Dale, 1995), in the underground-indie *Boozecan* (1994) directed by one of his fetish actors Nicholas Campbell, in

the short *Blue* (Don McKellar, 1993), in *The Stupids* (John Landis, 1996), in *The Judge* (Mick Garris, 2001), and—as doctor again—in the television series *Alias* (Touchstone Television, 2003) and *Happy Town* (ABC, 2010). Together, many of these roles are endorsements: “acts of support for friends and family—the family of his oeuvre, the family of Canadian cinema . . . and the family of ‘old times’—helping out chums such as Garris and Landis.”³¹

In sum, as a form of referential acting, cameo acting relies heavily on complex networks of references instigated and maintained by the “being” of the cameo appearance. Its very presence is enough to trigger interpretations of referentiality, polysemous expression, ostentation and “received action.” As Cronenberg’s acting career shows, however, these cameos can gradually take on some of the elements of “proper performance” (note the move from appearance to performance). Still, even then, they maintain their referentiality—never bogged down into only representation.

CONCLUSION: “MAD ACTING” AND BECOMING (MORE) “REAL”

Referential acting corresponds nicely with the kinds of cinematic pleasures sought out by cultists and other such “avid audiences.”³² As such, then, referential acting is a collection of tools whose wide application in cult films demands attention and asks critics of acting to closely and continuously monitor the cultural surroundings within which screen performances occur. After all, these surroundings affect not just the performance of the actor, but, as we have seen, they also shape the receptions of such performances, in turn influencing new ones.

Not all forms of acting in cult cinema are swayed by the tools of referential acting; some remain stubbornly excessive and exaggerated, and they are not reigned in by professional techniques. One such extreme performance style can only be described as “mad acting.” Mad acting is, in theory, the form of acting furthest removed from referential acting. Its aspiration is to abolish the distinction between reference and referent, between persona and person, but it does not want to become “only acting”; it wants to remain “only being.” The anaphoric gesture it desires is almost absolute. As an aspiration, mad acting has a long history. From the 1920s onward, and as most approaches to acting became more and more professionalized, a school of thought emerged that wanted to bring acting back to its origins as an expression of the aspiration to communicate—what theatre director Peter Brook called “a reality deeper than the fullest form of everyday life”: a mystical feeling of union between audience and performer that concentrates on emotional harmony and a communal identity.³³ This idea finds its roots in the work of Jacques Copeau and, especially, Antonin Artaud. In the 1960s, Fernando Arrabal, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski and Joseph

Beuys launched similar proposals. They drew a lot of criticism from acting coaches such as Lee Strasberg, who called their wish to “return to some mystical womb” laudable, but found the impact on the audience to be “disappointing” in execution.³⁴ It has indeed been problematic to see theories designed especially for “live” confrontations between audiences and performers work effectively even in theatre.

And yet, if we look at vernacular and cursory descriptions of many acting performances in cult films, we note that this form of acted “madness” fares rather well in cult cinema. In numerous critical comments on “mad” performances—Max Schreck in *Nosferatu*, Kenneth Anger in *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (Kenneth Anger, 1969), Jackie Gleason in *Skidoo* (Otto Preminger, 1969), Divine in *Pink Flamingos* (John Waters, 1972), Klaus Kinski in *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (Werner Herzog, 1972), Björk in *Dancer in the Dark* (Lars von Trier, 2000) and many, many roles by Udo Kier—commentators observe and admire a form of “purity” and “possession” that supersedes the professional and gives audiences a glimpse into trances, summons or demonic wrath. Invariably, these performances have been described as “raw,” and because attempts to understand them have remained oblique, they have conjured their own cults in ways similar to the near-mystical fascination elicited by magicians, raging priests, foaming lunatics, shamen, somnambulists and possessed souls.³⁵

Neither Joey Tribiani nor Jean-Claude Van Damme even try to achieve mad acting, and not because it cannot be learned but because they try to be professional first and foremost. Their calculated excess in referential acting and their use of the tools of ostentation, referentiality and polysemous expression may be repetitive (Tribiani and Van Damme *do* always look the same in the various shots of the “death” scene, which is also in keeping with the scene’s lampooning of the tediousness of film production), but it remains professional through and through. Because of the absence of any reference to “being” to balance the referentiality, the performances of Matt LeBlanc (as Joey Tribiani) and Van Damme have not attracted cultist receptions comparable to most of the films and actors mentioned in this chapter. Maybe that will happen when “Jean-Claude” or “Joey” becomes more real.³⁶

In his discussion of acting, Naremore posits an intrinsic connection between acting and culture. He paraphrases Lee Strasberg: “to become human we put on an act.”³⁷ Acting in cult cinema asks us to also consider this formulation the other way around.³⁸

NOTES

1. The terms “impersonation” and “personification” are discussed at length in Barry King, “Articulating Stardom,” in *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*, ed. Jeremy Butler (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 130.

2. Danny Peary, *Cult Movies* (New York: Delta Books, 1981), xiii.
3. Welch Everman, *Cult Horror Films* (New York: Citadel Press, 1993), 2.
4. Umberto Eco, "Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage," in *Travels in Hyperreality*, ed. Umberto Eco (1985; repr., London: Picador, 1987), 197–211.
5. James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 23.
6. Stanislavsky may state that "to act without an audience is the same as singing in a room without resonance," and that an "audience [is a] sounding board," but he never really explores the function of the audience for actors and often sees them as an obstacle, that is, as much in need of discipline as the actors. "It is much more valuable to have a quiet audience," he states, before going on to claim that "as the actor stops being concerned about audience, they begin to watch." See Constantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Handbook* (1924; repr., London: Routledge, 2004), 27.
7. Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 23.
8. See, for instance, Alex Cox, *Moviedrome II* (London: BBC, 1993), 1.
9. Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 2nd ed. (London: BFI, 1998), 63.
10. Eco, "Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage," 208.
11. See Ernest Mathijs, *The Cinema of David Cronenberg: From Baron of Blood to Cultural Hero* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 72–101; and Ernest Mathijs, "Tijd, cultcinema en de jaren tachtig: *Back to the Future* en *Peggy Sue Got Married* via *Donnie Darko* en *It's a Wonderful Life*," in *Filmsporen: Opstellen over Verleden en Geheugen*, ed. Daniel Biltreyst en Christel Stalpaert (Ghent: Academia Press, 2007), 181–95.
12. Observe the various viewpoints in Akira Mizuta Lippit and others, "Round Table: *Showgirls*," *Film Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2003): 32–46.
13. For a consideration of the integral role that an actor's public image plays in our assessment of her or his performance, see Peter Krämer, "Faith in Relations Between People: Audrey Hepburn, *Roman Holiday* and European Integration," in *100 Years of European Cinema*, ed. Diana Holmes and Alison Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 195–206; and Ernest Mathijs, "Audrey Hepburn," in *501 Movie Stars*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (New York: Barron's Publishers, 2007), 368–70.
14. For an elaboration on this scene, see Ernest Mathijs, "Cut & Copy: Lichamelijkheid en Reflexiviteit in de Horror Film," in *Film/TV/Genre*, ed. Daniël Biltreyst and Philippe Meers (Ghent: Academia Press, 2004), 109–10.
15. Michael Kirby sees "acting" and "being" as poles on a continuum. I would like to maintain them as separate categories that can be applied simultaneously. See Michael Kirby, "On Acting and Not-Acting," *The Drama Review* 16, no. 1 (1972): 3–15.
16. Rudolf Arnheim, "In Praise of Character Actors," in *Film Essays and Criticism*, trans. Brenda Benthien (1931; repr., Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 52.
17. Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 249.
18. There is a burgeoning body of work on repertory acting, and it has reception appeal—although these analyses usually don't connect with each other to inform an integrated view on this undervalued form of acting. An exception is Diane Negra, "'Queen of the Indies': Parker Posey's Niche Stardom and the Taste Cultures of Independent Film," in *Contemporary American Independent Cinema*, ed. Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt (London: Routledge, 2005), 71–88.
19. Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 25.
20. Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): 2–13.

21. See Patricia MacCormack, "Masochistic Cinesexuality: The Many Deaths of Giovanni Lombardo Radice," in *Alternative Europe: Eurotrash and Exploitation Cinema Since 1945*, ed. Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 106–16.
22. Eco makes note of *E.T.*'s reference to *Star Wars* in "Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage," 210. Steven Spielberg and George Lucas have an ongoing history of jokily referring to each other's work: the droid R2D2 makes a nearly subliminal cameo in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977), while members of the same species of alien as *E.T.* make a brief appearance in *The Phantom Menace* (1999).
23. Danny Peary mentions *Vertigo* and *Psycho* as cult films. See Peary, *Cult Movies*, 375–78; and Danny Peary, *Cult Movies 3* (New York: Fireside, 1988), 187–93, respectively.
24. Naremore refers to Scorsese's cameo as a television director in *The King of Comedy* (Martin Scorsese, 1983) as a "doubling." See Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 270.
25. Rumor has it that these appearances were Landis' way of acknowledging support he had received during the tribulations that followed the disastrous shooting of *Twilight Zone: The Movie* (1983).
26. Mark Kermode, "I Was a Teenage Horror Fan, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Linda Blair," in *Ill Effects: The Media/Violence Debate*, 2nd ed., ed. Martin Barker and Julian Petley (London: Routledge, 2001), 129.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Marc Janovich, "Cult Fictions: Cult Movies: Subcultural Capital and the Production of Cultural Distinctions," *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 306–22.
29. See Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 23.
30. Adam Lowenstein, "David Cronenberg and the Face of National Authorship," *Kinokultura* 6, September 29, 2004, www.kinokultura.com/articles/oct04-natcine-lowenstein.html.
31. Mathijs, *The Cinema of David Cronenberg*, 200–01.
32. The term "avid audience" is further operationalized in Graeme Harper and Xavier Mendik, "The Chaotic Text and the Sadean Audience: Narrative Transgressions of a Contemporary Cult Film," in *Unruly Pleasures: The Cult Film and its Critics*, ed. Xavier Mendik and Graeme Harper (Guilford: FAB Press, 2000), 237–49.
33. Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (1968; repr., New York: Touchstone, 1996), 42.
34. Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method* (New York: Penguin/Plum, 1987), 178–82.
35. In the case of Max Schreck, this obsession with "purity" even led to rumors that suggested he was a real vampire. These rumors form the core of the narrative of *Shadow of the Vampire* (Elias Merhige, 2001). Also see Michael Mangan, *Performing Dark Arts: A Cultural History of Conjuring* (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), 11–18.
36. It could be argued that this process has already started for Van Damme with the minor cult reputation of *JCVD* (Mabrouk El Mechri, 2008), in which he also plays himself, but this time with much more reference to his "being" as a private person instead as a star.
37. Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 22.
38. This research was supported by an HSS research grant from the Faculty of Arts of the University of British Columbia (project #12R72560).

10 Acting and Performance in Home Movies and Amateur Films

Liz Czach

A projector starts up with a whirl, the lamp is turned on and the celluloid ghosts come to life. Appearing on screen are family members and friends, recordings of trips, celebrations and holidays. The images are familiar, a repertoire of filmic memories of events past and of people long dead. These are home movies, those films best characterized as the recordings of domestic everyday life made by family members to be shared in the private sphere. A staple of domestic image production from the 1920s until surpassed by video in the 1980s, the home movie is easily identifiable: the settings are naturalistic, the subjects are non-actors and the events recorded are taken from everyday life. Distinct from either the documentary or the fiction film, the home movie's aesthetics are also instantly recognizable: shaky camera, flash panning, grainy image, blurry focus and cut-off heads. These home movie traits are so ubiquitous that they are readily mimicked in narrative films and commercials that aim to replicate the home movie "look." Yet a further trait of the home movie aesthetic needs to be acknowledged—the home movie performance. Home movies engender a unique performative style, one that is distinct from performances in amateur fictional films, Hollywood narrative films, documentaries and contemporary home video. The home movie performance is marked by the subject's awareness of being filmed, but this awareness is part of the home movie's performance aesthetic, and home moviemakers generally do not attempt to eradicate the traces of this awareness, but rather accentuate and celebrate them.

A woman, framed in a medium close-up, looks into the movie camera. First she smiles, but as the camera continues to film, she begins to blush, her hands come to her face hiding her mouth and then she begins to laugh, eventually turning away from the camera. This brief moment is a classic example of home movie performativity: a combination of shyness and awkwardness mixed with an awareness of being filmed and a display of uncertainty about what is expected from one's performance.¹ This timidity in front of the camera is quaintly nostalgic indicative of a time before YouTube and the ubiquity of cameras recording our every move; when appearing on film was novel, and people were unsure of what to do when the camera was turned on. In this case, the woman seems to be first posing for

a photograph, since she stands still, faces the camera and smiles. However, as the filming continues past the anticipated brief duration of a snapshot, she becomes ill at ease and doesn't seem to know how to occupy herself. It seems apparent that the person filming her is familiar to her, particularly given the relatively close framing of the shot and since the smile and laugh directed at the camera operator display genuine warmth. This brief shot, like so many other home movie performances, is charming.

The uniqueness of the performance in home movies is evident in the hundreds of 16mm, 8mm and Super 8mm films I have viewed at Home Movie Day events, in archives, on the internet and in private collections. In arguing for a specificity of home movie performativity, I am positioning these performances as distinct from performances in amateur fictional films or films that evince the evidentiary qualities of documentaries. To further elaborate on these distinctions, it is helpful to turn to James Naremore's expansive definition of film acting in his groundbreaking study, *Acting in the Cinema*. He writes,

people in a film can be regarded in at least three different senses: as actors playing theatrical personages, as public figures playing theatrical versions of themselves, and as documentary evidence. If the term *performance* is defined in its broadest sense, it covers the last category as much as the first: when people are caught unawares by a camera, they become objects to be looked at, and they usually provide evidence of role-playing in everyday life; when they know they are being photographed, they become role-players of another sort.²

These different types of filmed performances can be correlated with amateur film and home movies. First, there are those non-professional films that replicate fictional film norms and thus employ actors playing characters—that is, the amateur fictional film. Second, there are home movies in which people perform themselves but in a theatrical, that is, exaggerated and conscious manner—what I have characterized as home movie performativity. And finally, there are the home movies that seem to catch people performing their daily roles without cognizance of the camera. These home movies provide documentary evidence of everyday role-playing. In providing an overview of the three different senses in which people appear in amateur film and home movies, I shall illuminate the manner in which home movie performativity—where subjects ham it up for the camera or make other playful gestures that recognize the process of filmmaking—has been characterized as self-conscious or awkward, and negatively interpreted as unnatural, and therefore, poorly acted. I argue, however, that these excessive gestures should be productively rethought as the unique attributes of the home movie performance.

The self-conscious home movie performance has been negatively interpreted as displaying awkwardness, nervousness or being ill at ease, and

thus ruining home movies. This disapproving characterization is most evident in the vast majority of how-to books, manuals and articles, or what I call the ameliorative literature that offered non-professional filmmakers tips on making “better” home movies. Books such as Kodak’s *Better Home Movies* (first published in the 1940s and continued with revised editions until the 1970s) presented filmmakers advice on everything from camera technique to editing and adding soundtracks as a means for home moviemakers to improve their filmmaking efforts. This Kodak series falls in line with a long tradition of ameliorative literature that emerged in tandem with non-professional filmmaking equipment marketed from the 1920s onward.³ Although this how-to literature tended to focus on the mechanics of filmmaking, suggestions on how to improve acting also appeared from time to time. The thinking was that if home moviemakers needed help in eliminating the home movie’s tell-tale signs—shaky camera movements, swish pans and cut-off heads—they equally needed advice on eliminating another prominent feature: the over-the-top performance. If home movies were to get better, the performances would also need improvement.

This ameliorative literature steadfastly promoted the elimination of conscious performativity urging instead actions and acting that audiences would read as “natural.” What was less clear, however, was how these more natural—and, by implication, better—performances were to be achieved. Should this natural performance be achieved through capturing natural behavior or through acting? Here the literature is odds, fluctuating between advice that counsels filmmakers to merely catch natural behavior and then, in other instances, cautioning that only hard work and the effort of acting will produce natural-looking results. In a broader discussion of screen performance, Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke have recently characterized the divergent positions of “behaving naturally” versus “acting naturally” for the camera as the “capturing” versus “crafting” approaches to achieving natural behavior on film.⁴ Although Baron and Carnicke explicitly discuss narrative film performances, the distinction between acting and being, as well as capturing and crafting, are pertinent to my investigation of performance in home movies and amateur films. In providing an overview of two positions—“acting naturally” and “behaving naturally”—as they appear in the ameliorative literature, I will make clear that neither of the suggested approaches is particularly fruitful. Each, in its own way, is premised on the elimination of the unique, consciously performed aspects of the home movie performance, which in turn are deserving of productive reevaluation.

ACTING: CRAFTING NATURAL BEHAVIOR

A casual survey of the ameliorative literature produced for the amateur filmmaker yields a recurring guiding assumption: home moviemakers should replicate the norms and traditions of Hollywood filmmaking—that is, they

should adhere to the principals of narrative fiction films. An apt illustration of this dictum is seen in a 1950s issue of *Bolex Reporter*, a magazine produced by 16mm camera manufacturer Bolex and aimed at filmmaking enthusiasts. Included in one issue was a free copy of a recording entitled "Ross Hunter's Top Secrets of Hollywood Movie Making." The record features the commentary of Ross Hunter, a Hollywood producer whose screen credits include Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) and *Magnificent Obsession* (1954). Hunter reveals professional filmmaking "secrets" and instructs aspiring filmmakers on how to make more professional-looking films. Home movies can be improved if they follow Hollywood conventions. A narrator on the record asks the listener:

When you go to your neighborhood theatre and see a good movie, do you wish you could make movies with that professional Hollywood touch of quality? Well, here's good news: with top-grade home movie equipment and some basic camera techniques, your own movies can share that Hollywood excellence.⁵

The key assumption of this record is that filmmakers wanted their movies to replicate Hollywood films in all respects. Thus, unsurprisingly, the record covers standard advice on how to make fictional films, including recommendations on preparing a story or script, editing, varying camera angles and shot length and properly lighting subjects. But most pertinent to my discussion here is the advice to "avoid mugging."⁶ Excessive hamming it up for the camera typifies many home movies, with subjects waving at the camera, sticking their tongues out or generally clowning around and making other playful gestures that recognize the process of filmmaking. The ameliorative literature consistently cites these types of performances as a contributing reason that films are perceived as amateurish.

Yet despite the advice of the ameliorative literature, not all home moviemakers wanted to, or attempted to, adopt fictional filmmaking techniques. In fact, there is a clear disjuncture between the how-to advice and actual filmmaking practices. The vast majority of small-gauge movies made by non-professionals that I have viewed make no attempt to replicate professional standards or Hollywood conventions. Thus, it is imperative to distinguish between amateur filmmakers who were attempting Hollywood-style fictional films and home moviemakers who did not adopt the advice to "improve" their films. When this distinction is made, it becomes clear that the advice literature, in advocating the elimination of home movie performativity, is clearly aimed at filmmakers wishing to professionalize their work. So, what advice is offered to the steadfast director of amateur fiction films who wishes to elicit a greater degree of "natural" unself-consciousness from his performers?

In 1951, Focal Press, a publisher specializing in how-to manuals and guides for amateur photographers and filmmakers, released *How to Act*

for *Home Movies*. This joint effort co-written by an amateur movie director (Rose) and a professional movie actor (Benson) advocated strongly for the need for crafted performances. Rose and Benson argue that a natural performance on film can only be achieved from the combination of proper film technique and skilled acting. Or, as they put it, the actor's work on film is "part creative, part mechanical."⁷ While they acknowledge that many of the factors that result in a credible performance are beyond an actor's control—namely, technical aspects such as lighting and composition—they shift the emphasis away from these mechanical factors (well covered in the majority of the how-to literature) to focus on the little discussed area of acting. They emphasize the contributions actors make to film through their hard work and skill, contending, "The man whom we term 'a natural born actor' is in fact a highly trained and experienced one. He has reached the stage at which all experience translates itself on sight into terms of his craft."⁸ Rose and Benson reveal the work involved using terms such as "experience," "highly trained" and "craft." Thus, a good and natural performance doesn't just happen but is the result of these factors. As they note, when any film director asks an actor, "Just be natural," what she or he really wants is acting. "In fact," they contend, "you cannot *be* natural but you must *appear* natural. And your simulated natural behavior must be combined with considerable skill."⁹ For Rose and Benson, appearing natural entails much effort and expertise.

Getting amateurs with little or no experience to craft credible performances, as Rose and Benson propose, is not any easy task. Thus, it is unsurprising that the ameliorative literature suggests methods of easily circumventing the hard work of acting. For example, making the actor forget they are being filmed or casting people in their everyday roles are proposed methods to elicit naturalistic expressions of behavior from performers without requiring them to act. First, people absorbed in everyday tasks will forget they are being filmed, evidently producing a more naturalistic performance. In a short section entitled "Acting Before the Camera," in *Eumig's Manual for Better Home Movies*, it is noted that children have an easier time forgetting that the camera is filming them, particularly if their attention is diverted from the act of filming with other things, such as toys.¹⁰ The author contends that genuine depictions of children—or as the photograph caption would have it: "Children as they really are"—are possible when they are so engrossed in what they are doing that they take no notice of being filmed. The accompanying picture shows four youngsters playing with model cars who "take no notice of the whirring of the camera."¹¹ Adults, in contrast, have a much harder task in overlooking the camera's presence and are "awkward, or rather become so, in front of the camera, often they cannot act normally straight away."¹² Adults, like children, could overcome their inhibitions if given a distracting task. People should be asked to perform a task with which they are familiar and can accomplish with competency and not be called on to act out some

previously devised action; rather, they should routinely, and thus naturally, perform it. *The Movie Maker's Handbook* puts it the following way:

People usually behave convincingly as they go about their everyday business, but they look uncomfortable when shifted into an unfamiliar environment. If you want a dustman in a movie, say, then get one—a real one.¹³

This advice, presented as straightforward and commonsensical, argues that the way to ensure natural performances is to film real people or non-actors performing their everyday social roles. The need to craft a performance can be seemingly obviated by simply getting people to be themselves.

This advice strongly echoes the ideas on acting found in the theories of postrevolutionary Soviet directors such as Lev Kuleshov and Sergei Eisenstein. In his 1929 treatise, *Art of the Cinema*, Kuleshov argued that cinema could not replicate reality, but rather should capture it. “[R]eal material,” he argued, “must be operative in cinematography.”¹⁴ In addition to writing scripts that could incorporate real situations and locations, his search for realism necessitated a new relationship to acting.¹⁵ For Kuleshov and Eisenstein, this new relationship was most evident in the principle of *typage*—the casting of non-actors according to appearance. Rather than relying on the trickery of make-up or camera angles, casting non-actors who fit the look of a part would, it was claimed, bring a much-needed element of realism to the cinema. In principle, this approach to casting would open the door to depicting real people in their social roles, and thus capture their natural behavior. Therefore, if a scene required sailors, real sailors could be cast, and they would simply perform their social roles on film without needing to act. However, *typage* was heavily dependent on cultural stereotypes, social types and physical attributes, and simply translated into a form of typecasting.¹⁶ The impossibility of a one-to-one correspondence of a non-actor “type” to the character that she or he portrayed on film resulted in casting against actual social role. So, for example, a washerwoman found herself playing a member of the aristocracy if she had what was considered to be a noble appearance.¹⁷

Despite the inherent contradiction in casting non-actors to play roles that were opposite their real social roles as a means to achieve heightened realism, the ideas of *typage* trickled into the ameliorative literature, where it is understood as a means of getting people to perform their daily routines, jobs or tasks as a technique for achieving a more natural performance. For example, the influence of the Soviet theories regarding acting is most evident in Leo Salkin's *Story-telling Home Movies and How to Make Them* (1958). While some of Salkin's advice suggests ways a home moviemaker might narrativize typical non-fictional home movie content such as birthdays and holidays, his advice on acting is squarely aimed at the ambitious amateur fiction filmmaker rather than the casual home moviemaker. References to fictional films,

storytelling, scripts and actors, position Salkin's text within the ameliorative tradition that urges filmmakers to align their filmmaking with narrative filmmaking goals. Salkin, a screenwriter and an animator, peppers his how-to manual with quotations from film theorists (Pudovkin, Bazin and Balázs, among others) and filmmakers (Chaplin, Capra and Kazan, to name but a few) while drawing directly on Eisenstein for his advice on acting. On the role of actors in amateur filmmaking, he quotes from Eisenstein: "I do not pick my actors from the profession. . . . They do not act roles. They simply are their natural selves. I get them to repeat before the camera just what they would have done in reality. They are hardly conscious of any artificiality, of any make-believe."¹⁸

Salkin further elaborates on Eisenstein's ideas, translating them into his own casting suggestions. He proposes:

[Eisenstein's theory] is the clue to obtaining performances from people who have never been in front of a movie camera. Give them the barest necessary hints and give them things to do that are natural for them. Put a car mechanic to work on a car, use a painter painting—allow people who are not professional actors to do what comes naturally to them and you'll get natural responses and natural actions.¹⁹

For Salkin, then, getting unskilled, amateur actors to perform routine tasks would allow them to appear more natural. Despite Kuleshov's and Eisenstein's use of non-actors playing "types" that do not align with their real selves, the use of non-professional actors continues to generate a belief that they are, by necessity, playing themselves. From Kuleshov and Eisenstein through to Italian neo-realist directors, such as De Sica and Rosellini, up to the contemporary work of directors such as Bruno Dumont, non-actors are perceived as a means of attaining performances that are more truthful and accessing the real. Whereas professional film production depends on *typage* to the degree that professional actors must look the part to be cast, it is not simply that amateurs are cast on the basis of their verisimilar correspondence to ideas about social types; rather, it is also assumed that such a performer will literally *be* the role—they will embody their own individual self rather than enact or personify a prefabricated character. In essence, amateur actors aren't seen to be acting; the camera merely catches their *being*.

The assurance that filming non-professional actors—i.e., "real people" performing their daily tasks or routines would inevitably lead to more natural performances—was rapidly undercut by contradictory suggestions that stressed the need for screen tests to ensure performers possess natural screen presence. Thus, there is no correlation between people performing an action convincingly in everyday life and performing it unself-consciously on camera. In an illustration accompanying a section on acting

in *The Movie Maker's Handbook*, a short, stout man is pictured hoisting a large block of ice, obviously demonstrating the necessary physical characteristics and strength for the role of an iceman. Conversely, a man in business attire is shown attempting unsuccessfully to lift the block of ice. The stout man is also used as a model for what characteristics a director should seek out, such as suitable voice, ability to do the task, appropriate dress and correct equipment. What matters here is whether the non-actors look the part and can translate the performance of an everyday real-life task into a viable screen performance. In short, even the iceman needs to be able to act. Although this manual proposes that you should cast a real dustman if you want one to appear in your film, it immediately undoes the simplicity of this advice by making clear that a person should only be cast if he looks the part and can act (i.e., has screen presence). Thus, the seemingly uncomplicated solution of casting people performing their everyday routine presents is ultimately insufficient; simply being captured by the camera will not render a credible performance. Screen presence and the acting ability to craft a performance are still required.

Writing for *Movie Makers Magazine*, a publication geared toward the serious amateur filmmaker, Paul Hugon similarly pointed out the limitations of casting non-professional actors to perform their everyday social roles. For Hugon, simply relying on people to perform their everyday jobs is insufficient for creating convincing performances. He writes:

A man with a noble brow and a sympathetic eye, who has observed the mechanism of a surgeon's life, will usually make a better screen surgeon than the most highly skilled specialist from the best hospital in the land. If the real surgeon has to play the part, endless tact will be required to make him realize that he knows nothing of how a surgeon should look and act.²⁰

Contending that non-actors have no idea how to perform on screen, Hugon dispels the notion that real people performing their work duties will add realism to a film. Hugon isn't arguing that people don't know how to do their jobs, but rather that they lack the capacity to translate that knowledge to the screen. Acting natural on screen is, indeed, acting. Central to the rationale for avoiding non-actors is their inability to perform their roles as Hollywood envisions them. A real surgeon, Hugon argues, would "despite the very idea of gloating over a patient after a successful operation, and yet that is precisely what the audience expects of him."²¹ Hugon thus cautions against casting unskilled amateurs, because of their inability to create the illusions of Hollywood. Thus, crafting a performance is crucial. The need for acting re-emerges, and acting is hard work. The *Eumig Manual for Better Home Movies* stresses the hard work involved in getting credible performances. It states:

Let us assume you have friends who could make really good film actors. You must ask yourself—will they act in your films? If the answer is yes, will they always have time for rehearsals when you, their director, have a few hours to spare? And rehearsals there must be, rehearsals and more rehearsals, and yet more rehearsals, for your actors are amateurs who need proper direction. And this is not always easy.²²

Through the repeated reference to rehearsals, acting as a learned and practiced craft is stressed. In amateur narrative films, the films' performers are actors playing theatrical roles, and thus simply capturing people's daily behavior is insufficient; a performance must be crafted.

NON-ACTING: CAPTURING NATURAL BEHAVIOR

While the ameliorative literature tends to devote itself to the promotion of amateur fictional filmmaking, there exists an equally strong valorization of the documentary evidence of the non-fictional home movie's seemingly unadulterated access to the real. The home movie as a form of documentary evidence implies a lack of performative elements. The home movie's filmed subjects do not seemingly perform for the camera but are simply caught by it. Or, to return to Naremore, in this type of film performance, "people are caught unawares by a camera, they become objects to be looked at, and they usually provide evidence of role-playing in everyday life."²³ In this regard, the home movie, like the documentary, is seen to be free of staged elements. As Tom Waugh has observed, "documentary film, in everyday commonsense parlance, implies the absence of elements of performance, acting, staging, directing, etc., criteria which presumably distinguish the documentary form from the narrative fiction film."²⁴ Thus, like the documentary, the home seems to offer easy access to the real. For example, Leonard Maltin claims that home movies provide answers to questions such as, "What do people dress like? *How do people act?* What does it look like in a typical American backyard? Not the way Hollywood saw it, but a real backyard."²⁵ Likewise, archivist Micheline Morisset argues that:

Better than any photograph, [home movies] reveal the way people looked, lived and acted. They bring information we would have to gather from many different sources and reconstitute a way of life, a manner of being and the true appearance of individuals caught in the course of sharing a few moments of their lives with us.²⁶

Both of these quotes illustrate the degree to which home movies are considered a filmmaking practice offering unadulterated access to the real, lacking in performative aspects and granting the viewer a glimpse of unstaged performance, or how people really act. In this interpretation of the home

movie, subjects do not craft their acting for the camera but are merely caught exhibiting their natural behavior and thus provide valuable evidence of everyday role-playing. Somewhat paradoxically, these films exhibit the much sought-after natural behavior that the ameliorative discourse proposed. Thus, two seemingly divergent modes of film performance, crafted acting and documentary evidence of everyday role-playing, dovetail when filmed subjects achieve the ideal “caught-by-the-camera” effect. In both cases, the success of this naturalism rests on a disavowal of the camera. Despite the fact that most home movie subjects are aware of being filmed, the illusion of having been caught by the camera is valorized by both documentary and fictional filmic traditions.

Creating the illusion of having been caught by the camera requires a twofold disavowal: subjects are to avoid drawing attention to the camera’s presence by directing their own looks away from the lens, and they are to avoid drawing attention to the brute fact of their performance—i.e., they should not display any nervousness or awkwardness. Failing to adhere to these two conditions ruins the “captured” quality that naturalism demands. For example, one how-to manual points out that

the film may make it necessary for an actor to look into the lens, that is to say, straight into the audience’s eyes, especially in close-ups, but this “Kitchener needs YOU” effect is usually unpleasant. It looks unnatural and should be avoided whenever possible, that is, you should persuade your actors to look somewhere else.²⁷

Films should replicate the norms of the classical narrative film where an emphasis is placed on creating a world where actors deny the presence of the camera. This stress on not looking in the camera is also present in the documentary filmmaking tradition. Tom Waugh has traced the cutting out of looks into the camera from Joris Ivens through to *cinéma vérité*, arguing that “this clearly artificial code of acting naturally is so rooted in our cinematic culture, then as now, that Ivens posits it unquestioningly as a basic axiom of ‘quality’ cinema.”²⁸ With regard to the narrative film, of course, there are plenty of examples of narrative fictional films in which the protagonists address the camera (see *Breathless* [Jean Luc Godard, 1959]), but the prevailing convention is to create a self-contained diegetic world. In these instances, the narrative film breaks the filmic illusion to elicit a particular effect, but the illusion remains the norm.

In addition to looking into the camera, the believability of the diegetic world is equally disrupted when performers look nervous or self-conscious. The ameliorative literature is rife with references to the ruinous consequences of awkward performances. For example, *The Movie Maker’s Handbook: The Professional Guide to Making Perfect Home Movies* (1979) notes that, “In amateur film making, the most often faulted area is the acting. Normally, the problem is that actors are too self-conscious.”²⁹

Preferably, home movie performers should appear natural and relaxed in front of the camera—as if casually caught by it, even when they are not. A number of manuals suggest that moviemakers ought to film their subjects for long periods but without film, merely to habituate them to the presence of the camera. The idea is that they will grow accustomed to its presence and cease acting for it. Another author links discomfort in front of the camera to the whir it makes. He counsels filmmakers to employ a form of Pavlovian conditioning in which performers are made to listen to the camera’s whir while eating so that they associate it with the pleasure of food and not filming. Thus, the camera’s whir will become associated with a pleasurable activity and “unconsciously, associating the sound with pleasure, you will actually welcome it on the set.”³⁰ Forgetting the camera’s presence and thus feigning a “caught-by-the-camera” illusion is imperative to the home movie’s naturalism and its evidentiary quality.

THE HOME MOVIE PERFORMANCE

Whether it favors capturing or crafting performances as the best strategy for producing a natural appearance, the literature that counsels a better home movie is uniformly in agreement that awkwardness and acknowledgment of the camera ruins the film. Throughout the ameliorative literature, people’s awareness and recognition of the camera is characterized as detrimental to a good movie. As one manual puts it, “We’ve all seen home movies in which the observing camera suddenly becomes the involved camera, as people turn to talk to it and wave at it; the spell—assuming there has been one to start with—is effectively shattered.”³¹ But why should the involving camera versus the observing camera be so problematic? Home movie performances are geared toward precisely such an involved camera, including instances of mugging for the camera, moments in which subjects ham it up by laughing, smiling and waving at the camera, or skittish attempts to avoid being filmed. Home movie subjects are conscious of their actions for camera, they acknowledge it and deliberately perform for it. This over-the-top playing to the camera and hammy performances are evident in the greater part of home movies, but why does the literature so vociferously object to them?

As I have suggested, the ameliorative literature advises a mode of filmmaking that replicates Hollywood norms and codes of realism: subjects should appear as if the camera has caught them unawares and perform naturally. Yet, other modes of filmmaking do not adhere to these tenets, and actors within these modes perform to, and for, the camera. Tom Waugh provides a useful means of distinguishing between performance traditions in terms of their acknowledgment of the camera.³² So-called “representational performances” follow the classical narrative tradition in that subjects do not look into the camera, go about their business as if they were unaware of it, and pretend that it does not exist. By contrast, “presentational performances” display an awareness of the camera

and communicate the sense of an actor's conscious and explicit self-presentation to the camera's look. The home movie performance, then, is principally presentational. The ameliorative literature, unsurprisingly, considers presentational performances undesirable.

The filmmaker does have a bit of a problem with his family and friends; they are highly susceptible to an ailment we call the Waving Syndrome. Symptoms, appearing the moment they see the camera, typically consist of gaping, grinning, face-making in younger subjects and—especially—waving. Why do they do this? They do this because they know you're taking pictures, and they feel silly; they thereupon tend to make asses of themselves in an entirely futile attempt to appear *unsilly*.³³

But why should the participants in a film, particularly a home movie, make the pretense of the camera's invisibility, particularly when the filmmaker is often a family member and an active participant in the filmed proceedings, even if an offscreen one? Interacting with the filmmaker makes evident the consciousness of performing an act for the camera. Home movies that document the private sphere and everyday life seldom demonstrate a strict adherence to avoiding the camera. On the contrary, subjects perform any number of gestures that make it perfectly clear that they know they are being filmed and are engaged with (or annoyed by) the process. They are conscious of the camera, but not in a way that need be interpreted as a poor performance or bad acting.

Despite the emphasis and persistence of a discourse that naturalizes and privileges representational performance practices, a long tradition of presentational performances, in which subjects address and acknowledge the camera, can be traced from the beginnings of cinema.³⁴ Early Lumière *actualités* are a case in point, with films such as *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1895) and *Children Fishing for Shrimp* (1895), featuring subjects who glance at, and sometimes perform for, the camera. One of the clearest examples of the presentational mode of performance is *Repas de Bébé* (1895). In this film, a couple, Auguste and Marguerite Lumière, feed their baby girl. They are seated facing the camera and perform this ritual feeding specifically for it. Described in numerous accounts as cinema's first home movie, Paul Arthur has suggested *Repas de Bébé* can be differentiated from other Lumière films such *Train Arriving at Ciotat* (1895) by the degree of intimacy, familiarity and proximity evident between filmmaker and subject. He notes that *Repas de Bébé* "stands out [from the other Lumière *actualités*] as at once visually distinct and remarkably prescient."³⁵ He continues:

The greater visual proximity of its subjects, along with their relatively subdued movements, their clothing, and their physical setting, allows viewers hints of the family's affluent social position. It is for this reason the only scene from the early roster of Lumière films whose aura of familiarity deflects the clinical chill of historical distance.³⁶

Even more pertinent to this discussion is how Arthur points to the complicity between the social actors and the recording process. Specifically, there is a relationship between the filmmaker and filmed subjects: Uncle Louis is filming his brother, sister-in-law and niece. Unlike the moments where the Lumières are filming their workers or strangers at a train station, here the filmmaker and subject are shown to have a different, more personal relationship. Arthur describes this relationship as “a performative exchange between observer and observed.”³⁷ This performative exchange, captured in home movies, is different from other kinds of filmmaking. The relationship between filmmaker and subject is at once personal and private, and it engenders a unique mode of performance that is both presentational and intimate.

The relationships involved in home moviemaking, predominately family members filming each other in a domestic environment, are one of the key characteristics that define the home movie.³⁸ The access that home movie subjects grant the filmmaker often exceeds other subject/filmmaker relationships. The performative exchange is crucial to how we interpret a film as a home movie. When filmed subjects wave at a camera, signal that they don't want to be filmed or generally ham it up, these gestures are principally associated with this form of filmmaking. Of course, not all home movie performances excessively pander to the camera, but neither do they embrace acting styles dominant in mainstream cinema, and these performances bear little resemblance to mainstream film acting. Home movie performances exist on a continuum from the excessively hammy to the slightly self-conscious, but acknowledgment of the process of filming and being filmed is a common attribute. Having subjects look directly into the camera and address the audience is a frequent occurrence in home movies, and this recognition of the spectator creates a different order of spectatorial address. We are interpellated into the film in a manner that is distinct from the way we are drawn into fictional or documentary films. We are hailed not as mere spectators, but as participants complicit in affirming the performativity of the home movie. Arthur is correct in characterizing the address of this look as an intimate gesture that deflects historical chill. Thus, it isn't uncommon to feel like an interloper when watching the home movies of strangers. We are welcomed into the lives of people we do not know with their smiles, waves and winks. It is a seductive embrace and explains the attraction that home movies can exert. When a home movie subject looks into the camera and waves, we partake of this intimacy, and this gesture acknowledges not only the filmmaker and the camera, but us as well.

NOTES

1. This is a description of a film viewed at an International Home Movie Day event in Edmonton, Alberta Canada, October 16, 2009.
2. James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 15.

3. Safety stock and 16mm cameras were first marketed to the general consumer in 1923, with 8mm following in 1932, and super 8mm in 1965.
4. Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 11–32.
5. Ross Hunter, “Top Secrets of Hollywood Movie Making,” record issued by *Bolex Paillard*, 1961.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Tony Rose and Martin Benson, *How to Act for Home Movies* (London: Focal Press, 1951), 8.
8. *Ibid.*, 10.
9. *Ibid.*, 15.
10. R. Hansham, *Eumig Manual for Better Home Movies* (Vienna: Foto-Edition R.H. Hammer, 1959), 69.
11. *Ibid.*, 90.
12. *Ibid.*, 69.
13. Christopher Wordsworth, *The Movie Maker’s Handbook* (New York: Ziff Davis Books, 1979), 212.
14. Lev Kuleshov, “The Art of the Cinema,” in *Kuleshov on Film: Writings by Lev Kuleshov*, ed. and trans. Ronald Levaco (1929; repr., Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1974), 63.
15. *Ibid.*, 64.
16. For more on the role of typeage in typesetting, see Pamela Robertson Wojcik, “Typesetting,” *Criticism* 45, no. 2 (2003): 223–49.
17. See Sergei Eisenstein, “The Principles of the New Russian Cinema,” in *S. M. Eisenstein: Selected Works, Volume 1: Writings, 1922–1934*, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (1930; repr., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 198.
18. As quoted in Leo Salkin, *Story-telling Home Movies and How to Make Them* (New York, Toronto & London: McGraw-Hill, 1958), 129.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Paul Hugon, “On the Necessity of Letting Go,” *Movie Makers* (May 1932): 222.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Hansham, *Eumig Manual for Better Home Movies*, 48.
23. Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, 15.
24. Thomas Waugh, “Acting to Play Oneself: Notes on Performance in Documentary,” in *Making Visible the Invisible: An Anthology of Original Essays on Film Acting*, ed. Carol Zucker (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1990), 66.
25. Leonard Maltin, interview, *Keepers of the Frame* (Dir. Mark McLaughlin, 1999); emphasis added.
26. Micheline Morisset, “Home Movies,” *The Archivist: Magazine of the National Archives of Canada*. No. 108 (1995): 28–29.
27. Hansham, *Eumig Manual for Better Home Movies*, 69.
28. Waugh, “Acting to Play Oneself,” 67–68.
29. Christopher Wordsworth, ed. *The Movie Maker’s Handbook: The Professional Guide to Making Perfect Home Movies* (New York: Ziff Davis Books, 1979), 212.
30. Paul Hugon, “Acting Versus Naturalness,” *Movie Makers* (June 1929): 385.
31. Ed and Dodi Schultz, *How to Make Exciting Home Movies and Stop Boring Your Friends and Relatives* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 26.
32. Waugh, “Acting to Play Oneself,” 68–69.
33. Ed and Dodi Schultz, *How to Make Exciting Home Movies*, 101.

34. Tom Gunning's influential conceptualization of the "cinema of attractions" draws attention "to the recurring look at the camera by actors" that is a feature of early film. See Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* vol. 8 no. 3/4 (1986): 64.
35. Paul Arthur, *A Line of Sight: American Avant-Garde Film since 1965* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 24.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. The French term for home movie, *le film de famille*, more adequately conveys the familial relations at play in home moviemaking.

Part III

Culture

**Film History, Industry and the
Vicissitudes of Star Acting**

11 Story and Show

The Basic Contradiction of Film Star Acting

Paul McDonald

The relationship of actor to character is fundamental to all film acting and so provides the starting point for any discussion of film acting. For Vsevolod Pudovkin, the “basic contradiction” of film acting was found in how “the image the actor builds as his work develops, on the one hand is constructed out of himself as a person with given individual characteristics, and on the other is conditioned by the interaction of this personal element and the intention in general of the play.”¹ If the “person with given individual characteristics” can be interpreted as the actor, “the intention in general of the play” describes the role or character played by that performer.

Star acting, however, produces a tension in this relationship. In narrative film, a character is a narrative agent, whose actions contribute to the progression of the plot, and who is differentiated from other figures by a set of individuating qualities. As the actor uses the voice and body to give material substance to those actions and characteristics, so acting contributes to the making of the narrative world and the creation of story. But stardom introduces a further dynamic into the character/actor relationship. In economic terms, stardom is defined by the marketability of a performer, whereas the cultural significance of stardom arises from how widespread media exposure of certain performers circulates ideas about identity or provides figures of identification for the movie-consuming public. Whether judged in economic or cultural terms, star status relies on a performer becoming a known figure. Many actors, not just stars, are recognizable faces to moviegoers due to their previous roles. In the case of the star, however, familiarity with the performer goes further: not only are they a household “name,” but knowledge of the performer frequently extends beyond the screen to his or her private life. It is the recognizability and familiarity of the star actor that creates the tension in the character/actor relationship. In *I am Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007), for example, Will Smith is at once Robert Neville and Will Smith. For her role in *Julie and Julia* (Nora Ephron, 2009), Meryl Streep did all that was necessary to reproduce the vocal and physical idiosyncrasies of Julia Child, but still at every moment she was Meryl. Through playing characters, stars contribute

to the representation of the story world, yet at the same time they are visible as known onscreen identities and so therefore are on show. It is this tension, the tension between story and show, or between the representation of character and the presentation of the star, that forms the basic contradiction of film star acting.

This chapter is concerned with how the voice and body in star acting negotiate this tension. As a way of anchoring the analysis that follows, the chapter looks at the performances given by Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt in *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (Doug Liman, 2005). It was while working on this film that Jolie and Pitt first met and their subsequent relationship became the subject of huge media interest across the gossip industry. Following Richard Dyer's work, it is widely recognized that the image or identity of film stars is produced across an inter-textual mix of films, reviews, interviews, biographies and so on.² Yet although non-film texts may play an important part in shaping audience knowledge, and so contribute to the meaning of star *actors*, any discussion of star *acting* must focus on how stardom is enacted in films. This chapter therefore focuses on how Pitt and Jolie's stardom is enacted onscreen.

Acting in film is the product of a double performance. At one level, framing, editing and camera movement all create the performance of the medium, influencing how the actor is presented. At a secondary level, there is the performance of the actor, whereby the actions of the voice and body create character and so contribute to the making of narrative meaning. Initially, the chapter considers how the performance of the medium works to mark star acting as spectacular, and the remainder of the chapter examines how the voice and body negotiate the contradiction between story and show in star acting.

STAR ATTRACTION

For Tom Gunning, the "cinema of attractions" emerged in the very earliest years of cinema out of a desire to provide spectacular presentation over the construction of narrative. Although history eventually saw the dominance of narrative production, Gunning argues, "the cinema of attractions does not disappear with the dominance of narrative, but rather goes underground, both in certain avant-garde practices and as a component of narrative films, more evident in some genres (e.g., the musical) than in others."³ What is most valuable and challenging about this insight is that it invites a consideration of spectacle as a persistent element belonging to all forms of narrative film, rather than something driven "underground" or confined to certain genres. Although narrative film represents a story world, at the same time it always functions as a type of public presentation, and is therefore a form of show. Although this combination of representation and presentation is foundational to narrative cinema, it is important to recognize

that certain moments in films still stand out by their extraordinariness or extravagance. For example, the whole of *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* is spectacle, yet it contains showpiece scenes that are spectacular—e.g., the explosive kidnap attempt in the desert or the final gunfight. In this case, then, it would seem appropriate to draw a distinction between “spectacle”—defining the general condition of film as a medium for public presentation—and “spectacular,” which describes specific elements of the film that stand out for how they present what is amazing, fantastic or dazzling.

If the co-presence of narrative and spectacle means all film acting is caught between story and show, then it is necessary to refine this opposition in order to grasp what is specific about the place of star acting in this tension. In the second scene of *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, Pitt is placed in the story world of the film as his character, John Smith, stands in the lobby of a hotel in Bogotá, Colombia, where he talks to a barman. Both actors are part of the scene, and so both belong to the narrative and the spectacle. Yet the performance of the medium uses film elements to pick out the star. Framing places Pitt centrally, while the staging puts him in the foreground and he gets close-ups. With the editing, cuts are used to follow his story, and when the camera moves, such as when John/Pitt turns to see police gathering in the hotel lobby, the movement is motivated by the star’s look. Here the performance of the film medium singles out, centers and isolates the star. The barman is spectacle, but Pitt is distinguished as spectacular. All film acting is spectacle, but star acting is spectacular acting as the medium employs devices to ensure the performance of the star is lifted out of the general spectacle of film presentation to become a leading attraction. This spectacular status means the star is always presented in ways that ensure the voice and body are infused with extra meaning. Unlike the rest of the ensemble, everything the star says or does seems to have consequence and importance. The co-presence of story and show is common to all film acting, but the spectacular presentation of star acting places the voice and body in an exhibitionist display of meaning.

The spectacular differentiation of the star is, however, not only an effect of the film medium. Richard Maltby observes that in film acting, the audience is presented with the “actor’s two bodies”: “The audience experiences the presence of the performer as well as—in the same body as—the presence of the character.”²⁴ From the star to the lowliest supporting player, all film acting rests on this dual presence of actor and character. However, the recognizability of the star creates a pull on this relationship, which is most evident when stars are placed alongside other supporting actors. During the hotel scene, although Pitt is immediately recognizable, it is unlikely that the vast majority of moviegoers will be able to put a name to the actor playing the barman. Both performances depend on the co-presence of two bodies—actor and character—but where star acting specifically inflects this relationship is by marking a distinction between the supporting actor’s anonymous body and the star’s recognizable body. Whereas the portrayal

of the barman is achieved through the dual presence of actor and character, the anonymity of the actor tips this balance toward the performance being full of the character, so that in many respects the actor's body is transparent because he can only be recognized as the barman. In contrast, the star's recognizability makes the body visible: "That is Brad Pitt." If all film acting presents two bodies, what differentiates star acting is the familiarity and visibility of the star's physical and vocal presence. Foundational to star acting is therefore a hierarchy of bodies, whereby the spectacular presentation of the star's recognizable, named and visible body is distinguished from the spectacle of the supporting actor's anonymous, transparent body.

STAR AS CHARACTER AND STAR AS STAR

To appreciate how star acting negotiates the tension between story and show, it is necessary to look at how the voice and body enact the relationship between character and actor. Barry King applies the term "impersonation" to describe the effect of the actor transforming him or herself in order to represent a character. King contrasts this with "personification," which occurs when there are no obvious signs of transformation, so an actor's performance takes on the appearance of being "consonant with his or her personality."⁵ If all film acting involves the actor's construction of character, then no instance of acting can be judged to be purely the character or the actor. Instead, what impersonation and personification describe are relative degrees of balance between whether a performance may be judged to foreground the presence of the character or the actor. Impersonation privileges character over the actor, for the actor must transform him or herself to represent the character. Although the external trappings of make-up and costume may contribute to this effect, the impersonatory work of acting is found in vocal and physical change. An actor may adopt certain accents or a dialect, modify his or her behavior, assume physical manners or actually transform the body to respond to the specific demands of a particular role. In contrast, personification foregrounds the actor. With personification, vocal and physical continuities persist as the actor makes little or no concessions to individual characters, and so the actor seems very similar from role to role. What King's opposition therefore boils down to is the contrast between two performance principles: impersonation is based on difference and discontinuity, whereas personification rests on continuities and sameness.

King's terms can be applied to illuminate the tension between story and show in film acting, for if impersonation masks the presence of the actor in order to represent the character as a figure in the story world, personification presents or shows the actor. By foregrounding actor over the character, it is easy to see how personification can be judged to be a basic requirement of star acting. Combined with the spectacular presentation of the star by

the film medium, personification makes the star visible. Due to vocal and physical continuities between their performances, stars are often criticized for just “playing themselves,” yet in the commerce of popular cinema, such a performance strategy seems necessary: why should filmmakers pay exorbitant fees to employ stars if they are unrecognizable and can’t be distinguished from the rest of the cast? At the same time, a star cannot stand out as an entirely autonomous figure but must be integrated into the overall requirements of the narrative. Star acting is never a show of pure personification for the star is always required to perform the specific demands of the story. Rather than absolutely opposed principles, impersonation and personification may best be understood as poles on a continuum across which any film performance may be positioned. Star acting might be placed more toward the personification end of that continuum, yet with each role, the star will use the voice and body to perform actions, dialogue and emotions that are specific to the particular circumstances of the narrative. In this case, even in the midst of heightened personification, when continuities and repetitions make a star immediately recognizable and visible, star acting is always (to some degree) impersonation. In star acting, the contradiction between story and show is therefore the tension produced between the opposing principles of impersonation and personification, for at all moments the star is the star but also a particular character. With star acting, personification is not set in opposition to impersonation but is rather continually achieved in the midst of impersonation. At the same time, the specific character is filtered through the recognizability and visibility of the star’s body and voice, so that impersonation is achieved through personification. Rather than regard impersonation and personification as mutually exclusive, star acting demands thinking about the *co-presence* of these principles within the same performance.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith provides just one example for seeing this dynamic at work. At the level of story, Jolie and Pitt must represent their characters in order to play their part in what Pudovkin described as “the intention in general of the play.” *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* is an action comedy. It tells the tale of husband and wife, John and Jane, who live in the suburbs. As their names may suggest, the couple lead very ordinary, routine lives, yet unbeknown to one another, they each lead shadow lives as professional assassins, working for rival organizations. While on assignment, by coincidence, their paths cross in that hotel lobby in Bogatá, and they spend a night of passion together. Since then, however, their marriage has atrophied into a dull routine, and both now only find real excitement in their clandestine existences. When they learn of each other’s secret lives, out of a sense of betrayal but also professional rivalry, they attempt to kill one another. Only when their respective employers send forces to eliminate the couple do they put their differences aside to team up against a common foe. Driven by the excitement of escaping their attackers, the couple once again discovers their passion for each other, and as they wipe out the opposition, a final

piece of gunplay echoes the dancing and sex of their first night to confirm the couple has been renewed.

In order that these plot developments can be delivered, Pitt and Jolie must use their voices and bodies to undertake certain actions in order to serve the purposes of the story. For example, John and Jane meet for the first time in Bogotá when she is on the run from the police after killing the “Barracuda,” and the only reason she is not detained is because John/Pitt saves her by telling the police, “She’s with me. *Está bien.*” Later, they can only obtain information confirming their employers intended to kill them both after Jane/Jolie hits a hostage in the face with a hotel phone. Here in these moments, Pitt’s and Jolie’s acting has a functional purpose, for it is only by using the voice or body to deliver these micro actions that essential plot points occur. Both stars must, however, do more than simply perform the actions necessary to move the film along. Generically the film integrates action cinema with the conventions of the screwball comedy, or more specifically the battle of the sexes comedy, in which couples trade insults and possibly violent exchanges.⁶ With these genre frameworks in play, to achieve the film’s comedic purpose, strongly demarcated characters had to be set in opposition, and so Pitt and Jolie enacted certain character qualities to portray the antagonism between the couple. John is portrayed as informal, reckless and just a bit dumb, whereas Jane is smart, rigid and controlling. Costume (he dresses casually, she in formal office attire), *mise-en-scène* (his office is cluttered and ramshackle, whereas hers is stark, minimal and furnished with high technology) and dialogue (he describes himself as relying on improvisation and instinct, whereas she calls him “half-assed”; he accuses her of being “anal” and having “no spontaneity,” which she interprets as “organized”) all contribute to these differences.

And yet it is the bodies and voices of the stars that actually give living substance to these characters. Some appreciation of how the voice and body carry the circumstances of the narrative can be gained by comparing the ways in which the performances of Pitt and Jolie advance the narrative across two similar scenes. Twice in the film, the couple sits down for dinner at home. These scenes serve the purposes of the narrative. During the first dinner scene, dialogue is confined to exchanges about Jane’s addition of peas to what would seem to be a standard meal and a request from John for Jane to pass the salt. John/Pitt speaks in a dry, flat monotone. Only occasionally does he look across the table at his wife, and when he does, his face remains blank, registering no emotion. When John/Pitt asks about what has changed in the meal, Jane/Jolie tells him about the peas, giving him a slight smile and raising her eyebrows, suggesting that she seems proud and pleased he has noticed and seeks his approval. However, as she quickly breaks out of the smile and throws a glare at him, this appears to be a false show of satisfaction, and she is actually irritated by how wearisome he is (Figure 11.1). This tension is compounded when John/Pitt asks his wife to pass the salt, and the request is met by Jane/Jolie telling him it is

in the middle of the table between them, nodding her head in his direction as if to say, “Get it yourself” or “Over to you.” The scene concludes with a medium shot of John/Pitt staring across the table with a look of what may be interpreted as dumbstruck annoyance. Overall, the dialogue but also the voices and bodies of the stars work to show the monotony of the couple’s routine life and the seething tensions between them.

A second dinner scene occurs after John and Jane have been sent on the same hit by their respective agencies. During this mission, they try to kill one another, and the incident compromises their covers. By dinner time, both have obtained the first indications that their spouse may not be who they thought he or she was, but as neither gets complete confirmation, they come to dinner with only deep suspicions. The two dinner scenes are intentionally paired: not only is the setting the same, but the dialogue in the second self-consciously replays John’s request for Jane to pass the salt. Due to the recent plot developments, however, the circumstances of these exchanges have changed. Again, the scene is full of tensions, but this time, not only are John and Jane now embroiled in a potential life or death situation, but confronting their potential respective mysteries seems to have also reawakened the allure of their relationship. Wary of the deadly potential but also the simmering attractions of the other, John/Pitt and Jane/Jolie fix eye contact intently, and their looks are equally cautious and desirous. The scene preserves a charade of routine through dialogue about the everyday matters of work and the meal: “Mmm. Pot roast. My favorite”; “Allow me, Sweetheart. Been on your feet all day”; “So how’s work?”; “Green beans?”; and so on. This dialogue could belong to the earlier scene, for the script preserves the mundane ritual of domestic life.

But the scene is carried not by what is said but by how the stars use their voices and bodies to convey the layers and tensions of the scene. Both give the surface appearances of everyday civility by consistently smiling at



Figure 11.1 The look of loathe. *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005). Digital frame enlargement.

one another and speaking in warm tones to keep the conversation friendly. Whereas previously, John/Pitt's voice remained colorless, his speech now moves across a range of tones to convey a greater sense of liveliness and engagement. On the one hand, the smile that Jane/Jolie offers is warm and hospitable, but at the same time it seems imbued with a knowing quality that shows she has found him out (Figure 11.2). The niceties of the scene are all evidently pretense: not only has the narrative already established tensions that underline the scene, but the vocal and physical manners of both actors also contrast sharply with how they acted in the earlier dinner scene when the characters were really following the routine. It is precisely because eye contact and smiles were missing from the earlier scene that both actors can now be seen to be pretending and not living the routine. Conversation may be light, but it is also guarded: the actors hold lengthy pauses to interrupt the dialogue while each character tries to assess what to ask and what to reveal. When Jane/Jolie stands at the table to carve the pot roast, John/Pitt makes a flowing movement to stand and circles behind her, wrapping his arms around Jane/Jolie as if to embrace her, while at the same time protecting himself by holding the hand clasped around the carving knife (Figure 11.3). This movement encapsulates the tensions of the scene, for in one respect it is a moment of tenderness and physical intimacy—the pose is reminiscent of a couple cutting their wedding cake—but at the same time an act of self-protection as he tries to neutralize the possible dangers of the knife.

Across these two scenes, the acting of Pitt and Jolie conveys the intentions of the narrative, as the stars use their voices and bodies to enact the transition from banal routine to sexually charged danger. By performing the changing circumstances, both stars are integrating their performances into the overall purpose of the narrative. In so doing, they enact the transforma-



Figure 11.2 Sizing him up. *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005). Digital frame enlargement.



Figure 11.3 Tenderness with protection. *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005). Digital frame enlargement.

tions necessary to tell the story and impersonate the character qualities of John and Jane.

At the same time, at each and every moment, the two performers are immediately recognizable as Pitt and Jolie. Not only do they look unmistakably like Pitt and Jolie, but with their acting, both use the voice and body to preserve continuities across their most popular and commercially successful roles. Although Pitt became a big name in Hollywood during the 1990s, *Se7en* (David Fincher, 1995) was his only real commercial success during the decade.⁷ *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) achieved a degree of cult status, although it was no hit. During the decade, his onscreen image did not settle on any particular type of role, as he appeared in thrillers (e.g., *Se7en*, *The Devil's Own*, *Spy Game* [Tony Scott, 2001]), period dramas (e.g., *Legends of the Fall* [Edward Zwick, 1994], *Seven Years in Tibet*) and fantasy (*Meet Joe Black*). With his idiosyncratic performances as Louis de Pointe du Lac in *Interview with the Vampire*, Jeffrey Goines in *Twelve Monkeys* or Mickey O'Neil in *Snatch* (Guy Ritchie, 2000), Pitt appeared to be aiming self-consciously at preventing his career from settling on any particular type. For Pitt, a relatively consistent run of commercial success only came with his appearances in *Ocean's Eleven* (Steven Soderbergh, 2001), *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004) and *Ocean's Twelve* (Steven Soderbergh, 2004).⁸ These hits were interspersed with cameos in *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (George Clooney, 2002) and *Full Frontal* (Steven Soderbergh, 2002) and voice work for the animated feature *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas* (Patrick Gilmore and Tim Johnson, 2003), but it was the first two installments of the *Ocean's* series in particular that defined Pitt's onscreen image immediately prior to *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*.

Whether intentional or not, Pitt's portrayal of John Smith bears strong similarities not only to his performances as Rusty Ryan in the *Ocean's* series, but also Tyler Durden in *Fight Club* and Jerry Welbach in *The*

Mexican (Gore Verbinski, 2001). Even when John is deflated by the boringness of his marriage, Pitt carries the same physical assurance found with Rusty, Tyler and Jerry. These characters don't walk but swagger. In each case, Pitt greets situations with the same boastful, boyish grin. Pitt's voice has a deep tone to it, which he maintains across these roles. Continuities between Pitt's performances as John and Rusty are maybe unsurprising: with principle photography on *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* only two-thirds complete in spring 2004, Pitt had to leave the set in order to fulfill his preexisting commitment to act in *Ocean's Twelve* before returning to finish the film.⁹ In Pitt's schedule, John and Ryan were therefore coincident characters, and certainly after John has awoken from his soporific domestic life, the two performances could be interchangeable. John looks, sounds and moves like Rusty (Figure 11.4). Between *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* and *Ocean's Twelve*, variations in the respective dramatic circumstances demanded that Pitt played the respective stories of John and Rusty, but at the same time, vocal and physical continuities always ensured Pitt was on show. Pitt impersonated John, but throughout the performance retained a recognizable onscreen identity to ensure that at every moment the performance was an instance of personification.

As Sara Wayland in *Gone in Sixty Seconds* (Dominic Sena, 2000), Lanie Kerrigan in *Life or Something Like It* (Stephen Herek, 2002), Mariane Pearl in *A Mighty Heart* (Michael Winterbottom, 2007) and Christine Collins in *The Changeling* (Clint Eastwood, 2008), Jolie's career has traversed roles that have seen her use voice and body in distinctively different ways. Although the performance in *Girl, Interrupted* (James Mangold, 1999) saw Jolie win the Academy Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role, within a short period, her market value and popular visibility had come to rest on *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Simon West, 2001) and *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Cradle of Life* (Jan de Bont, 2003).¹⁰ Lara Croft became



Figure 11.4 Pitt as Rusty. *Ocean's Twelve* (Warner Home Video (UK) Ltd, 2004). Digital frame enlargement.

Jolie's most bankable role to date, and her portrayal of the videogame heroine not only established her trademark dark, pouting sensuality but also linked her to action cinema. In between the first *Tomb Raider* film and *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, Jolie's career passed through genre categories. Although the romantic comedy *Life or Something Like It* and humanitarian drama *Beyond Borders* (Martin Campbell, 2003) saw Jolie give performances that marked departures from the *Tomb Raider* series, in their various ways, the period drama *Original Sin* (Michael Cristofer, 2001), thriller *Taking Lives* (D. J. Caruso, 2004), sci-fi action adventure *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (Kerry Conran, 2004) and Hellenic epic *Alexander* (Oliver Stone, 2004) all played on the same sensuality found in her portrayal of Lara Croft, despite genre differences. To a large extent, this effect was created by continuities in appearance—her dark hair, equally dark large eyes, the high arch of her sculpted eyebrows and signature pout—but it also came from how she spoke and moved. Frequently, she tilted her head slightly backward with the chin pushed forward to emphasize the angularity of her facial structure, while her voice maintained a low timbre and steady rhythm. Although the angling of the head may suggest she presents herself as a beautiful object to be looked at, the tone of the voice conveys assertive confidence and control. These continuities are carried over to Jolie's performance in *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, where her customary sensuality always ensures Jane's organized manner comes over as cool and composed rather than cold and austere.

Continuities in star performance were not lost on the critics when reviewing *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*. For example, Matt Soergel wrote, "Pitt has some of that stumblebum charm that he showed in *Ocean's Eleven*; he's adept at being goofy and cool in the same scene."¹¹ Similarly, Mal Vincent claimed, "This is the perfect role for Jolie. It's just made for her brand of tongue-in-cheek toughness and assurance. After all, she used to be Lara Croft."¹² Although the majority of reviewers dismissed the film as failing in its comic and action ambitions, those who offered praise considered the visibility of the stars to be among the film's strengths. "*Mr. and Mrs. Smith* would not exist if not for Pitt and Jolie," asserted Duane Dudek. "It exploits their star power and sex appeal and is created in their oversize images. . . . You never forget it's Jolie and Pitt up there and, as in the celebrity yuk-fest *Ocean's 12*, that's the point. How do you escape into a character when your persona is so overwhelming?"¹³ Or, consider Mal Vincent's subsequent evaluation:

Pitt counters [Jolie] nicely, loosening up to play the befuddled male who can't remember if he's been married for five or six years. After an unfocused career of cameos and parts designed to prove he's an "actor" by playing against type, he, at last, may be settling down to play what he plays best—Brad Pitt, movie star.

Jolie may be the last movie star of the old style. With long legs and those lips, she lets the audience know that she's aware all this may be

ridiculous and beneath her, but hey, it's her movie-star job. She is much more believable as a killer than as a housewife.¹⁴

Acting according to type may create limitations, yet for one critic those constrictions provided the film with a useful foundation from which to expose the Smiths' marital charade.

[Mr. Smith] doesn't realize he's married to Lara Croft, tomb raider. Jolie handles pistols better than she does light comedy, but the movie uses her well simply by putting her in an apron. Jumping down elevator shafts is easy for this woman; being Martha Stewart is hard. Jolie's generally been grating when she tries comedy. . . . What [the director] does . . . to help her is make her acting struggle a part of the Mrs. Smith act: The challenge of being the perfect wife and career woman, from casseroles to drapes, makes her brittle and almost vulnerable.¹⁵

In each case, these reviewers formed their judgments through seeing the two stars as playing the specific demands of the narrative while also visibly bringing to the film qualities and meanings evident from their other performances.

Although John and Jane were specific characters, the acting of Pitt and Jolie portrayed these roles through preserving continuities from earlier performances, with the effect that the stars were always on show. King suggests personification relies on performances corresponding with the actor's personality, although some caution must be expressed at this conclusion. In most cases, moviegoers only know a star through a string of performances, and so if a particular performance is perceived as illustrating the star's personality, then that judgment can only be based on familiarity with an identity produced over a string of other performances. It is necessary therefore to recognize that the star's "personality" is already a performed identity. Personification does not emerge from the relationship between a single instance of star acting and how this accords with an external reference point—the star's offscreen personality—but rather results from interconnections between a series of acts. Those connections don't come from a performance replaying everything the star has ever done before, nor from the exact systematic reproduction of vocal intonations or gestures presented by a star in previous roles. Instead, as an aspect of star acting, personification only becomes visible in small, brief glimpses, when similarities are produced between particular moments. For example, as Lara Croft, Jolie imitated the original game character's familiar stance of brandishing two pistols at arm's length. This pose is visible in the opening sequence of *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* as Croft/Jolie is attacked by a robotic device in an underground chamber, but it is also adopted at several points in the final moments of the concluding action sequence of *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, when the couple become holed up in the Home Made store

and must unite to defend themselves against the forces sent to kill them. This pose is by no means unique to these characters, but in the particular context of Jolie's career, repetition of the stance forms direct connections between two specific performances as Jane Smith brought Lara Croft into suburban domesticity.

When *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* was released in 2005, the film became the biggest commercial success for both Pitt and Jolie to date (US\$110 million to produce and a box office of US\$186 million in North America and US\$292 million internationally). Although a star can never guarantee against the insecurities of the box office and the unpredictability of audience taste, what this may suggest is that preserving vocal and bodily continuities in star acting can still count for something in the film market. If consonance is achieved between a particular performance and the star's "personality," then that effect is only ever accomplished through continuities created by the actions of the voice and body, and as film stardom links performance to the market, so those actions are producers of not only symbolic meaning but also commercial value.

CONCLUSION

Star acting sees tensions between representation and presentation, or story and show, enacted through the voice and body. In *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, the entire cast of actors was located at the intersection of narrative and spectacle, but with Pitt and Jolie, the performance of the film medium made their acting spectacular, lifting them to prominence in the hierarchy of actors. Both stars used their voices and bodies to represent the specific character qualities of John and Jane, but at the same time they were always visible as they repeated manners evident in previous roles. At each and every moment, Pitt was John but also Pitt was Pitt. "Pitt" or "Jolie" are, of course, in turn performed identities—the product of continuities between previous roles. Both stars therefore impersonated and personified their characters. As this example would suggest, with star acting, not only does impersonation co-exist with personification, but impersonation is achieved through personification and vice versa. Any star's performance is seen through the prism of the star's onscreen personality; yet at the same time, that very personality is in turn the product of a series of acted roles.

Star studies have adopted a range of historical, critical and analytic perspectives, ranging from the historical emergence of star discourses or the ideological meaning of stars, to the currency of stardom in the film business and the identificatory relationships that moviegoers form with stars.¹⁶ Each usefully contributes to our understanding of film stardom, yet what has slipped through this work is attention to what goes on when stars act. Film scholarship is littered with studies of stars that make no attempt to tackle the acting of stars. Some of those works are studies of individual

stars. Acting is the basic contribution of star labor, and failure to look at acting leaves star studies without a solid grasp of what stars do. By largely ignoring the fundamental material of acting—the workings of the voice and body—star studies is left on uneasy foundations, for it is necessary to recognize that film stars are only ever stars because they *act* in films.

One of the limits of the work done so far on acting is the concentration on the voice and body purely in terms of the creation of narrative meaning.¹⁷ Through detailed analysis, performances are “read” to see how acting works to convey the actions and circumstances of the story world. This is certainly necessary for the study of film performance, but as this chapter has suggested, all film acting, and star acting in particular, requires equal regard for acting as narrative and spectacle. Attention to acting may therefore remedy shortcomings in star studies, whereas attention to stars may encourage studies of film acting to see how film performance is always situated between story and show.

NOTES

1. Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting* (1933 and 1935; repr., London: Vision Press, 1968), 241.
2. Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 2nd ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 60–63.
3. Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-garde,” in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 57.
4. Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 380.
5. Barry King, “Articulating Stardom,” *Screen* 26, no. 5 (1985): 30.
6. Tamar Jeffers McDonald, *Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre* (London: Wallflower, 2007), 20–21. As many critics noted when reviewing the film, it shared similarities with screwball comedies of earlier decades such as *The Lady Eve* (Preston Sturges, 1941), *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey, 1937) and *Trouble in Paradise* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1932), along with more contemporary antecedents like *Prizzi’s Honor* (John Huston, 1985) and *The War of the Roses* (Danny de Vito, 1989). See, for example, Jami Bernard, “She’s Got It Brad, and That’s Good,” *Daily News* (New York, NY), June 9, 2005, Sports Final Edition; Stephen Farber, “Brad and Angelina’s Old-Fashioned Romance,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), June 5, 2005, sec. 2, Late Edition; Christopher Kelly, “Revenge of the ‘Smith,’” *Star-Telegram* (Fort Worth, TX), June 10, 2005, sec. S, Tarrant Edition; Todd McCarty, “Pitt, Jolie Can’t Deflect a Fusillade of Flippancy,” *Variety*, May 30, 2005, 21; Michael O’Sullivan, “‘Smith’: A Marriage of Mayhem and Wit,” *Washington Post*, June 10, 2005, sec. T, Final Edition; Jeff Simon, “A Killer Couple,” *Buffalo News* (Buffalo, NY), June 9, 2005, sec. C, Final Edition; and Calvin Wilson, “‘Mr. and Mrs. Smith’ Let a Marriage Come Between Them,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (St. Louis, MO), June 10, 2005, sec. E, Five Star Late Lift Edition.
7. After his supporting role in *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991) brought Pitt a considerable amount of attention among critics and the movie-going public, over the next decade he appeared in twenty films. During this period,

Pitt frequently took supporting roles (e.g., *True Romance* [Tony Scott, 1993], *Twelve Monkeys* [Terry Gilliam, 1995]) or played co-star to a bigger name (e.g., *Interview with the Vampire* [Neil Jordan, 1994], *The Devils Own* [Alan J. Pakula, 1997], *The Mexican* [Gore Verbinski, 2001]). *Johnny Suede* (Tom DiCillo, 1991) and *Kalifornia* (Dominic Sena, 1993) had seen him achieve lead billing, but only *Se7en* became a real commercial success (US\$33 million to produce/US\$100 million domestic and US\$227 million international box office), with *Fight Club* (US\$63 million to produce/US\$37 million domestic and US\$63.8 million international box office) performing modestly. After *Seven Years in Tibet* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1997) (US\$70 million to produce/US\$38 million domestic and US\$93.5 million international box office) and *Meet Joe Black* (Martin Brest, 1998) (US\$90 million to produce/US\$44.6 million domestic and US\$98.3 million international box office) performed below expectations at the box office, a question mark hung over whether Pitt was really star material. All figures cited here and afterward for estimated production costs and box office grosses are from "Search," *Box Office Mojo*, IMDB.com, Inc., Burbank, <http://www.boxoffice Mojo.com/search/> (accessed November 20, 2009).

8. After Pitt's lackluster box office performance in the 1990s, *Ocean's Eleven* (US\$85 million to produce/US\$183 million domestic and US\$267 million international box office), *Troy* (US\$175 million to produce/US\$133 million domestic and US\$364 million international box office) and *Ocean's Twelve* (US\$110 million to produce/US\$126 million domestic and US\$237 million international box office) gave the star a series of stand-out hits. However, as each featured Pitt as part of larger ensemble casts, including other star names such as George Clooney and Matt Damon, it is debatable to what extent the success of these films can be attributed to Pitt's stardom alone.
9. Soren Andersen, "Pitt-Jolie Rumors 'Irrelevant' to Film, Producer Asserts," *The News Tribune* (Tacoma, WA), June 10, 2005, sec. E.
10. *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* cost US\$115 million to produce but grossed US\$131 million at the domestic box office and US\$144 million overseas, while its sequel was made for US\$95 million, returning a gross box office of US\$66 million domestic and US\$91 million international.
11. Matt Soergel, "'Mr., Mrs. Smith' Equally Bland," *Florida Times-Union* (Jacksonville), June 10, 2005.
12. Mal Vincent, "Entertaining 'Smith' Gets Firepower from Star Power," *The Virginian-Pilot* (Norfolk, VA), June 11, 2005, sec. E.
13. Duane Dudek, "Assassins' Star Power Overshoots Sexy 'Mr. and Mrs. Smith,'" *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (Milwaukee, WI), June 10, 2005, sec. E, Final Edition.
14. Vincent, "Entertaining 'Smith' Gets Firepower from Star Power."
15. Brian Miller, "The Marriage Reloaded," *Seattle Weekly* (Seattle, WA), June 8, 2005.
16. See, for example, Richard de Cordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Richard Dyer, *Stars* new ed.; Paul McDonald, *The Star System: Hollywood's Production of Popular Identities* (London: Wallflower, 2000); and Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994).
17. An example of this tendency is James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

12 The Screen Actor's "First Self" and "Second Self"

John Wayne and
Coquelin's Acting Theory

Sharon Marie Carnicke

In this chapter, I examine John Wayne's highly crafted portrayal of Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956) through the lens of Constant-Benoît Coquelin's theoretical understanding of the actor's creative work in order to shed new light on the art of film acting. While at first glance the American film star and the French theatrical icon seem to have little in common, their shared views on the techniques of acting reveal that film acting and stage acting are, at base, the same basic art form. They may have worked in different eras and media and made use of different performance styles, but their remarkably similar craft suggests how theatrical history can productively illuminate the mechanics behind screen performances.

Their star images are a study in opposites. Marion Robert Morrison (better known as John Wayne, 1907–1979) is often viewed as a screen star who plays himself, donning different costumes for different films. By his own testimony, this view was literally true during the earliest days of his career when B Westerns were shot in as few as four days. As Wayne summed up the breakneck work schedule, "I'd change my clothes, read the lines, change my clothes, read some more lines."¹ In his mature career, however, he crafted fine, naturalistic screen performances. In contrast, Coquelin (1841–1909) was a member of France's classical company, the *Comédie Française*, founded in 1680. He was rightly viewed as a legitimate actor who crafted a wide range of richly artistic roles in a histrionic style. "I represent . . . that *ensemble* of [theatrical] traditions which constitute the *Comédie Française*," he stated, "that mass of accumulated observations, that inheritance of those who have gone before."²

The two actors also learned their craft in radically different ways. Wayne used trial and error by working on the sets of dozens of B films. Wayne said, "I was in so many pictures that aren't exactly the things that you jump with joy about that I'd go and see them and see if I got away with certain things."³ By trying "things" and seeing how they looked onscreen, he developed his own personalized method of working. In contrast, Coquelin

rigorously trained with France's leading teachers through a systematic curriculum at the Paris Conservatory. Such training proved to him that "study polishes the blade and renders it more brilliant."⁴

A closer glance at Wayne and Coquelin, however, reveals interesting commonalities. Both became international stars—Wayne, through the global distribution of his films; and Coquelin, by touring over five continents. Both shared a conservative bent in their political beliefs: Wayne became known for his controversial anti-Communist stance, and Coquelin was an ambassador for the French government. Even more noticeably, both became cultural icons who were officially honored by their governments at their deaths. Wayne's roles in films about the American West and World War II made him arguably "the most important American of our time," and, accordingly, he received the US Congressional Gold Medal in 1979.⁵ Coquelin's classical roles "represent[ed] all the breadth of . . . the French dramatic manner."⁶ Indeed, he was recognized by the government of France through an official graveside speech in 1909.

Most remarkably, the claims that each performer makes about his acting reveals that they agree in large part about how actors work. However different their performance styles and their training, both were highly cognizant of how the media in which they performed affected their craft and how their physical and vocal gestures created dramatic effects. While scholars might well expect such awareness from the histrionic Coquelin, the same from Wayne might surprise anyone who assumes that he plays himself in role after role. Thus, their unexpected commonalities about the craft of acting reveal Wayne as a legitimate actor and illuminate the nature of screen acting more generally.

COQUELIN'S THEORY OF ACTING

Wayne offers flashes of insight into his creative process in interviews, but he spent most of his time acting rather than speaking about it. In this, he was a typical working actor. What Coquelin eloquently furnishes that Wayne does not is a theoretical framework. Coquelin made it his business not only to act, but also to explain his work to non-actors. In this regard, Coquelin is exceptional. Explicit theorizing among actors has always been rare because acting, like riding a bicycle, inhabits a "tacit dimension": philosopher Michael Polanyi's term for non-verbal, embodied knowledge that resists easy verbalization.⁷ Lee Strasberg, the famed guru of the American Method, once said about acting, "All this discussion, all these theories, all this thing about wanting to solve something by having an opinion, I think you're right and you're wrong, it's crazy. It's suicidal. . . . The only thing that counts is what you see."⁸ Wayne would have agreed, Coquelin would not.

Only a handful of actors over the centuries have tried to find words for their tacit knowledge. Most everyone knows the name of Constantin

Stanislavsky (1863–1938) precisely because he tried. “I believe that all masters of the arts need to write,” he said, “to try and systematize their art.”⁹ Yet, such a project is far from easy. A “system lives within me,” he admits, “but in an unformed state.”¹⁰

As Stanislavsky struggled with his task, he read others who had tried to do the same, including Coquelin. In the Frenchman, Stanislavsky found an admirable actor, whose method matched his own system, but only in part. Stanislavsky recognized himself in Coquelin’s process of rehearsal, but not in his experiential description of the act of performance *per se*.¹¹

In contrast, when Wayne speaks about acting, his remarks echo Coquelin precisely. Thus, despite the fame of Stanislavsky’s System, Coquelin’s theory better suits the goals of this study and, more broadly, this volume. Stanislavsky writes for actors and develops a training curriculum. Coquelin speaks to non-actors in order to help them find an objective point of view from which to assess performances.

In 1879, Coquelin saw acting attacked on two fronts. First, the novelist Émile Zola (1840–1902) wrote a scathing article that attacked the *Comédie Française* for its artistic conservatism.¹² Following scientific discoveries about heredity and social systems, Zola was agitating for an artistic revolution that would bring the arts into alignment with science. He set in motion the movement known as “naturalism,” and his theatrical followers put “slices of life” on stage. In so doing, the naturalists rejected the histrionic tradition of Coquelin’s home company. Second, the French Legion of Honor denied membership to two leading French actors, precisely because they were actors. “If an actor were ignominiously treated upon the stage,” so reasoned the Legion, then “the dignity of [. . . our honor] suffered,” too.¹³

On the first front, Coquelin realized that an actor who uses naturalistic illusion to create character is in particular danger of being disregarded as an artist. Wayne’s star image proves Coquelin’s intuition. When asked about playing himself in film after film, Wayne said, “The majority criticize my work, ride me and belittle me.”¹⁴ On the second front, Coquelin realized that the cultural elite were having difficulty differentiating between actors and their roles. He thus took it on himself to raise public awareness about acting by delivering lectures, first in Paris and then worldwide. He continued to advocate respect for actors until his death in 1909. Among his most articulate writings are *Art and the Actor* (1880) and *The Art of Acting* (1894).

Coquelin began his most well-known defense of the actor with the bold statement that “acting is an art, analogous to that of the portrait painter, for instance.”¹⁵ For Coquelin, the purpose of acting is no different from that of any other art.

What is *art* . . . if not the interpretation of nature, of truth, more or less tinged by a peculiar light, which does not alter the proportions, but yet

marks the salient features, heightens their colors, displays their fidelity to nature, so that our minds are more deeply and forcibly affected by them? Is it not the actor's duty to cast this light?¹⁶

He specifically aligns actors with artists who had been accepted into the Legion of Honor. "We are to poets as musicians are to composers and conductors. And I assure you that to interpret Molière or Corneille, as to interpret Beethoven, it does not suffice to be made of wood."¹⁷

This basic assumption—that acting is art—generates Coquelin's entire theoretical framework; it leads him to identify the multiple ways in which acting is comparable to other arts and yet remains distinctive. I focus below on three of his key insights that most usefully illuminate Wayne's acting: (1) actors adjust to the conventions of the specific medium that frames their performances, (2) naturalism is a style of acting as conventional as any other, and (3) actors consciously use themselves (hence, play themselves) as the material from which to create their characters.

PERFORMANCE MEDIA

Coquelin observes that actors, like other artists, respond to production "conventions" that "change with time and men" and, moreover, that these conventions determine the actor's "special and peculiar medium."¹⁸ Coquelin's medium was the late nineteenth-century proscenium stage, which he describes as "isolated, elevated, brightly lighted" and having "that collection of conventional properties, the footlights, wings, scenery, the actors themselves—for an actor is himself a convention."¹⁹ In short, spectators "are at the theatre and not in the street or at home."²⁰ Thus, actors adapt to their given medium accordingly by adjusting their performances to the artificial conditions under which they work. Performers "must absolutely modify the conditions of real life to suit this background if we would produce the illusion of real life upon the spectators."²¹

In contrast, Wayne understands that his medium creates a more intimate relationship with the spectator than does the stage. He once observed, "Motion pictures are like sitting in a room with someone and talking across a table."²² His adjustments, therefore, are different, but no less conscious, than Coquelin's. "You can't show histrionics beyond a certain point," Wayne explains, "because you're right there."²³ He also knows that film creates technological conventions to which screen actors respond. Just as experienced stage actors "find their light" within the proscenium frame, so too must screen actors "hit their marks" so that the camera can frame them properly.

Seen from Coquelin's point of view, the actor's work onscreen is a relatively recent historical manifestation. The proscenium arch may have been replaced by the camera's eye, but the actor's performance is framed by both.

As recently as 2009, Julianne Moore made this very comparison while discussing her work in *Blindness* (Fernando Meirelles, 2008). She reminds her interviewer that because the camera is “a proscenium device . . . I need to know what I’m doing and I need to know what the proscenium is so that I can be within that.”²⁴ Coquelin would surely have made the same comparison and heralded Wayne for adjusting appropriately to his medium. Such adjustments to different performance media, however, do not constitute new art forms; acting is acting whether on stage or screen.

NATURALISM

Actors, like other artists, also adjust to changing trends in aesthetic styles. But, actors who work with naturalism, a style that calls on them to hide their craft, can be more easily dismissed as artists. To Coquelin, hiding one’s craft is tantamount to “self-effacement.” He writes ironically, “The triumph of the [actor in naturalism] is to make himself forgotten.”²⁵ Film actor Michael Caine echoes Coquelin unironically when he says, “If you catch someone ‘acting’ in a movie, that actor is doing something wrong.”²⁶

Whereas Coquelin watched as naturalism overpowered his taste for the histrionic, Wayne played out his entire career against cinema’s insistent demand for natural behavior onscreen. But he is as aware of the conventions behind naturalism as was Coquelin. “Nobody can be natural” in films, Wayne said. “To be natural you’d drop a scene. The scene would go right out the window, for Christsakes.”²⁷ Given the widespread belief that film captures actors’ natural behavior, Wayne’s emphasis on the fact that screen acting is no more inherently natural than stage acting is as significant a statement as Coquelin’s defense of the stage actor. In the twenty-first century, actors still feel the need to state this obvious fact. Moore said in 2009, “I think there’s this misnomer about acting [that] we’re like feeling stuff and the camera’s going to pick up what we’re feeling. It’s deliberate . . . you have to have awareness.”²⁸

During the last years of Coquelin’s career, theatre’s passion for naturalism was already moving into the incipient film industry. As theatre scholar Edwin Duerr observes, “Most of the subsequent makers of motion pictures . . . were not interested in the new medium’s potentialities for the fantastic or the artificial”; instead, they wanted “a new kind of acting so truthful, or personable, that often it [seemed] hardly acting at all.”²⁹ Perhaps, as Duerr suggests, the historical coincidence of naturalism as a theatrical trend and the use of the movie camera as a medium for acting made naturalistic screen performance seem somehow inevitable.

Although it may sometimes appear to contemporary audiences that naturalism is a mark of good acting, Coquelin’s contention that acting is an art, much like any other, best exposes naturalism as only one stylistic approach available to screen actors. By taking a historical and theoretical

look at performance, an actor's illusionist approach to reality seems no different in impulse than a painter's ultra-realistic *trompe l'oeil* canvas. Both the naturalistic screen performance and the *trompe l'oeil* painting are discrete manifestations of style within the broader horizon of the arts.

PLAYING ONESELF

The quintessential difference between acting and other arts resides in the material that actors use to create their works. As Coquelin explains:

The poet has for his material, words; the sculptor, marble or bronze; the painter, colors and canvas; the musician, sounds; but the actor is his own material. To exhibit a thought, an image, a human portrait, he works upon himself. He is his own piano, he strikes his own strings, he molds himself like wet clay, he paints himself.³⁰

Semiotician Eli Rozik puts the same idea into more contemporary theoretical language when he writes that in most iconic arts, "the matter employed for imprinting an image usually is not typical of its model. For example, the image of a human being may be imprinted on marble, canvas (by means of paint), or puppets." For acting, the situation is unique: "images of human beings are imprinted on actors (i.e., real human beings)."³¹

In examining this aspect of acting, Coquelin makes his theory unique. Other practitioner-theorists, including Stanislavsky, assert that the actor necessarily uses dual consciousness in the creation of roles.³² Coquelin's specific description of that dual consciousness is unusually concrete, in that he envisions the actor as having "his first self, which is the player, and his second self, which is the instrument. The first self conceives the person to be created . . . and the being that he sees is represented by his second self."³³

Coquelin specifically likens the actor to a portrait painter. He describes the creation of one of his most famous roles, the title character in Molière's *Tartuffe* (1664), thus: After studying the play, the "first self" envisions the character in his mind's eye. This vision is not yet his portrait, only an imaginary model from which to paint Tartuffe's portrait. The "first self" now "seizes each salient feature and transfers it, not to his canvas, but to himself. He adapts each element of this personality to his second self. He sees Tartuffe in a certain costume, he wears it; he feels he has a certain face, he assumes it."³⁴ In short, the actor "recasts his own individuality till the critic which is his first self declares he is satisfied and finds that the result is really Tartuffe."³⁵ Moreover, Coquelin observes, an "external" transformation is not sufficient. "The actor must learn to move, talk, gesticulate, listen, and also think with the mind he divines in Tartuffe."³⁶

At first glance, Coquelin seems to do little more than restate the "paradox of the actor" as identified by the French eighteenth-century philosopher,

Dennis Diderot (1713–1784), who speculated that actors need not necessarily feel the emotions of their character in order to move spectators.³⁷ Indeed, Coquelin writes, “I hold this paradox to be literal truth.”³⁸

However, a second glance shows a significant difference in Coquelin’s restatement of this paradox. While Diderot writes from the perspective of a spectator who is moved, Coquelin filters the philosopher’s insight through the experience of an actor performing. His doubling of the word “self” in his terminology for the actor’s dual personality stresses the importance of individuality. It is as if the actor stands before a mirror that reflects both person and role; the two images are at once the same and not the same, yet both are the “self.” Put another way, Coquelin sees the actor as completely engaged in performance, however paradoxically. “It is with this individual *self* that [the actor] makes you by turns shiver, weep, or smile, the noblest shudders, the most melting tears, the humanest smiles.”³⁹ In this sense, actors do indeed play themselves, but in the same way as musicians play their instruments, not as Wayne’s detractors suppose.

Coquelin drives his point home when he answers a challenge from the British actor Henry Irving, who claimed that Coquelin’s insistence on the actor’s controlling “first self” trumps “the divine fire” of inspiration.⁴⁰ Coquelin countered that Irving had misunderstood. “Mr. Irving . . . fears that my theories may smother originality” and lead to “imitation [which] kills individuality.”⁴¹ It is true, Coquelin concedes, that untalented actors may indeed produce imitative work, but “for actors of talent, no. . . . Far from obstructing individuality,” self-control in the artist “develops it.”⁴² “What I protest against,” Coquelin asserts, “is the idea that one can be inspired in a role which one has not studied, and the belief that one is inspired when one is merely extravagant.”⁴³ As theatre scholar William Worthen observes, critics of Coquelin, like Irving, “denied the actor the status of artist by seeing his performance as self-denial rather than as self-discovery.”⁴⁴ Irving’s focus on personal inspiration may well argue for greater respect of the actor as an individual, but Coquelin’s argument is more pragmatic. It takes into account the fact that actors must consciously control their inspirations. If they did not, they could not adjust to the conventions of their media.

Interviews with Wayne reveal that he was highly aware of the ways in which the actor in him (his “first self”) shaped his vocal and physical gestures (his “second self”) for his roles. Consider his famously eccentric pausing while he speaks. Here’s what he said about it:

I have found that you [can] take your ah, ah, ahs in the middle of a sentence. . . . If you say it normally, “I think I’ll go to town. Um [pause]. Then we can go over and see something,” the audience would have left you. But if you say “I think I’ll go [pause] to town, and I’ll [pause] see those three broads,” now they’re waiting for you. You can take all the goddamn time you want if you choose your time for hesitation. . . . I know what I’m doing.⁴⁵

In other words, Wayne as actor (his "first self") consciously controlled his audiences' reactions to his characters (his "second selves") through manipulations of vocal apparatus.

The actor's "dual personality" makes acting especially difficult to study. As Rozik aptly notes, "The extension of the principle of similarity to imprinting matter is probably responsible for occasionally blurring the borderline between theatre and life."⁴⁶ On the simplest level, it is hard to separate actor from character when they both occupy the same body. When the actor is framed by the complex art and technology of cinema, and when screen acting is placed within a cultural context that prefers naturalism as an aesthetic style, it becomes all the more difficult to isolate art from artist.⁴⁷

FINDING JOHN WAYNE'S FIRST SELF IN ETHAN EDWARDS

I now turn to John Wayne not as a star, but as a working actor, who uses his body and voice as instruments of his work. I will therefore search for his "first self," the actor, in his powerful and highly ambiguous creation, Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers*, a role commonly considered by many as his finest performance.

Two key obstacles get in the way of this search: first, Wayne's stardom, and second, the apparent naturalness of his filmed behavior. These obstacles suggest that Wayne does not *play* Edwards but *is* Edwards. In the words of film director Allan Dwan, "A fellow like John Wayne is the same in every picture, but you like him because he's Wayne. And you like to see that walk of his, that strange walk. And you're satisfied. Here he is."⁴⁸

First, the view that Wayne plays himself stems from a pervasive assumption that stars and their personas are somehow the same thing because they occupy the same body. Put into Coquelin's terms, most spectators confuse the actor's "first" and "second selves." In his extraordinary study of cinema acting, James Naremore admits to just such a confluence of person and role. "It is usually John Wayne [I see] getting on a horse, seldom the Ringo Kid or Ethan Edwards. But then who is John Wayne? In a very real sense he is as much a character as anyone else, the product of publicity and various film roles, represented by a fellow whose name was Marion Morrison."⁴⁹ John Wayne as the star is, at base, "just a construction, an image that has an ideological or totemic function."⁵⁰ Coquelin would agree that *Wayne* is as much a role for Morrison as is *Edwards*.

Morrison too was clearly aware that he differed from "Wayne," and that his "first self" constructed the star image. "People say so much that John Wayne is just playing John Wayne. Now is this true?" an interviewer asked. Morrison answered:

I am happy that they say that . . . I like the idea of being popular with a great number of people and having an identification with them. . . . I always try to be something that they can easily identify with; therefore,

I have tried never to let my ego enter into my performance to the point where it makes a many-colored male bird that may attract attention for a while. . . . The more they say, “Jesus, that’s just the way that he is,” why the better it is for me propaganda-wise in the business. I mean, in the box office.⁵¹

In short, Morrison not only played “Wayne” consciously, but also naturalistically hid his artifice from the public.

His words point directly to the second obstacle that blocks a search for Wayne’s “first self”: his apparently natural filmed behavior. To see such behavior as crafted, one must consider both naturalism and casting as production conventions. I have already cited Wayne’s bald statement that “nobody can be natural” onscreen. He has also said, “You’ve got to act—you can’t be natural, that would stop the tempo.”⁵² Such statements are far more honest about actors’ work than the publicity machine’s tendency to romanticize their in-born talents.

Acting teacher Patrick Tucker is particularly good at assembling “proof that acting is far from ‘real.’”⁵³ For example, to expose the unnatural spatial relationships between acting partners during filming, Tucker uses a single shot of Clint Eastwood and Lee Marvin in *Paint Your Wagon* (Joshua Logan, 1969). Both actors look toward the camera; Eastwood glances over his right shoulder, and Marvin squarely faces forward, pointing a finger in alarm. They stand so close to each other that their shoulders overlap in the shot. Tucker observes that

real people stand a certain distance apart when in a normal social situation. . . . If we put a frame around the ‘proper’ distance, we would think they were aloof, and a large part of the screen would not be used. So the distance between [Eastwood and Marvin] becomes significant on its own account, rather than reflecting a truth. [Moreover,] the close version . . . looked fine on screen when it was framed, but take the frame away and . . . you just would not believe that these two men would stand in such an intimate position.⁵⁴

Of course, awareness of the frame is only one of many kinds of adjustments to technology cited by Tucker, but it speaks directly to the fact that working actors, like Wayne for film and Coquelin for stage, deal with unnatural production conventions all the time.

Cinema’s penchant for naturalism makes typecasting prevalent in Hollywood. Wayne’s large frame and rugged features, for example, best fit the American cultural stereotype of “hero.” Thus, when he plays a hero (or even an antihero like Edwards), Wayne does indeed play himself, insofar as his body suits the type. Coquelin muses, “The ideal would be that the second self, the body, should be a soft mass of sculptor’s clay, capable of assuming at will any form. . . . Alas! nature forbids this”; and so, “the exterior of an actor, certain details of his ‘architecture,’ may confine him

exclusively to one special kind of part."⁵⁵ Put into these pragmatic terms, typecasting counts. Actors are constrained by their material bodies. Even Stanislavsky bemoaned this state of affairs: "My God, are we stage artists really doomed because of our material bodies to serve eternally and portray only crude realism?"⁵⁶ Once one confronts the obstacles of stardom and Wayne's apparently natural behavior, one can look for his "first self" in the details of his finely crafted vocal and physical work: in this case, his portrayal of the ambiguous Ethan Edwards, a man of honor who can perform the most dishonorable act of shooting a man in the back.

As I have argued elsewhere, acting consists of an observable series of vocal and physical choices on the part of the actor in service of character and narrative.⁵⁷ Coquelin adds to that definition the fact that such choices also take account of the medium that frames them. In a live theatre, the actor's choices tend to be larger and more obvious in order to carry the character into the furthest reaches of the balcony. Onscreen, the choices can vary widely from shot to shot, because the camera eye can change the apparent spatial distance from spectator to actor easily and quickly. Thus, film actors adjust their means of expression from theatrical full-body gestures in long shots to subtle facial motions in the close-up.

As Wayne's aforementioned words about his use of unusual pauses make clear, he chooses his vocal gestures consciously. He is just as conscious of physical movements. Director Budd Boetticher credited "Duke Wayne [for having] taught me [that . . .] when you don't have anything important to say, do something. Saddle a horse, light a pipe, spit, do anything."⁵⁸ Wayne may have learned this lesson from John Ford, who was rumored to have ordered his star to "Cut the crap, and do the thing!"⁵⁹

I therefore turn to a close examination of Wayne's choices in a brief sequence from *The Searchers*—the story of Ethan Edwards's obsessive five-year search for a niece who was abducted by Comanches. Over time, Edwards transforms his rescue mission into a plan to kill her for having been defiled. The search begins when Edwards finds his brother's house burned to the ground, his sister-in-law raped and their two young daughters—the elder Lucy and little Debbie—missing. A full posse initially sets out to find the girls, but the team soon gives up. Edwards, however, vows to carry on. At this point Edwards is accompanied by two young men: Lucy's fiancé, Brad Jorgenson (Harry Carey, Jr.), and his adopted nephew, Martin Pawley (Jeffrey Hunter).

The sequence consists of three distinct segments: (1) When the three men come across an Indian trail leading up into a canyon, Edwards insists on going up alone and leaves the two young men behind. He may, perhaps, want to protect them from seeing what he fears to find. (2) Edwards returns in a dark mood and without his Confederate "Johnny Reb coat," but morosely refuses to tell his companions what he found in the canyon. (3) Finally, when Brad sees a Comanche wearing Lucy's dress and excitedly reports that she still lives, Edwards admits the truth—that he found Lucy dead in the canyon, wrapped her in his coat and buried her.

At Edwards' admission, Brad inarticulately asks about rape: "Did they . . . ? Was she . . . ?" Edwards answers by angrily shutting down the conversation. "What do you want me to do? Draw you a picture? Spell it out? Don't ever ask me! Long as you live, don't ever ask me more." Does he refuse in order to protect her dignity? His reaction closely echoes an earlier scene with Martin; here too only Edwards has seen the body of his dead sister-in-law, Martin's mother, and here too Edwards violently refuses to name what he has seen. Clearly, these two related scenes suggest the dark emotion that drives Edwards' ambivalent search for Debbie that oscillates between rescue and punishment.

In the first segment of this sequence, Ford places Wayne on a horse, his companions on foot. This positioning means that Wayne would need to look down on his acting partners in order to see them; but if he does so, the camera would not see his eyes as open. Instead, Wayne looks toward, but not directly at, them; the camera now captures his eyes as lowered but still visible.

In this segment, Ford also frames Wayne in two medium close-ups. In these, the actor's work involves almost microscopically small physical gestures. It is as if Wayne were treating the shots as extreme close-ups, with movements that are nearly imperceptible in the medium shots. Thus, he affects the viewer almost subliminally. Without close attention, one is unaware of what he does physically within the frame. Yet, he creates a sense of fearful expectation using the following physical details (Figure 12.1):



Figure 12.1 Does he look at his partners or inward toward his thoughts and fears? John Wayne in *The Searchers* (Warner Brothers Entertainment, Inc., 1958). Digital frame enlargement.

(1) There is tension in his lips as he turns his head away from the canyon to answer his two optimistic young companions with the skepticism of a man who has experienced such circumstances before. "I'll take a look," he says.

(2) By vaguely directing his eyes toward the young men, he not only assists the camera but also presents an unclear object of attention that suggests inner emotion.⁶⁰ Is he distracted by disturbing thoughts, or is he hesitant to speak them aloud?

(3) When the young men offer to signal at any sign of trouble, Wayne pulls his head back slightly as he warns them, "No. Don't fire your guns." He lets the suggestion strike him, like a slap, causing a physical reaction.

(4) Wayne then underlines his plan to go alone and meet them "on the far side" with a small, brief nod of the head.

(5) With this final punctuation, he turns first his head and then his horse toward the trail. This last physical choice simultaneously suggests determination and reluctance to go.

The next segment is composed of both long and medium shots. Here, in sympathy with the camera, Wayne uses larger physical gestures to suggest Edwards' emotional reaction to having found Lucy's body.

(1) As he rides quickly into the foreground of the picture, Wayne nearly falls from his horse, off-balance, catching himself just in time (Figure 12.2).

(2) He then sinks slackly into the dust with an exhale. This movement turns the fall into something else, as if he had intended from the first to sit



Figure 12.2 Wayne nearly falls from his horse, off-balance. *The Searchers* (Warner Brothers Entertainment, Inc., 1958). Digital frame enlargement.

down in the dust. Is Edwards too tired to stand? Does he want to rest? Or does he wish to keep his actual emotion from the two younger men?

(3) Wayne then channels his energy into a strong physical action that clearly puzzles his companions: breathing hard, he digs with his knife in the dirt (Figure 12.3). Does Edwards seek water in the dry earth? Martin's offer of a drink suggests that he interprets Edwards' digging in this way. Or does it echo his burying of Lucy? This is precisely the sort of physical choice that creates Edwards' ambiguity.

(4) When Wayne takes Martin's canteen to drink, he holds it with two hands, as if to steady himself. Edwards' emotion is barely under control (Figure 12.4). These off-balance and inexplicable physical choices speak loudly of Edwards' dark and grieving mood.

In the final segment, when Edwards confesses the truth about Lucy, Ford gives Wayne centrality in the scene by positioning him between the two young men. Moreover, it seems, Ford wishes us to see the deliberateness of this positioning: as Carey (playing Brad) runs into the foreground, he is framed by Hunter (as Martin) to the left and Wayne (as Edwards) to the right. But, just before Carey joins them, he veers sharply to the right to cede centrality to Wayne. For the rest of the scene, Wayne holds the strongest position.

In this last segment, Ford also gives Wayne two close-ups, framing just his shoulders and head. In a film that takes full advantage of the Western landscape through primarily long and medium shots, these close-ups stand



Figure 12.3 Does Edwards seek water in the dry earth? *The Searchers* (Warner Brothers Entertainment, Inc., 1958). Digital frame enlargement.

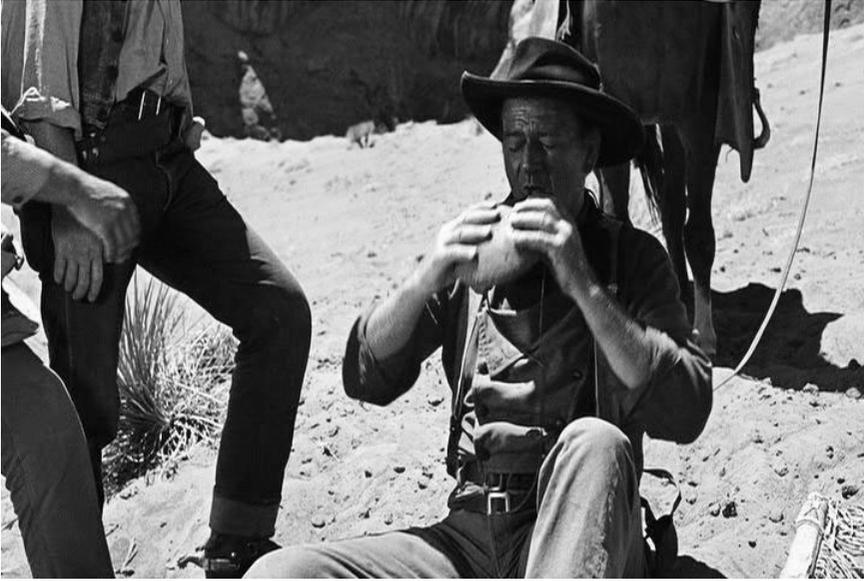


Figure 12.4 Wayne holds the canteen as if to steady himself. *The Searchers* (Warner Brothers Entertainment, Inc., 1958). Digital frame enlargement.

out. As in the medium close-ups, Wayne uses subtly small and simple gestures: his eyes narrow as he looks at Brad, and his lips flatten out in tension. However, in comparison to his gestures in the first segment, his facial gestures here are more visible because the camera is closer.

What makes this segment distinctive is how Edwards' previously suppressed emotion explodes through a vocally rich performance. Ford sets the scene in the darkness of night, a choice that furthers the imagery of light set against dark throughout the film. Here, Wayne takes full advantage of the dark by focusing on the delivery of his dialogue. He uses his eccentric pausing when he says, "I wrapped her in my [pause] coat buried her with my own hands thought it best [pause] to keep it from you." The sentence runs on without stop except for the two oddly placed breaths. This rhythm suggests the difficulty with which Edwards speaks the truth.

Wayne also uses rising inflections at the ends of his thoughts, never dropping his voice to signal the end of sentence. Every thought is punctuated by his breath and ends with a rising inflection that keeps the scene moving inexorably forward. "If I had a downward inflection," he says of this technique, "then the camera can cut away from my face. But if I have a rising inflection, then I haven't finished yet and the camera cannot cut away."⁶¹ When Wayne finally drops his voice on "Don't ever ask me more," he ends the scene and turns away from the camera. With this inflective punctuation, Wayne controls the tempo and shape of the scene. In this control, the actor is at work.

CONCLUSION

Wayne's carefully controlled acting in *The Searchers* offers a stunning example of how actors imprint images of characters onto themselves in ways that create credible illusions of natural behavior. Coupled with his comments on acting that reveal how consciously he manipulates his gestures to adjust to the technology that frames his performance, Wayne's "first self" can be seen playing his instrument, his "second self," admirably. If Coquelin could watch Wayne, he would most likely observe that "the actor is within his creation, that is all. It is from within that he moves the springs which make his character express the whole gamut of human consciousness."⁶²

Finding Wayne's "first self" entails extremely close observation of the smallest of his physical and vocal gestures and an analysis of how these work in consonance with the shots in which he appears. In *The Searchers*, his acting is seamless in its adjustments to the frame; he exhibits true "material poetry," which can, like verse, be scanned in order to see how familiar, quotidian gestures are transformed into associative, emotional expressions that create his character.⁶³ Prompted by Coquelin's theoretical defense of acting, this perspective on screen acting distinguishes the star from the actor, the actor from the character and naturalism from natural behavior.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Rick Jewell, "John Wayne: An American Icon," *The Trojan Family Magazine* (Autumn 2008), 35.
2. Quoted in "Actors and Acting: A Discussion by Constant-Benoît Coquelin, Sir Henry Irving, and Dion Boucicault," in *Papers on Acting*, trans. and ed. Brander Matthews (1887; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1958), 189.
3. John Wayne, interview by Tony Macklin, in *Voices from the Set: The Film Heritage Interviews*, ed. Tony Macklin and Nick Pici (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2000), 137.
4. Coquelin, in "Actors and Acting," 190.
5. Eric Bentley, "The Political Theatre of John Wayne," in *Theatre of War: Comments on 32 Occasions*, ed. Eric Bentley (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), 308.
6. Brander Matthews, introductory note to Constant-Benoît Coquelin, "Art and the Actor," in *Papers on Acting*, trans. and ed. Brander Matthews (1880; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1958), 9.
7. Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1966). For more on tacit knowledge in acting, see also Chapter 4 of Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus: An Acting Master for the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2009).
8. Lee Strasberg, "The Actors Studio," sound recording no. 339A (1956–1969), Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, An Archive of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Tape 9: October 29, 1956.
9. Quoted in Boris Filippov, *Actors without Make-Up*, trans. Kathelene Cook (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 58.

10. Konstantin Stanislavsky, *Sobranie sochinenii* [Collected Works] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1999), 9: 658–59. Stanislavsky's books are best known in English as *An Actor Prepares*, *Building a Role* and *Creating a Character*, the titles given to the abridged editions by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood.
11. See Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 139–44.
12. See Lenora Marguerite Coe, "Constant-Benoît Coquelin: The Art of a Rhetorical Actor" (PhD dissertation, University of Southern California, 1974), 779.
13. *Ibid.*, 372.
14. Quoted in Macklin, *Voices from the Set*, 130.
15. Coquelin, "Art and the Actor," 22.
16. *Ibid.*, 18.
17. Coquelin, quoted in and translated by Coe, "Constant-Benoît Coquelin," 386.
18. Coquelin, "Art and the Actor," 30.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. Quoted in Macklin, *Voices from the Set*, 136.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Melissa Block, "Julianne Moore: Seeing Past Surfaces in *Blindness*," *National Public Radio*, October 2, 2009; transcript accessed through <http://www.npr.org> (accessed December 23, 2009).
25. Coquelin, quoted in and translated by Coe, "Constant-Benoît Coquelin," 390.
26. Michael Caine, *Acting in Film: An Actor's Take on Movie Making* (New York: Applause, 1990), 4.
27. Quoted in Macklin, *Voices from the Set*, 137.
28. Quoted in Block, "Julianne Moore."
29. Edwin Duerr, *The Length and Depth of Acting* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 406.
30. Coquelin, "Actors and Acting," 163.
31. Eli Rozik, *The Roots of Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 19.
32. For Stanislavsky's reinterpretation of Diderot's paradox as an alternation of consciousness, see Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 138–44.
33. Coquelin, "Actors and Acting," 163.
34. *Ibid.*, 164.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. See Denis Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting*, trans. Walter Herries Pollock (1883; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1957). For contemporary articulations of Diderot's thesis, see Robert Gordon, *The Purpose of Playing: Modern Acting Theories in Perspective* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 24; and Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 157–58.
38. Coquelin, *Art and the Actor*, 26.
39. *Ibid.*, 28.
40. Irving, in "Actors and Acting," 181.
41. Coquelin, in "Actors and Acting," 189–90.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. William B. Worthen, *The Idea of the Actor: Drama and the Ethics of Performance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 135.

45. Quoted in Macklin, *Voices from the Set*, 137.
46. Rozik, *The Roots of Theatre*, 2.
47. See Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008) for a number of analytic strategies that might be employed in one's critical assessment of a screen actor's contributions to a film.
48. Quoted in Eric Sherman, *Directing the Film: Film Directors on Their Art* (Los Angeles: Acrobat Books, 1976), 70.
49. James Naremore, *Acting in Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 157.
50. Ibid.
51. Quoted in Macklin, *Voices from the Set*, 130.
52. Quoted in Patrick Tucker, *Secrets of Screen Acting* (London: Routledge, 1994), 87.
53. Tucker, *Secrets of Screen Acting*, 35.
54. Ibid., 32.
55. Coquelin, in "Actors and Acting," 165, 170.
56. Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 355–56.
57. Sharon Marie Carnicke, "The Material Poetry of Acting: Objects of Attention, Performance Style, and Gender in *The Shining* and *Eyes Wide Shut*," Special issue on Acting, *Journal of Film and Video* 58, nos. 2–3 (2006): 21–30.
58. Quoted in Sherman, *Directing the Film*, 165.
59. Quoted in Mary Ellen O'Brien, *Film Acting: The Techniques and History of Acting for the Camera* (New York: Arco Publishing, 1983), 48.
60. For more on "objects of attention" as an acting term and technique, see Carnicke, "The Material Poetry of Acting," 25–28.
61. Quoted in Tucker, *Secrets of Screen Acting*, 150.
62. Coquelin, "Art and the Actor," 17.
63. See Carnicke, "The Material Poetry of Acting," 21–22.

13 Acting Like a Star

Florence Turner, Picture Personality

Charlie Keil

The transitional era of 1907–1913 incorporates a wide range of changes, to textual practices and extratextual institutions alike. Frequently these two types of changes work in concert, as when production efficiencies promote particular stylistic tendencies (such as increased cutting rates or adjusted shot scale) or when the adoption of a new standard for running length, predicated on stabilizing rental charges, also leads to the enshrinement of certain narrative formulae. Nowhere is this tendency more evident than in the intertwined histories of the development of the star system and the concomitant shift to a type of performance style tailored to the demands of crafting compelling film narratives during this period. While changing filmic performance styles always owe a least a partial debt to prevailing trends in popular star personae and current promotional strategies, during the transitional era the interconnectedness of stardom and performance style was arguably more pronounced than it would ever be again. More specifically, during the years leading up to the feature era, before the enshrinement of motion picture stardom within a complex circuitry of promotional departments and media-based publicity, the filmic text played a paramount role in defining what Richard deCordova has labeled the “picture personality.”

DeCordova argued that the earliest screen stars (as distinct from pre-established theatre stars who were cast, usually unsuccessfully, in motion pictures) depended on the diegesis of their films to cement their star status.¹ The sheer force of their onscreen performances led to this specialized status, as apart from the public’s knowledge of them as figures off the screen. Once promotional activities, ranging from print-based profiles to personal appearances, became staples of the industry’s efforts to forge stars, the concept of the picture personality cedes to that of the star proper. But during the transitional period at least, companies were dependent primarily on the strength of their featured actors’ performances, and the promotion of the first screen stars devolves directly from their prowess onscreen and the types of roles devised to capitalize on qualities discerned by the public.

The potential for an actor’s performance to draw audience attention arises around 1908–1909 in part because of increased industrial consolidation

leading to improved delivery of prints and enhanced production values. But the emergence of the picture personality can also be tied to changes in the representational system employed within American filmmaking (themselves tied to the altered industrial context) that became increasingly evident from these years onward. For my purposes, those changes most crucial to the development of stardom include at least three noticeable developments. First, companies began crafting scenarios that concentrated more consistently on character psychology, creating stories that allowed a focus on character reactions to emotionally charged situations. Second, filmmakers began to place the camera closer to the actors, which allowed aspects of their performances to register more easily. (Here, the contribution of Vitagraph, one of the industry's preeminent production concerns, is of vital importance: the company instituted what became known as the 9-foot line, wherein the camera was positioned at a distance no farther than 9 feet, ensuring that actors would be filmed in something equivalent to the medium long shot as a norm beginning in 1909.) Finally, actors began to employ with increasing regularity what Roberta Pearson has labeled the verisimilar style of performance.² This type of acting, often associated most strongly with American filmmaking of the transitional period, eschewed the marked gestures prevalent within much stage acting of the nineteenth century, opting instead for modified bodily movement and a concentration on the expressive capacity of the face, particularly the eyes.

Vitagraph, one of the chief exponents of the emerging verisimilar style, also capitalized on the acting abilities of its most popular leading actress in an attempt to position her as a favored picture personality of the day. Key performances of that actress, Florence Turner, can serve as a privileged example of how filmmakers and actors could contribute to the construction of a star persona prior to relying on promotional mechanisms to sustain and cultivate audience appreciation of preferred performers. By 1910, Turner had emerged as one of the American industry's breakout stars, despite the absence of any concerted effort by Vitagraph to promote her as such using extratextual means. How then did a company like Vitagraph work toward verifying Turner's star status in the absence of proven methods of publicity and promotion? In part, the answer lies in the changes to the representational system that American filmmaking was undergoing during the pivotal transitional years of 1907–1913, when Turner experienced her greatest success as a film performer. But it also resides in Turner's abilities as an actor to be realized within this system, and Vitagraph's apparently self-conscious recognition of how to use narrative to promote performance as a form of stardom.

I have chosen Florence Turner at Vitagraph as a case study for a number of reasons. First, as mentioned, Vitagraph was one of the foremost producing companies at this time—an acknowledged industry leader often praised in the trade press for the quality of its actors' performances among other attributes. Second, Turner's career virtually coincides with the transitional

years, as she joined Vitagraph in 1906 and stayed there until deciding to leave for England (and eventual professional oblivion) in 1913. Third, during her tenure at Vitagraph, Turner became one of a handful of performers apparently selected by the public as an early motion picture favorite, soon labeled the Vitagraph Girl, in lieu of her name, which the company chose not to disclose at the outset. Such was Turner's popularity that a song was composed for audiences to sing when she began to make personal appearances in 1910; by 1912, the *New York Dramatic Mirror* would claim that "no actress in motion pictures has a larger following."³ Finally, and perhaps most crucially for my concerns, Vitagraph, possibly recognizing Turner's potential for stardom, chose to showcase the actress in a number of films that depended on her skills as a performer. This approach was not unique to Vitagraph—the studio's chief American rival, Biograph, engaged in a similar strategy, when female actors such as Blanche Sweet, Mae Marsh, Lillian Gish and Claire McDowell were featured in roles seemingly designed to test their performative capacities. With the exception of McDowell, however, these lead actresses tended to be much younger than Turner: they were virtual screen neophytes, guided for the most part by a single figure, Biograph's primary director, D. W. Griffith. Turner, in contrast, was a more mature performer, ten years older than Gish, Marsh and Sweet, and lacked the ethereal qualities of the Griffith ingénues. Perhaps even more significantly, Vitagraph's interest in exploring and exploiting the range of Turner as an actress is evident as early as 1910, whereas Griffith's celebrated experiments with primarily female performers occur most notably from 1912 onward. Finally, while Griffith tended to test his actresses with roles that operated within the domestic realm (for example, repressed spinsters for Sweet in *The Painted Lady* [1912] and McDowell in *The House of Darkness* [1913] and betrayed wives for McDowell in *The Female of the Species* [1912] and Gish in *The Mothering Heart* [1913]), Vitagraph cast Turner as an actress on several occasions in roles that most convincingly tied performance to the establishment of the possibility of early screen stardom.

On the basis of those films I have seen or read described, I believe the casting of Turner as an actress represents an attempt on Vitagraph's part to transform her into a screen star for audiences even before extra-textual mechanisms consistently and successfully promoted stars as such. The company relied on Turner's convincing portrayal of (theatrical) actresses within filmic narratives to cement her reputation as a picture personality of the first order. And Turner, for her part, parlayed her command of the developing verisimilar style (in conjunction with a knowing deployment of aspects of the earlier, histrionic style) into a compelling argument for acknowledging that film stars could succeed on their own terms, not simply as inferior versions of their theatrical counterparts. Precisely because Turner was cast as an actress on at least three occasions in 1910–1911, one can deduce that part of her onscreen persona depended on the textual evidence of her ability to act onscreen. These films do not simply showcase Turner the actress

by providing her with juicy roles replete with emotional highpoints; rather, by casting Turner as an actress, Vitagraph was providing a way for Turner to enact a role envisioned for her: that of a star. However, rather than being made into a star by promotion, Turner assumes the role onscreen, becoming a picture personality by the force of her performance as one. If, for the picture personality, “the player’s identity was restricted to the textuality of the films she or he was in,” Turner’s “actress films” represent the ideal embodiment of a filmically inscribed star.⁴

To demonstrate this, I will focus on one Turner vehicle in particular, a film that relies most obviously on her skills as an actress in the construction of its own narrative. In all of Turner’s films, her diegetic status as a performer becomes instrumental in her handling of the romance plotline; the scenarios consistently offer her acting ability as a support for the romantic contrivances propelling the narratives toward their denouements. In one such film, titled *Renunciation* (Wilbert Melville, 1910), Turner plays an aspiring actress, one whose abilities are tested in the course of her involvement with a wealthy young man more so than in the development of her career. Because *Renunciation’s* plot is devised to provide Turner with at least three tour de force scenes, each of them reliant on her skills as a screen actress, a synopsis is in order: Turner plays Violet Leslie, a young actress, who auditions for a role in a famous playwright’s upcoming production. The playwright happens to know the father of a young man who has fallen in love with Violet. The father disapproves and, after consultation with the playwright, convinces Violet that she must trick the son into believing she does not really care for him. Violet’s success in the charade sufficiently impresses the playwright that he is willing to offer her a role in his play, but Violet’s true vindication comes when the son learns the truth and returns to her.

The early scene of Violet’s audition, unlike the subsequent two showcase scenes, has no connection to her involvement with the young man. While the scene possesses a loose compositional motivation in that it provides the means by which Violet meets the playwright, the narrative does not require that we actually witness her audition. In fact, her opportunity to perform is nearly aborted when the playwright signals his lack of interest, but he relents, and clearly the scene is included for the spectator’s pleasure (Turner often positions her body outward for our gaze rather than for that of her diegetic audience of one) more so than the demands of the story.

What does this audition scene reveal to us? In its own canny way, it demonstrates the differences between the verisimilar and histrionic styles, while affirming Turner’s virtuosity as a performer in being able to enact those differences. Violet’s audition consists of an amalgam of stock gestures, a catalogue of poses and effects, blended together into an apparent mini-narrative hinting at love lost. The moment of transition from Violet, the actress preparing to embark on this display of her talents, to Violet in the throes of performative passion, is perhaps the key to Turner’s success

here, for it signals her ability to incorporate the histrionic style into her own verisimilarly charged conception of a young actress hoping to impress a jaded impresario. Turner's virtuosity in this instance involves the ability to demonstrate Violet's skill as a stage performer while reminding us that these remain the tropes of the film actress' theatrical performance.

Because this scene is key to establishing Turner's abilities as a knowing purveyor of the histrionic style, one who can perform it as a means of demonstrating her concomitant mastery of the verisimilar, it deserves extended analysis. The sheer wealth of gesture that Turner manages to compress into a relatively brief scene, lasting little more than half a minute of running time, can only be conveyed adequately if described in detail. The opportunity for Violet (and, by extension, Turner) to perform is established once the playwright has signaled his agreement to witness her audition: Turner responds with delight and slaps her purse on a nearby table. She pulls slightly on the neckbow of her bonnet, pauses as though contemplating what poses she will employ, and then begins, signaling a shift from the verisimilar style used to portray Violet in everyday life to the histrionic style Violet would rely on as an actress. Her eyes immediately widen as she clasps her hands together. She looks upward, hands clasped and then drawn flat and crossed to her lower neck. She cocks her eyes and begins to turn her head to the side one way and then to the other as she thrusts her arms out toward the playwright, spreading them apart widely. At the point that her arms are fully separated, she glances down at a spot on the floor. Transfixed, she moves down toward it, going on her knees, but keeping her head upright so her stare outward is visible. She then recoils, rising slightly as she puts her flat hands to the sides of her face. She then looks upward, before turning, in profile, toward the playwright. Rising up to a standing position, she brings her joined hands (placed together, as in prayer) from in front of her chest to out and then apart and down. She looks straight out, raises her right arm above her head and speaks (with animation) as that arm comes back down, bent at the elbow and the hand at cheek level, curled. She then thrusts her arm up, swings it around to where it had been and then brings it quickly to her forehead in a fist. It then comes down and both are held at shoulder level before being brought together at the chest, as she backs up slightly and finally breaks concentration to glance over at the playwright, who has commenced clapping.

Even though the playwright refrains from casting her, the overall impression of this scene works to establish Violet's credentials as an actress at the same time it verifies Turner's command of both the verisimilar and histrionic modes. Arguably, her ability to highlight the discrepancies between the two could only be the province of one schooled in the histrionic but now developing a facility in the verisimilar. Certainly predicating her performance on the very notion of performing renders this the most reflexive of actorly moments in transitional cinema. If the rest of the film fails to point up these differences as consistently as the audition scene, it still offers

Turner additional opportunities to perform the role of a star, to demonstrate that film acting is the province of those trained to maximize the opportunities provided by a medium distinct in its means and effects from any other.

The force of the audition will carry over to the subsequent two scenes designed to focus on Turner's skills as an actress, as each of them will call on different levels of self-conscious performing. The middle scene, wherein the young man's father approaches Violet to convince her that she must give up his son, is the most straightforward of the three. Here, Turner is merely called on to react to the father's entreaties, involving a range of glances and gestures, some of which recall those employed earlier in the audition scene. Turner is positioned in the same portion of the frame, so as to recall that previous scene, and again, an older male stands to her left. An important difference, however, is that Turner spends much of the scene seated, which tends to focus attention more directly on her face while her arms remain drawn in closer to her body for the most part. The force of this scene aims to draw attention to Violet, the enamored young woman who is discredited precisely because she is an actress and who will be enlisted as an actress to distance herself from her own beloved. Her emotional reactions in this scene provide the necessary emotional backdrop to her deliberately staged performance in the scene where she must discourage her paramour from seeing her as a viable romantic partner.

In the final "performance" scene, Turner as Violet must then enact the planned ruse to convince the son that she is unworthy of him. This entails pretending she is the drunken degenerate the father imagines her to be; her performance involves turning herself into an image of actors others might well hold, a parody of an off-stage persona in the same way the audition was a heightened version of the arsenal of poses employed by stage actors when they perform. Taken together, then, these two scenes constitute a complete (if parodic) portrait of the stage star, more complete than any such image of a film actor could be at this point. As verification of Turner's abilities, what better proof than her embodiment of the professional and personal life of legitimate actors, whose fame at this point served as a model for those who had chosen motion pictures? Proving able to perform all aspects of a stage star's persona onscreen, Turner thereby stakes a claim to bona fide motion picture stardom through film acting.

Of course, the effectiveness of the final scene is heightened by the built-in discrepancies between the audience's level of knowledge and that of the son. We recognize the ruse for what it is, and we are encouraged to marvel at the artful artifice built into Turner's impersonation of an actress willfully destroying her own relationship. But equally important is our ability to discern those moments when Violet registers the import of the success of her deception. The result is a multi-leveled performance: at once an exaggerated masquerade wherein Violet makes herself seem tipsy and inappropriately familiar with the men in the room, it is also engendered to invite pathos in

those moments when Violet reveals the pain involved in driving her lover away. The early part of the ruse, where Violet assumes the demeanor of a drunken and “loose” woman, involves a fair degree of humor, as when Violet rather unsuccessfully stifles a burp or launches her hairbrush into the air with gay abandon. Within this portion of the scene, Turner alternates between a swaggering, loose-bodied performance style and an artificially stiff sense of bravado (as when she toasts the affronted group of men). But, as in the audition scene, the gaps between the prepared performance and the “real” Violet constitute the added value of the verisimilar style. As Violet recognizes her lover is about to leave, the energy drains out of Turner’s body and the look of proud defiance gives way to a deep sorrow. And once the father and son have departed, a startling moment of unbridled rage fills Turner’s face as she reacts to the compliments of the playwright.

As much as the deception scene provides Turner with one final opportunity to prove her ability as an actress, its significance deepens in relation to the other two scenes: whereas the middle scene featured “true” emotion and the audition studied poses, this final scene offers both—a ruse suffused with rueful regret. As the climax of the film, it is also the summation of Turner’s ability—a synthesis of actorly presence and authentic feeling, both captured by a film actress capable of such synthesis because she could master both.

But if *Renunciation* functions as a showcase for Turner’s starmaking acting, it also signals the degree to which the transitional period in cinema already anticipates the fusion of narrative and image that subsequent concepts of female stardom would rely on more consistently. The turning point of *Renunciation*’s narrative—the moment when the plot machinations demand that Turner’s status as actress be fully enfolded within the fortunes of Violet the character—hinges on a photograph. The son proudly produces a photo of Violet, which is then passed from father to playwright, the female image circulated among men in her absence. In the male domain of the father’s study, the central decorative feature of which is a stained glass triptych featuring female artistic muses, two of the men decide Violet’s fate on the basis of this image. From this point onward, Turner’s acting will function as a response to the control exercised by men upset by the moral dangers distilled within photographic representation of the female form. The plot of *Renunciation* achieves resolution through acting nonetheless, as Violet’s successful climactic performance manages to secure both professional advancement and romantic happiness. But the model of the star as skilled actor that *Renunciation* promotes would soon give way to a more familiar type, anticipated by a scene that introduces Turner’s character in a subsequent example of her “actress” vehicles: *Proving His Love* (1911).

In this scene from the later film, Turner, playing stage actress Alice Gordon, is first shown sitting with her back to the camera as her maid tends to her. As many commentators on Vitagraph have noted, one of the distinctive aspects of the company’s developing style was its tendency to place

figures in the foreground, often with their backs to the camera, so this shot should not strike us as unique. However, here the technique of turning an actor away from the camera gains an added resonance. First, Turner is playing the lead role, whereas typically the figures viewed from the rear in Vitagraph films would be supporting players. Second, as I mentioned at the outset, this scene constitutes the first time we see Turner as Gordon, though the preceding shots have set up her introduction by establishing that a newspaper requires an interview with her character, including an insert note that identifies her as a “prominent actress.” So the decision to block the view of Turner can be seen as something of a tease, a deliberate refusal of a famous face, its desirability reinforced by the imperatives of the plotline. Even so, Turner’s face is not completely unseen by the spectator: prominently displayed in her dressing room (and turned for the camera to see) is a photo of the actress.

On a diegetic level, this prop works toward establishing verisimilitude: stars’ dressing rooms often contain photographic portraits of their occupants. But when understood in conjunction with the positioning of Turner away from the camera, this photo effects a substitution of a star-image for a star-as-star. Viewed this way, the photo serves both diegetic and extra-diegetic functions: diegetically, it provides us with our first visual access to the character, Alice Gordon, while simultaneously serving as a salient detail, one that confirms her status as a famous actress, whom a prominent newspaper wishes to interview and whose success guarantees her a maid and a well-appointed dressing room. But equally important, the photo signals the parallel fame of Florence Turner, the actress playing this famous actress, for the glamour shot is of Turner herself and might well have been one of the early promotional photos Vitagraph generated around this time to circulate images of Turner among her growing fan base. The photo of Turner, transformed into an image of her character, also an actress, constitutes an intersection of promotional tool and narrative prop that will progressively define this moment in film history, when notions of stardom dependent on detachable and consumable images begin to outstrip their source within the performances viewed onscreen.

The example of Florence Turner crystallizes what is distinctive about early cinema acting, when performative conventions tailored to the demands of the medium were not yet in place. While early cinema acting may well have been influenced by the types of performance developed in vaudeville and the legitimate theatre, among other forms, it was beholden to no particular mode of performance style, finding itself quickly altered by changes to film style and modifications to narrational approaches. During the transitional period in particular, acting styles were in flux, their status further complicated by the emerging phenomenon of stardom. Now we often experience film performance in conjunction with stardom, understanding the two as conjoined pleasures; however, during the transitional period, the public’s restricted knowledge of actors’ extratextual existence elevated

the role of onscreen performance. For a time, performance served as the privileged means of access to whatever associations an actor conjured up for her audiences. Accordingly, Florence Turner's performances as a star rehearse how future audiences might view film performance, promoting reliance on her textually constructed persona as the basis for her appeal. This notion of *acting* like a star, though it will not completely disappear, will fade as surely as the notions that stars need exist only on and through the screen. In this way, Florence Turner's actress dramas belong firmly to the transitional period, where performance is no longer the direct address characterizing the cinema of attractions, but not quite yet a fully narrativized support for the delineation of character; instead, acting itself could function as a performance of stardom.

NOTES

1. Richard deCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).
2. Roberta Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
3. *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, 1912.
4. DeCordova, *Picture Personalities*, 51.

14 Niche Stars and Acting “Gay”

Chris Holmlund

MAKING THINGS MORE PERFECTLY QUEER?

Theatrically released feature films in the late 1990s proffered a teasing taster of leading and supporting performances that together demonstrate how much things had—or had not—changed for both queer screen representation and acting at the end of the decade. Several movies introduced or featured niche stars in ensemble and/or supporting roles; a few featured A-list stars. 1999 was a banner year, with *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (Anthony Minghella), *Flawless* (Joel Schumacher), *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes), *But, I’m a Cheerleader* (Jamie Babbit), *Election* (Alexander Payne), *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze), *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberly Peirce) and *South Park: Bigger, Longer, Uncut* (Trey Parker) all including openly queer characters. 1997 and 1998 films also showcased queer characters. Among the more debated, “dissed” and/or noteworthy are: *All Over Me* (Alex Sichel, 1997), *As Good As It Gets* (James Brooks, 1997), *In & Out* (Frank Oz, 1997), *Love! Valour! Compassion!* (Joe Mantello, 1997), *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (Clint Eastwood, 1997), *Gods and Monsters* (Bill Condon, 1998), *High Art* (Lisa Cholodenko, 1998), *Happiness* (Todd Soldondz, 1998), *The Opposite of Sex* (Don Roos, 1998), *Velvet Goldmine* (Todd Haynes, 1998) and *Your Friends and Neighbors* (Neil LaBute, 1998).¹

Were these films helping to make things “more perfectly queer,” to paraphrase Alexander Doty?² Increasing legitimacy was certainly accorded to queer independent and mainstream films: several of these movies were nominated for and/or won awards from critical and professional institutions. Often, the performances of niche or lesser level stars playing queer characters were honored: count foremost among them Chris Cooper, Chloë Sevigny, Catherine Keener and Ian McKellan. As niche stars, although “perhaps not fully meeting the criteria for stardom in the conventional sense,” each nonetheless “generate[s] personae that operate as legible, functional trademarks.”³ What Diane Negra writes about Parker Posey is true here, too, I will argue: Cooper’s, Sevigny’s and Keener’s recognizability as niche stars “functions to guarantee that the films in which they appear will support a certain aesthetic and status economy.”⁴ In the case of these films, this economy coincides, of course, with the mainstreaming of the New Queer Cinema.

Whereas McKellan is gay, none of the three American actors claims a queer identity, and none is rumored to be queer. Significantly, however, none makes a point of distancing her or himself from roles that are readily recognized as gay, lesbian, bi-, trans- or otherwise queer. This sets them apart from A-list stars like Tom Hanks, who Cindy Patton feels "triumph[s] in *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993) . . . in part because he could guarantee his distance from the character he portrayed; he *acted*" without, for many queers, "reading gay."⁵

That the characters these niche stars play are readily identifiable as queer, moreover, is drastically different than was the case with the character that George (Beryl Reid) plays in the soap opera-within-the-film in *The Killing of Sister George* (Robert Aldrich, 1968). One of the first Hollywood films to represent lesbianism openly, on her television soap George is nonetheless completely asexual, her butch "masculinity" not acknowledged. Patricia White argues in consequence that *The Killing of Sister George* thereby "suggests that lesbians may always have been present in popular culture," but "in genres that never admitted of the existence of homosexuality."⁶

Late 1990s films, in contrast, showcased queer characters in a wide range of genres, including dramas, comedies, bio-pics, cartoons and action extravaganzas. In most, furthermore, the queer characters are not stereotypes—i.e., they are not portrayed as merely fags, femmes, butches or bull dykes. In earlier films, exterior signs (gestures, walk, stance, costume, make-up or lack thereof, pitch, delivery, word choice) made sexual preference visible. Now performances conveyed interiority alternatively or additionally.⁷ What Cindy Patton says of the 1949 social problem film *Pinky* (Elia Kazan) is thus differently true here: "Suppression, double coding, and showcasing of particular forms of . . . sexual difference suggest that acting styles at different times variously reflect, evade, or popularize particular notions of the relation between an 'inner' and an 'outer' self, between a person and his or her social location or history."⁸ As I will show, at the close of the 1990s, the balance of exteriority and interiority used to identify sexual preference and signal identity in film shifted—and in some ways widened.

To study how the performances by (straight) actors proud to play queer characters expanded late 1990s options across genres, I focus on the supporting turns that Cooper, Keener and Sevigny give in three of 1999's most popular and critically acclaimed films: *American Beauty*, *Being John Malkovich* and *Boys Don't Cry*. In ensemble work that showcases Method-based techniques and postmodern gestural collage, the three bring to life, respectively, a closeted, married military man; a self-assured, lipstick lesbian career woman; and a wide-eyed (bi-?) working-class girl. I discuss the work of each in turn, measuring their performances in these films and briefly commenting on their work in earlier and later films and on television. To illustrate shifts in acting choices and performance styles, I move from the oldest, Chris Cooper (born 1951), to Keener (born 1959) to Chloë Sevigny (born 1974).

CHRIS COOPER'S MILITARY MAVERICK: NEO-REALIST REVISIONING OF QUEER MASCULINITY IN *AMERICAN BEAUTY*

"You may not know his name but you know his face." The *Boston Globe's* 2004 comment, made after Cooper received an Oscar as Best Supporting Actor in *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002), captures Cooper's self-effacing style.⁹ At the same time it acknowledges how frequently he appears in independent and mainstream film, television and on- and off-Broadway. He makes "an effort to play a wide range of characters and ages," because, he says, "it's where you want to be if you're an actor."¹⁰ He always "wanted to be an actor, not a star."¹¹ Even though he has had starring roles in, for example, *Breach* (Billy Ray, 2006), ensemble work remains appealing. He has often won or been nominated for awards playing men who are reserved, diffident, somehow different. Key recognition also includes a Screen Actors Guild Cast Award for *American Beauty*.¹²

Cooper trained with Stella Adler among others.¹³ In her class on script analysis, he learned to jot down ideas and memories, which, in his words, "concern your real life [and which] somehow parallels the character you're playing, and you incorporate that in your scene work. What was made very clear early on in my studies was that often the words, though they're important, are not the most important thing."¹⁴ Yet for Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Frank Tomasulo, he is more a neo-naturalist than a naturalist actor because he builds on the idea that characters "belong to clearly delineated social environments and their actions are . . . a consequence of personal history and environmental determinants."¹⁵ He gives accessible performances using Method-inspired techniques that convey interiority via behavioral minutiae, but Carson argues that he goes beyond naturalist acting styles that would "scientifically" observe people in their environments; instead, he shifts the grounds of his characters' intelligibility by subtly adding extra verbal and non-verbal touches and playing off his fellow actors. Such neo-naturalistic qualities are well-suited to the "multifaceted perspective[s]" on characters favored by his three-time director and long-time friend, John Sayles.¹⁶ Cooper's performance in *Matewan*, for example, exemplifies Sayles' "preferred performance style": as union organizer Joe Keneham, Cooper is "attentive," "accessible," "low-key" and "calm," "watching and weighing what he sees and hears."¹⁷ *Adaptation* director Spike Jonze shares Sayles' admiration for the attentiveness and density of Cooper's performances, which he describes as "multi-leveled": "there's one thing going on physically, one going on with the dialogue, [his] face, or body language."¹⁸

Cooper's physique helps him create *American Beauty's* Colonel Frank Fitts as a sensitive and caring, if anguished, gay man trapped beneath a brusque, soldierly manner. At 5 feet 10 inches, "his slim body appears almost delicate, and his lack of rugged features makes him seem vulnerable, ineffectual."¹⁹ His face is "lined and thoughtful, eyes tending toward a squint," his mouth thin.²⁰ Pursed or smiling, his lips can imply a certain sensuality; frowning, his lips form two slits, and any such promise

disappears. Most importantly, according to John Sayles, Cooper possesses “a haunted quality, this is a guy with a past.”²¹

American Beauty focuses, of course, on Colonel Fitts’s neighbor, Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey), charting his mid-life crisis and then transformation. Fitts is essential to the denouement. As originally written, three male characters hold the key to Fitts’s heart: his son Ricky (Wes Bentley), Lester and his dead gay lover. To play the part, Cooper created an extensive back story for his character, working intensively with gay screenwriter Alan Ball and drawing on early versions of the script.²² Together they imagined that the Colonel was “a soldier in Vietnam and another soldier was his lover at base camp. They were involved in their first lovemaking. I created the idea that the North Vietnamese had attacked base camp and this lover was killed. And from that moment on, he just put a wall up, denying who he was. . . . We were excruciatingly precise.”²³

Cooper’s performance choices make the Colonel at first seem suspicious and reserved; then repressed, ill at ease, desiring and angry; and finally dejected and panicked. The Colonel’s two changes of clothes correspond to what Mendes calls a “depressed military palette”: everything he wears is grey, black, white or brown.²⁴ The dull colors accentuate the paleness of Cooper’s face. That Fitts wears layers of clothing—first pants, T-shirt, shirt and sweater; then slacks, T-shirt and heavy shirt—also seems appropriate: he needs to cover up. Only in the climactic set of sequences, which culminate with him kissing and then killing Lester, does he wear only a white T-shirt and pants.

Fitts’s house is “shrouded in a kind of exaggerated darkness, an exaggerated symmetry . . . in order to enhance [the] quality of strain.”²⁵ In his first appearance, we see Cooper seated at the breakfast table reading the paper, some distance from both wife and son. As Spacey points out, because Mendes comes to film from theater, he is adept at “juxtaposing actors and spatial relationships . . . to reveal what’s happening visually within a frame,



Figure 14.1 Chris Cooper uses his eyes and lips to convey Col. Frank Fitts’ mistrust and fear. Do his gay neighbors “read him?” Do they know that he, too, is gay? *American Beauty* (Dream Works Home Entertainment, The Awards Edition, 1999). Digital frame enlargement.

as well as emotionally what's happening within the characters."²⁶ Cooper's first line of dialogue is, "This country is going *straight* to hell!" His emphasis on "straight" is deliberate, the choice of words revealing. Suddenly the doorbell rings: Cooper's gay neighbors have come to welcome the family to the neighborhood. Hunched forward, Cooper moves stiffly to answer the front door. As usual, he is multiply framed and enclosed, and he uses quick, shifting eye movements to convey how much his character is trying to size up an unfamiliar situation, gauge whom to trust and decide how to behave (Figure 14.1). Ricky stands beside him some distance away, in the dark.

Fitts feels such a need to protect himself from expressing love for another man that he even clamps down on and rejects his own son. At one point he knocks on Ricky's locked door to ask for a urine sample, suspicious that Ricky is doing drugs. Cooper's eye movements and posture are revealing. Although his hands are now clasped behind his back, baring his heart, he is still covered by layers of clothing. In a series of shot/reverse shots, he starts to say something to his son, but cannot get a full sentence out. Wanting perhaps to be friendly, Cooper conveys inarticulateness, doubt and double-thinking, opening and closing his lips, mumbling: "You know . . . [pause] Well . . . [longer pause] . . . Good night, son."

In the two sequences where the Colonel hits Ricky, Cooper delivers virtuoso performances. In the first, he bursts into Ricky's room to confront him about breaking into the special cabinet where the Colonel keeps his guns and a Nazi plate. Within the space of two minutes, Cooper shifts from rage and physical brutality to distressed rectitude, fleetingly passing through moments of contrition and doubt. He begins by shouting epithets: "You little bastard!" and "Fight back, you little pussy!" Then, calming down and breathing heavily, he sits, holds Ricky's gaze, sniffs and, voice cracking, leans forward to lecture more quietly. He gestures with one hand and nods to emphasize his points: "There are *rules* in life! . . . You need *structure*, you need *discipline*!" Finally he gets up, voice cracking again—in relief? with love?—and says, "Aw, Ricky . . ." then leaves slowly, warning his son to "stay outta there." In interviews, Cooper has said the Colonel was so upset because "on the shelf below that Nazi plate was an Indonesian wooden and ivory box. In that box was my lover's dog tags, pictures of us, a newspaper article about his death, so that's why I freaked out and went up to his room and attacked him. My whole cover could've been blown."²⁷ Even though these vital details were not included in the film, by the end we nevertheless realize that the Colonel is talking as much to himself as to Ricky: he has buried himself in heterosexual rules, structures and discipline in an effort to stifle his own homosexual desires.

Cooper gives his most devastating rendition of closeted queer masculinity opposite Spacey near the end. We have seen them together only twice before. Staggering through the pouring rain, arms at his side and face a mask, Fitts approaches the garage where the shirtless Lester is doing chin ups. Fitts has just knocked Ricky down again and kicked him out of the house forever. In enraged, sadly ironic tones, he has again emphasized his disciplined efforts to

accomplish a pose of "straightness" as he assures Ricky he means business: "You're damn *straight* I do. I'd rather you be *dead* than be a fucking *faggot!*" Now he looks anguished. As the sequence progresses, his eyes and mouth register indecision, fear, desire and ultimately shame. When Lester opens the door, the Colonel is drenched, his nipples visible underneath his wet T-shirt. He holds his arms close to his body, thumbs joined to fingers in an indecisive OK sign that at first looks like a fist. In clenched tones, he asks after Lester's wife. Spacey maintains steady eye contact. Could this be a sign of erotic interest? With a dismissive gesture, he replies that his wife might be with another man, "And, you know what? I don't care." Tears in his eyes, mouth open in a downward frown, Cooper returns the look, lowers his gaze, moves closer, flicks his eyes right, blinks and then reengages softly, gulping, "Your wife is with another man . . . and you don't care?" Spacey smiles and nods, then grins, holding the look: "Our marriage is just for show, a commercial for how normal we are, when we're anything but." When Lester moves closer, puts a hand gently on the Colonel's shoulder and says, "We really ought to get you out of these clothes," Fitts is eager to think he is being seduced. Lester's "You just tell me what you need" unlocks his pent-up grief and longing. Crying, he moves forward and puts his hand on Lester's shoulder, trembling. In extreme close-up, we see his hand clutch Lester's back. When Lester lightly touches his head, shoulder and hands, still smiling, Fitts mistakes compassion for reciprocal interest. Suddenly he kisses his neighbor on the lips. Although Lester rebuffs him gently, the Colonel is completely undone. With downcast eyes, then a look up, mouth sadly set in a guilty smile, sniffing, he turns and lurches back into the rain, a veritable Frankenstein monster.

All references to the third man in the Colonel's life, his dead lover, ended up on the cutting room floor: 40% of Cooper's performance was excised from the final film. This makes his character seem more repressed and homophobic than originally written or performed. Cooper regrets the cuts because "in the end, you realized that these scenes justified why he was the way he was."²⁸ He had intended to make his character more overtly queer, if closeted. Nevertheless, a soupcon of this complexity remains thanks to the neo-naturalist performance Cooper gives in the dozen scenes that remain.

**CATHERINE KEENER'S BITCH GODDESS:
RECASTING NEO-NATURALISM AND LIPSTICK
LESBIANISM IN *BEING JOHN MALKOVICH***

By comparison, Catherine Keener's role in *Being John Malkovich* is larger, though she is also a supporting actress. John Malkovich stars. His odd name and celebrity status furnish the central conceit for Charlie Kaufman's zany story: under-employed puppeteer Craig Schwarz (John Cusack) finds work as a file clerk on the 7½th floor of an office building. There he discovers a closet portal into Malkovich's head and, with his partner Maxine (Keener), sells \$200 rides to anyone who wants to be John Malkovich for

twenty minutes. As queer performances go, Malkovich's performance is the most pyrotechnic: over the course of the film, he does impressions of all the major players except Keener, plays multiple gay and trans-versions of himself and even transforms himself into a puppet.²⁹ Keener covers less physical and emotional ground, but Kaufman's script frees her to queer *her* character, too. Because she does not need to register the kind of "interiority" called for in *American Beauty*, she can recast not only lesbianism but also neo-naturalism, tapping into postmodern performance styles. These are defined by Cynthia Baron as fixated on a "commerce with popular culture" and for the most part "eschewing . . . psychological realism."³⁰

Like Cooper, Keener is a "shape shifter" who loves working as a supporting actor, rarely gives interviews and hates publicity tours. She stands out in comedy, often playing a bitch goddess. Her best work has been in independent films. "I could spend my whole life working with the same four people," she says contentedly of her collaborations with Spike Jonze, Nicole Holofcener, Steven Soderbergh and Tom DiCillo. Though far less true of her work in *Being John Malkovich*, naturalist or neo-naturalist approaches appear to be foundational to her approach elsewhere since she says things like, "I play my characters the way I see people, not dark or edgy, hopefully just real."³¹ Often cast as a tough, sexy, professional woman, most of Keener's characters nonetheless also show softer sides. Her unassuming performance as Nell Harper Lee in *Capote* (Bennett Miller, 2005) and her ballsy incarnation of Maxine in *Being John Malkovich* netted nominations for Best Supporting Actress, and she boasts multiple other nominations and awards as well.³²

With "lynx-woman eyes and Cadillac cheekbones," long legs, flat chest, thin, 5 feet 8 inches, Keener is not traditionally beautiful, but she can be quite sexy.³³ Her throaty laugh and disarming smile help her play seductresses. Loose-limbed, her performances are marked by her physicality. "She uses her whole body to play a scene," explains Holofcener. "She does these things that are so lovely and unique. Things you can't write. Things you can't say to an actress."³⁴ She is also, Scott Proudfit claims, an "aggressive listener."³⁵

Of Maxine Keener says, "It was easy for me to fall into the trap of just being hard and mean. . . . [But] underneath it all [Maxine] might have had a heart somewhere. I think."³⁶ Throughout, Keener adds unmotivated gestures to her performance that exceed any constraining understanding of her as a stereotypical "lipstick lesbian." When we first see Maxine, she is icily attractive, poised, elegant and commanding. The costuming—chic Helmut Lang outfits of white, black and grey, and the occasional red and blue—reinforces Maxine's "cool." Keener wears little jewelry—just a watch, the occasional necklace—because Maxine is a "no-bullshit" kind of gal. Noteworthy, too, are her sensible black shoes.

Especially in her scenes with Cusack, she exudes snide self-confidence. The 6 feet 3 inch Cusack crouches and stoops everywhere he goes. Keener,



Figure 14.2 Catherine Keener’s stance indicates Maxine Lund’s lack of attraction to John Cusack’s Craig Schwartz in *Being John Malkovich* (USA Home Entertainment, 1999). Digital frame enlargement.

in contrast, finds ways to hold her body straight, even in the cramped space of the 7½th floor (Figure 14.2). When Craig (Cusack) first meets her, she is seated, leaning back, erect. When he tries to pick her up in the coffee room, she responds cuttingly, “You’re not someone I could get interested in Craig. You play with dolls,” then turns quickly away. He follows her to the elevator, defending puppeteering and professing his love. She smiles sarcastically as she gets in the elevator, says “Oh!” in mock pity and leans back so that her body is again perfectly aligned, one foot forward, her open stance a figurative “fuck you” to Craig’s bent forward come-on. At other times she leans forward to make her barbed rejections sink in. Frequently she delivers belittling comments using head and eye movements that make Maxine simultaneously inviting and eviscerating, touching her hair or tilting her head flirtatiously at the same time as, off beat, she signals how impatiently she is listening using raised eyebrows, bored sighs, sly winks and rolled eyes. Immune to the “metaphysical can of worms” Craig thinks he has opened on his first ride inside Malkovich (“I don’t see how I can go on living my life the way I have before”), Keener merely indicates with her hands that he should jump out the window.

Although Keener plays Maxine as a vamp for much of the film, sometimes she sits, stands or moves in ways that do not fit this glamorously aloof identity. Especially opposite Malkovich, she uses her gift for physical comedy in unmotivated ways. Making love to him—and, Maxine thinks, to Craig’s wife, Lotte (Cameron Diaz), inside him—she suddenly hauls off and slaps his head. “It was his head’s fault,” explained Keener, “his head was kind of asking for it.”³⁷ A quintessentially postmodern flourish occurs

in one of her last scenes with Malkovich, when he is now almost fully controlled by Craig. Together the two approach Malkovich's agent to change his career to puppetry. That Maxine holds the relationship reins is subtly indicated by Keener's body language. She steers Malkovich toward the couch, pats him quickly on the head and sits with one arm behind him. Malkovich's agent is unfazed by the request. "Sure, no problemo. Poof! You're a puppeteer." Malkovich grins. Keener laughs delightedly, leans in, kisses him, touches her hair, then grabs him with both arms, pulls him down towards her and throws one leg over his in an inappropriate display of affection and control.

Her gestures had been affectionate and playful, but suddenly the registers shift in a way not typical of neo-naturalist performance. And how to categorize her sexuality? Is Maxine now heterosexual? Bisexual? No longer lesbian? Keener's interactions with Cameron Diaz complicate further how we view Maxine. Maxine finds herself increasingly "smitten" by Lotte—"but," as she bluntly tells her, "only when you're inside Malkovich." Is she perhaps a lesbian who is in love with a transgendered person? Is this person male or female? When Lotte calls to arrange a second date, Keener rocks back and forth in pleasure, excitedly shifting her cell phone from hand to hand, giggling delightedly and almost shyly. Once pregnant, motherhood brings out her desire for Lotte as "father, mother, whatever." The film concludes with what Ruby Rich claims is a "rare lesbian happy ending."³⁸ Standing behind Maxine, Lotte hugs her at the local swimming pool as their little daughter, Emily, watches and Craig, trapped inside Emily as the new Malkovich vessel, miserably conjures the girl to "look away, look away, look away!"

CHLOË SEVIGNY'S POST-GRUNGE PRINCESS: BROACHING POSTMODERNISM AND "FEMME-ININITY" IN *BOYS DON'T CRY*

Playing Lana Tisdell in Kimberly Peirce's tragic love story, *Boys Don't Cry*, Chloë Sevigny approaches her queer character differently. Lana is perhaps bi-sexual, perhaps "queerly straight."³⁹ Heavily invested in the project, Peirce's goal was to encourage audience acceptance of queer lives and love and to "show the mechanics of hate."⁴⁰ That the film is based on the actual 1993 killing of the trans-gendered Teena prompted Sevigny to attempt a naturalist performance. But because she is what her *Party Monster* (Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato, 2003) co-star, Randy Barbato, terms a "21st century movie star . . . always a little bit ahead of her contemporaries," her acting is flat and peppered with postmodern touches.⁴¹

For Olivier Assayas, Sevigny "pops off the screen."⁴² She brought a pre-existing celebrity, grounded in real-life fame as New York "It Girl" and Prada model, to her film roles.⁴³ Discovered by fashion photographers on

the street in New York, Sevigny first starred in Larry Clark's controversial *Kids* (1995). Since then she has often played "post-grunge princesses"—i.e., sexually active, working-class girls associated with music scenes who do lots of drugs.⁴⁴

Sevigny never wanted to be an actress, but she has frequently said that she "wouldn't mind being a film star, [although] not a movie star."⁴⁵ She counts Nicole Kidman, Julianne Moore, Gena Rowlands, Sissy Spacek, Anna Magnani, Mia Farrow, Lillian Gish and Sandy Dennis as "film stars"; in contrast, Julia Roberts is a "movie star."⁴⁶ With little formal acting training, most of her film appearances have been in independents, working with such indie auteurs as Mary Harron, Whit Stillman, Steve Buscemi, Vincent Gallo, Lars von Trier and Harmony Korine. In 1999, she confessed that she was "winging it" in every performance, adding, "I'm always intimidated, especially because I . . . really have no method. I don't know any tricks of the trade."⁴⁷ Yet she was nominated as Best Supporting Actress for *Boys Don't Cry* and won several awards. In 2010, she received a Golden Globe for Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role in the television series *Big Love*.

Sevigny pulls her characters together based on their surface characteristics, going, as she puts it, from "the outside in" rather than, as a naturalist or neo-naturalist actor more likely would, from the inside out.⁴⁸ "As soon as I am in the clothes and in the hair and make-up—whether it's bad or good—that's when it happens for me. I find the character after the first take, not before."⁴⁹ With heavy-lidded blue eyes, full-moon face, pinched and pouty mouth, Mona Lisa smile, dirty blonde hair, rangy (5 feet 8 inches), she's "more handsome than beautiful," but she oozes "an alluring deadpan charm."⁵⁰ Her face, in particular, is expressive. Often her eyes tell the story, leading many, Peirce among them, to compare her to silent screen actors. I prefer Korine's take: for him, "as an actress she's great because she underplays, she doesn't emote."⁵¹

In casting Sevigny as Lana, Peirce valued that Sevigny had herself kissed girls and "questioned issues of gender and sexuality" as a teenager, and also that she had been "obsessed" (Sevigny's word) with the real Brandon.⁵² Sevigny actually originally wanted to play Brandon, but Peirce refused to consider her for the part because she had never wanted to be a man. Responding to Peirce's call for "realism," Sevigny prepared for her role as Lana by watching hours of the real Lana on video and talk shows and reading court transcripts. For the first time, she says, she tried to go all out: "I felt like before in all of my movies, I was never very emotional. I was kind of stiff. I wanted to try something I'd never done before and go crazy." Peirce approved: "Chloë just surrendered to the part. . . . She just became [Lana] very naturally."⁵³

Adept at set design from helping Korine on his films, Sevigny dressed Lana's bedroom herself, removing anything that smacked of girlishness.⁵⁴ She nevertheless conveys "skanky" (to quote a minor character) yet

vulnerable “femme-ininity”—i.e., she alludes to the difficulty of distinguishing between lesbian femmes and straight women. Throughout, she employs what Rachel Swan calls “a vocabulary of gesture which contrasts with Brandon’s male swaggering.”⁵⁵ Make-up (mascara to lengthen eyelashes, lipstick, red fingernails) helps; costuming—jeans, long shirts, turtle-necks, T shirts, a black leather jacket—contributes less. Only in the second of a pair of rhyming breakfast scenes, the first between Brandon (Hilary Swank) and Candace (Alicia Goranson), the second featuring Lana’s mother (Jeanetta Arnette), John (Peter Sarsgaard), Tom (Brandon Sexton) and Lana, does she wear an outfit that highlights her curves: rolled down men’s boxer shorts and a short black T shirt. Two rhyming mirror shots follow, underscoring the fact that both Brandon and Sevigny are women.

For most of the film, Sevigny acts as if she were a model. She is constantly posing, using her eyes, lips and posture consistently to appear seductive. Her interactions with John, Candace and Kate (Alison Folland) allow her to bring out other aspects of Lana’s personality, among them scorn, peevishness and self-deprecation, but only in the last third of the film does she noticeably modulate vocal delivery and breathing. She gives her most “naturalist” performance, screaming and sobbing, when Brandon is shot dead, then kicked and stabbed. Swank and Sarsgaard are consistently much more mobile and emotive.

Sevigny’s first appearance, in the bar where she regularly hangs out with John, Tom, Candace and Kate, is a case in point. To start, Sevigny sits slumped at the bar, downing shots of whiskey. Side and backlighting sculpt her profile. When she drags on her cigarette, she holds it pinched between thumb and forefinger: smoking is part of her image. John wanders over and throws a proprietary arm around her shoulder, and then Kate and Candace join him to urge Lana to sing karaoke with them. Lana finishes her drink and saunters past Brandon and Tom en route to the stage. As her eyes light on Brandon, she asks, “Who are you?” On stage as the lead karaoke singer, Sevigny alternately bats and closes her eyes and licks her lips as the camera dollies in, becoming, as Swan says, a woman who is “self-consciously aware of the male gaze upon her” (Figure 14.3)⁵⁶

Twice later, as well, as Brandon walks Lana home, again backlit, Sevigny prances first at his side, then backward in front of him, coquettishly repeating a variation of the same question: “What did you say your name was?” Whether or not one agrees with Kim Peirce that the search for Brandon’s “truth” is the point of the film, postulating and performance are certainly key to the “truth” of Sevigny’s Lana.⁵⁷ Nor is the fact that Brandon photographs her twice—once at her home, once as she stands in the window of the factory where she works—coincidental. The first time, Sevigny runs ahead as he follows after, camera in hand. Side lit, Sevigny covers her eyes, plays with her hair, tilts her head, as Brandon coaxes, “Why not? You’re beautiful.” With downward and then side-long glances, haloed in the light, making little “ooo’s” with her mouth, she coyly tells him, “I had a dream



Figure 14.3 Playing Lana Tisdell, Chloë Sevigny’s mouth, eyes and cradling fingers promise “phallic” bliss to Hilary Swank’s Brandon Teena in *Boys Don’t Cry* (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 1999). Digital frame enlargement.

about you last night. Someone walked me home last night, I think it was you.” No wonder he falls in love. He is captivated by Lana’s “femme-inine” fashion sense.

Even at her most earnest, Sevigny poses—as when Lana pretends she is telling “what we both know is true” to her mother, John, et al.: she is filmed in extreme close-up and again back lit, facing sideways with Brandon out of focus at her side. Although she blinks less than she usually does, her delivery of the line “I’ve seen him in the full flesh” rings false because it is flatly delivered.

From here on, it is Swank’s movie: hers is the tragedy, hers the histrionic performance. Sevigny plays reluctant witness, covering her eyes, protesting against abuse, finally, gently, slowly, comforting Brandon’s unmanned “boy girl” with Pietà-like hugs and kisses and the telling reversal: “You’re so pretty.” Is she now a “lesbian?” Sevigny’s performance remains so distanced it is hard to tell. The script rejects the label. With the primary exception of the death sequence, Sevigny performs “femme-ininity” at a second-hand postmodern remove for most of the film. She plays a “girl girl,” a copy of a copy.

A QUEER AND PRESENT DANGER?

To answer the question I asked in the introduction’s subtitle, in some ways these three films did make things “more perfectly queer.” When one thinks back to earlier eras, it is unquestionably a sign of progress that all three

of these non-gay niche stars were proud to play queer supporting characters, crafting them beyond stereotype using differing performance styles. As Colonel Fitts in *American Beauty*, Chris Cooper builds on naturalist, Method-based techniques to provide a neo-naturalist view of closeted masculinity. His acting choices regarding stance, posture, delivery, eye movement and so on seem “natural,” but they nonetheless help us rethink his character. He conveys both a gay desire ready to burst out *and* the homophobic repression that prevents his character from loving.⁵⁸ Keener offers something extra that is postmodern as she expands “lesbianism” in *Being John Malkovich*. The unanticipated moments of physicality she tosses in provide ironic—and comic—glimpses of Maxine as a character. But Sevigny’s cool performance is most clearly postmodern. She surfs her part, looking imitative and sounding flat, presenting self-conscious poses that showcase “femme-ininity” as a postulated ideal rather than a “reality,” and referencing the difficulty of distinguishing between the lesbian femme and a good-looking straight woman.

Yet at the same time, to paraphrase B. Ruby Rich, “queer and present dangers” remain. Hilary Swank accepted the Academy Award for Best Actress in 2000 clad in a slinky dress, lipstick and high heels, while her devoted hubby beamed at her from the audience (though Swank did not thank him in her acceptance speech). The unquestionably straight display led Rich to comment about Swank’s performance in *Boys Don’t Cry*: “The good news? That was all acting. The bad news? The same.”⁵⁹ As was the case with Tom Hanks earlier, she was implicitly distancing herself from her part. There are still no “out” gay leading men or women in Hollywood either (unlike the U.K.), indicating how uneven the playing field remains. A third “danger” is the fact that there are no openly gay actors who regularly play straight characters, only straight actors who play, often repeatedly, gay roles. This makes it seem like “straight actors play gay characters better than gay actors.”⁶⁰

Nevertheless, optimist at heart, older as I am, I see progress. As Ronald Shields says of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío’s casting of the non-gay Jorge Perugorria as a stereotypical, opera-loving queen in *Fresa y chocolate* (*Strawberry and Chocolate*, 1994), that straight actors are increasingly playing queer roles both “open[s] the door to the post-modern” and signals advance. According to Shields, queer-friendly straight actors study their queer friends, assimilating detail and story into a “self-aware gestural collage” so that “the perspectives of spectator [who studied ‘real’ others] and actor appear in a single body.”⁶¹ This is certainly what Cooper did for his role as Colonel Fitts. And with Keener’s Maxine and Sevigny’s Lana, a “girl viewer optics” emerges, wherein we may just, as Patricia White puts it, “grasp . . . the cultural shift in the status of gay men, lesbians and transgendered people, . . . see[ing] beyond makeup and fashion . . . to the reconfiguring of desire and agency also being provoked there by subcultures, activism and independent media.”⁶²

In an era of "routine over-exposure and an apparent heightening of star disposability," the "semi-anonymity" of the niche star is a relative advantage, maintains Diane Negra.⁶³ Niche stars have greater freedom to experiment, including, as I have shown, with the multiple ways there are to act—and be—"gay" and queer today. That Cooper, Keener and Sevigny do so without sign-posting their heterosexuality indicates the increasing acceptance of queer people and queer culture. Moreover, the ease with which, as niche stars, they move from independent films to studio vehicles to television and back again diversifies and expands the audiences they reach. Each in her or his own way is "acting up," acknowledging and supporting the demand formulated by the queer movement: "We're here, we're queer, get used to it!"

NOTES

1. *Billy's Hollywood Screen Kiss* (Tommy O'Haver, 1998), *Edge of Seventeen* (David Moreton, 1998) and *The Adventures of Sebastien Cole* (Tod Williams, 1998) contributed characters to the "We're not in Kansas anymore, Toto" landscape, too.
2. Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin comment on these films and underline how "queer" the early 2000s also were in *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 267–92.
3. Diane Negra, "'Queen of the Indies': Parker Posey's Niche Stardom and the Taste Cultures of Independent Film," in *Contemporary American Independent Cinema: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, ed. Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 71.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Cindy Patton, *Cinematic Identity: Anatomy of a Problem Film* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 16. Patton does not comment in detail. Hanks does at times manage to convey gay reactions convincingly (e.g., when he exhibits a combination of repressed hurt and forced jollity as his colleagues crack homophobic jokes in the sauna). But *Philadelphia* as a whole fails to engage with explicit gay sexuality. There is not even a kiss, just a slow dance. The film also ignores gay community life, thereby isolating Andrew (Hanks) and Miguel (Banderas). For these reasons, I agree with Patton that Hanks' character does not "read gay."
6. Patricia White, "Supporting Character: The Queer Career of Agnes Moorehead," in *Out in Culture*, ed. Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 91.
7. In an influential essay, Richard Dyer pointed to how important "typification" that relies on "signs of gayness" is to "any representation of gay people involving visual recognition." He also maintained that "though not indispensable, typification is a near necessity for the representation of gayness, the product of social, political, practical and textual determinations." See Richard Dyer, "Seen to Be Believed: Some Problems in the Representation of Gay People as Typical," in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*, 2nd ed., ed. Richard Dyer (1983; repr., London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 19. Typification remains key, although thanks to the strategic

- promotion of “coming out” and “outing” as ways to increase visibility and thereby gain acceptance and clout, naming and/or claiming a queer identity are important, too.
8. Patton, *Cinematic Identity*, 10.
 9. James V. Horrigan, “You May Not Know His Name But You Know His Face,” *Boston Globe*, September 12, 2004, 15.
 10. Jonathan Soroff, “Chris Cooper,” *The Improper Bostonian*, September 13–26, 2006, 18.
 11. Michael Fleeman. “Spotlight on . . . Chris Cooper,” *People* 54, no.2 (July 10, 2000), 38.
 12. Other triumphs include his nomination for an Independent Spirit Award for *Lone Star* (John Sayles, 1996), winning the Online Film Critics Society award for Ensemble Cast Performance for *American Beauty* and nominations for the Screen Actors Guild’s Cast Awards for *Adaptation*, *Seabiscuit* (Gary Ross, 2003) and *Capote* (Bennett Miller, 2005).
 13. Cooper received a degree from the University of Missouri’s School of Drama. He also studied with Wynn Handman, artistic director of the American Place Theater.
 14. Spike Jonze, “Interview with Chris Cooper,” *Interview*, August 2003, 41.
 15. Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Frank P. Tomasulo, “Introduction: More Than *the* Method, More Than One Method,” in *More than a Method: Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance*, ed. Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Frank P. Tomasulo (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 7.
 16. Diane Carson, “Plain and Simple: Masculinity through John Sayles’ Lens,” in *More than a Method: Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance*, ed. Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Frank P. Tomasulo (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 174.
 17. *Ibid.*, 177.
 18. Jonze, “Interview,” 81.
 19. Carson, “Plain and Simple,” 178.
 20. Elaine Dutka, “For *This* Role, He Was Willing to Adapt,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 25, 2002, E20.
 21. James Ryan, “Mr. ‘Last Minute’ Gets a Plum Role,” *The New York Times*, June 30, 1996, H11.
 22. Alex Simon, “Chris Cooper Steals the Show,” *Venice*, December 2002/January 2003, 58.
 23. Devin Friedman, “Screen,” *GQ*, December 2002, 80.
 24. Sam Mendes, DVD commentary track on *American Beauty*. The Awards Edition. DreamWorks.
 25. *Ibid.*
 26. Production notes for *American Beauty*, 6. Available at the Margaret Herrick Academy of Motion Arts and Sciences Library.
 27. Simon, “Chris Cooper Steals the Show,” 58.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. For a detailed discussion of Malkovich’s performance, see Cynthia Baron, “Buying John Malkovich: Queering and Consuming Millennial Masculinity,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 49 (Spring 2002): 19–38.
 30. Cynthia Baron, “Nicolas Roeg’s *Track 29*: Acting Out a Critique of Theory in a Postmodern Melodrama,” *Spectator* 14, no. 1 (1993): 19.
 31. Ben Kaplan, “Keener Edge,” *New York* 35, no. 22 (June 24, 2002): 136.
 32. Keener was nominated and/or won awards for her work in *Johnny Suede* (Tom DiCillo, 1991), *Walking and Talking* (Nicole Holofcener, 1996), *Lovely & Amazing* (Nicole Holofcener, 2001), *Into the Wild* (Sean Penn, 2007),

- Synecdoche, New York* (Charlie Kaufman, 2008) and the made-for-television drama *An American Crime* (Tommy O'Haver, 2007).
33. Michael Atkinson, "Keener Vision: Indie Goddess Keeps Her Eye on Offbeat Fare," *The Village Voice* 44, no. 43 (November 19, 1999): 146.
 34. Margy Rochlin, "Being Catherine Keener and Making It Look Easy," *The New York Times*, January 23, 2000, AR 11.
 35. Scott Proudfit, "Catherine Keener: Aggressive Listener," *Back Stage West Drama-Logue*, June 24, 1999, n.p.
 36. Lorenza Muñoz, "Being Catherine Keener Isn't So Bad," *Los Angeles Times*, January 9, 2000, Entertainment Section, 33.
 37. Cal Fussman, "Catherine Keener: Women We Love," *Esquire*, October 2000, 166.
 38. B. Ruby Rich, "Queer and Present Danger," *Sight and Sound* 10, no. 3 (March 2000): 25.
 39. Labeling her sexuality is difficult because both Peirce and her film vacillate as to how they understand Brandon Teena.
 40. Michael Musto, "Indie First-Timer Kimberly Peirce: Fast, Cheap, and in Control," *The Village Voice* 44, no. 39 (September 29–October 5, 1999): 212.
 41. John Clark, "It's Nice to Be an Artist, But She's Ready to Be a Star," *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 2003, K14.
 42. *Ibid.*
 43. For more on Seigny's background, see Jay McInerney, "Chloë's Scene," *New Yorker* 70, no. 36 (November 7, 1994): 182–89.
 44. Stephen Dalton, "Agent Provocateur," *The London Times*, March 25–31, 2000, 8.
 45. *Ibid.*, 10.
 46. Fiona Morrow, "An Independent Spirit," *The London Sunday Times*, October 12, 2003, Culture Section, 10.
 47. Jamie Painter, "The Natural," *Back Stage West Drama-Logue*, November 18, 1999, n.p. Available at the Margaret Herrick Academy of Motion Arts and Pictures Library.
 48. *Ibid.*
 49. Natasha Lyonne, "Chloë Seigny," *Interview*, November 1999, 70.
 50. Dalton, "Agent Provocateur," 8.
 51. Dana Kennedy, "Who Says You Have to Struggle to Be a Star?," *The New York Times*, March 12, 2000, MT 26.
 52. Dalton, "Agent Provocateur," 10; Kennedy, "Who Says," MT 26; Michael Giltz, "Standing by Her Man," *The Advocate*, March 28, 2000, 40.
 53. Kennedy, "Who Says," MT 26.
 54. Sally Singer, "Chloë Seigny," *Vogue* 192, no. 8 (August 2002): 312.
 55. Rachel Swan, "Boys Don't Cry," *Film Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2001): 48. On "femme-ininity" see further Alexander Doty, *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 74, n.26. Doty builds on articles by Danae Clark ("Commodity Lesbianism," *Camera Obscura* 25/26 [January/May 1991]: 181–201) and myself (see "When Is a Lesbian Not a Lesbian?: The Lesbian Continuum and the Mainstream Femme Film," *Camera Obscura* 25/26 [January–May 1991]: 145–78).
 56. Swan, "Boys Don't Cry," 49.
 57. Patricia White, for example, focuses on Lana instead of Brandon. Of Lana's "confession" to her girlfriends about what happened with Brandon and the subjective re-enactment that accompanies it, she maintains that we are left to decide "if she did it and what 'it' is, whether she knows or not, whether the knowing is worth thinking about for us or for her." See Patricia White, "Girls

- Still Cry,” *Screen* 42, no. 2 (2001): 220. Seigny herself says she believes that “in the beginning [that] . . . Lana thought Brandon was a boy, but Lana was kind of promiscuous, so, yeah, I have a hard time believing she wouldn’t have known eventually. I mean, something must have tipped her off, you know?” See Carole Nicksin, “The Girl Can’t Help It,” *Detour*, October 1999, 72.
58. That Spacey is cast opposite Cooper contributes to the queer feeling we have when we look at Cooper. Rumors have circulated since 1997 that Spacey is gay. He refuses to respond, insisting merely, “What difference does it make?” That he is familiar with queer lifestyles, whatever his own sexual preferences may be, surfaces in *American Beauty*, especially in the sequence when Lester quits his job and blackmails his younger boss into providing a sweet severance package. With short intakes of breath, mincing gestures and coquettish blinks, Spacey conveys queer threat: “Can you prove that you didn’t offer to save my job if I let you blow me?”
59. Rich, “Queer and Present Danger,” 25.
60. Patton, *Cinematic Identity*, 16.
61. Ronald Shields, “Acting Prima Donna Politics in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s *Strawberry and Chocolate*,” in *More than a Method*, ed. Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Frank P. Tomasulo (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 224.
62. White, “Girls Still Cry,” 221.
63. Negra, “Queen of the Indies,” 74.

Part IV

Apparatus

Technology, Film Form
and the Actor

15 What Becomes of the Camera in the World on Film?

William Rothman

In *The World Viewed*, Stanley Cavell's first book about the movies, he addressed the perplexing question, what becomes of reality when it is transformed or transfigured by the medium of film? Forty years later, we are still coming to terms with his seminal reflections about the ontology of motion pictures, including his brilliant and provocative observations about screen acting. In thinking about the relationship between film actors and the camera—a relationship in which a screen performer “is the subject of a study, and a study not his own”—I have long pondered an equally perplexing question that Cavell left unspoken: namely, what becomes of the camera in the world on film?¹ As I will argue in what follows, the answer to this question is that, however paradoxical it may seem, the camera that is absent from the character's world is no less real within her or his world—and, to be sure, no less unreal—than it is within the actor's world, a world in which the camera is present. This answer returns us to Cavell's question about the nature of the world on film, and those “human somethings” within it, and allows us to consider it afresh.²

In *If You Could Only Cook* (William A. Seiter, 1935), a charming but relatively routine romantic comedy, there is a key sequence that begins when Joan, played by the great Jean Arthur, opens the door connecting her bedroom with the sleeping porch where she believes that Jim (Herbert Marshall) has spent the night. They have only been pretending to be married so that in the depths of the Depression they could land jobs—she as cook, he as butler—with a wealthy man who turns out to have mob connections. “Jim, it's time to get up,” Joan says, smiling. There is a cut to a point-of-view shot of an empty, un-slept-in bed, then back to a reaction shot [a] (Figure 15.1).

Joan looks to her left, ostensibly to see if Jim is somewhere in the yard, not really be gone. Rather than a cut to another point-of-view shot, or to an angle that lets us see her reaction, however, the camera holds on Arthur—the back of her head turned to the camera [b].

When she turns back toward the camera, she looks perplexed. As she steps forward, her hand rises to her cheek [c].



Figure 15.1 Jean Arthur in *If Only You Could Cook* (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1935). Digital frame enlargement.

Arthur looks slightly offscreen to her right into the “middle distance,” conveying that Joan is turned inward [d]. Her hand slightly clenching, she dejectedly lets her arm drop [e]. Her eyes are shifting, as if an elusive thought is emerging.

Coinciding with this gesture by which Arthur conveys a shift in Joan’s consciousness, there is a cut to a longer shot [f]. Within this framing, the actress trudges to a closet, takes out a suitcase, slams it down on the bed, slaps it open, goes back to the closet, smacks her jacket and hat onto the

bed, goes to the little secretary by the wall, gets more things, returns to the suitcase on the bed and puts them inside it. When her character hears sounds coming from outside, Arthur freezes, looks almost at the camera again and then turns to face the door—again the back of her head is to the camera—and, after a pause, walks toward it. It's Jim!

This quite unexceptional passage is entirely characteristic of the style that Bazin calls "analytical editing."³ It is noteworthy only for the precision and economy of Jean Arthur's gestures, which are as expressive as those of Setsuko Hara in so many Ozu masterpieces. She *dejectedly* drops her hand. She *trudges* to the closet. Her hands swing *lifelessly* by her sides. She *slams* the suitcase down on the bed, *slaps* it open and *smacks* her jacket and hat onto the bed. Joan's thoughts and feelings are expressed perfectly in these gestures as Jean Arthur performs them. We do not *deduce* the character's "mental states" from her behavior, as if her mind and her body were only contingently related.

If Arthur were to behave the same way on stage, the expressiveness of some of her gestures would be lost to the audience. At each moment of this sequence, the camera views her from a distance and angle that assure that her gestures have their full expressive impact. For example, there is a cut from the medium shot in which her initial reaction is framed to a long shot that enables us to view her full body as she trudges toward the closet. If the camera instead followed her movement by tracking and reframing while keeping her in medium shot, we would miss the effect of her shuffling feet and lifelessly swinging arms.

In addition, the long shot diminishes Arthur's relative size within the frame and emphasizes the space of the large room and the distance she traverses. At the same time the long shot highlights the expressiveness of the gestures she performs, it distances us from her character's "inner reality." Thus the cut from medium to long shot also underscores the shift in Joan's mood, which we might characterize by saying that she feels less like a subject than an object. She feels powerless to bring closer to reality her dream of finding not only a steady job but a lover with whom she might share her joys and sorrows. The longer framing, expressive in its own right, helps suggest an intelligible context for the anger that Arthur's gestures increasingly express as Joan goes through the motions of packing. Is she angry at Jim? She is angry at the world for once again seducing her into dreaming that things could be different, angry at herself for being sucker enough to fall, yet again, for her old dream of finding security, happiness and love.

Throughout this passage, the camera frames Jean Arthur, acting as if she were Joan, in ways attuned to the expressiveness, the revelatory power, of her character's behavior. At times, the resulting framings, expressive in themselves, amplify the expressive impact of her gestures. But more than this must be said about the long moment in which Arthur's face is first turned away from the camera. This is the moment of Joan's initial reaction to (what she believes to be) her discovery that Jim is gone. What is Joan

feeling at this moment? Because we cannot see the expression on Arthur's face, we cannot say.

When Arthur turns her head to her left to convey that Joan is looking to see if Jim is in the yard, it just seems to happen that her face becomes hidden from the camera, as it just seems to happen that when her expression conveys that her character has turned inward, she does not look in the direction of the camera. That these things do happen, however, colors our experience of the passage as a whole and, indeed, the entire film.

The withholding of Joan's reaction when Arthur's face is turned away from the camera, which manifests an attunement between the actress and the camera filming her, is expressive, revelatory, in itself. It creates suspense; we are anxious to learn what Joan is feeling. But when Arthur turns around and we are offered a clear view of her face, our question is not answered. A change has already taken place. An ellipsis has been created. The immediate reaction that must directly have expressed her true feelings remains unknown, unknowable, by us. Nothing is now being withheld from, or by, the camera, but the gestures Arthur goes on to perform mask, rather than reveal, Joan's "inner reality." The way the actress lifts her hand to her cheek, and the way her eyes shift and her fingers clench, convey to us only that Joan is deep in thought. Surely, what Joan is now pondering is what she had been feeling a moment before—the moment she made the perplexing discovery that Jim was gone. That is the moment Arthur's face was hidden from, or by, the camera.

There is thus, for us, an element of mystery in Joan's evident thoughtfulness now. We do not know what the feeling was that she found so perplexing that it moved her to take thought. We know *that* she is thinking. We do not know *what* she is thinking, what thought is struggling to be born. When Arthur lowers her hand, this signals that, in her character's mind, this thought has emerged. But the perplexity that moved Joan to think, like the feeling that so perplexed her, has become submerged. She has arrived at a plan that she is resigned to carry out. To paraphrase Fred Astaire, she will pick herself up, dust herself off and start all over again. From this moment until the end of the sequence, Jean Arthur's every gesture conveys Joan's dejection, a dejection that morphs into anger as she packs her belongings to leave. But her behavior also registers her character's resignation, her sense that she is only going through the motions. Joan is playing herself, not simply being herself. And she is tired of the role she always finds herself playing.

If Jean Arthur were playing Joan on stage, or if Joan were a person simply living in the world, she could swing her arms dejectedly, trudge lifelessly to the closet, slap her suitcase open with a touch of violence and so on, even though no camera were present to capture these gestures, much less highlight their expressiveness. But it would not be possible for her to behave on stage in a way that has the expressive effect or significance of turning away, or being turned away, from the camera. Turning her back to

the audience, for example, would unambiguously register an action that the actress, hence the character, performs. She turns away from the audience; the audience does not turn away from her. But when Arthur's face is turned away from the camera, is it she or the camera that performs the turning away? Does she hide her reaction from the camera, or is it hidden by the camera? Can this even be said to constitute a gesture at all? After all, it just seems to happen. And yet, it has to be made to happen. And neither the actress nor the camera, apart from each other, has the power to make it happen. It is not merely that such a gesture needs the camera to *capture* it. Without the camera, it cannot *be*.

I would go further. Throughout this sequence, the camera frames Jean Arthur, acting as if she were Joan, in ways attuned to the expressiveness, the revelatory power, of her behavior. We can thus say that all the camera's framings, even those that are not so expressive in themselves that they actively amplify the expressive impact of Arthur's gestures, nonetheless manifest the camera's attunement to her performance. We can equally say that all the gestures Arthur performs within these framings manifest her attunement to the camera. The moment her face is turned away from the camera is exceptional only insofar as it explicitly declares what is the case at every moment: the fact that there is a real attunement between Arthur, behaving as if she were Joan, and the camera that is present in the actress's world, but absent from the character's world. Without such an attunement, *Joan* cannot be. And yet, if it is necessary for an actress to behave in ways that manifest an attunement with the camera in order to act as if she were the character she is playing, it must be the case that this character's behavior, too, manifests such an attunement. How can that be possible given that no camera is present in the character's world?

What becomes of the camera—what the camera becomes—within the world of a film is a question so elusive that I had not previously found the words to formulate it. Yet it is a question I have been striving for many years to address. To address this question and reflect on its implications for our understanding of screen performance, the remainder of this chapter follows a circuitous trajectory. We will turn first to Ross McElwee's celebrated diary film *Sherman's March* (1986), then to three Hitchcock films, *The Wrong Man* (1956), *Vertigo* (1958) and *Psycho* (1960), before concluding with a key moment in *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954).

*

There is a passage in *Sherman's March* in which Ross McElwee is conversing with Philip, the mechanic fixing his dilapidated sports car. As is often the case, Ross is filming without looking through the viewfinder, holding the camera slightly to the side to enable him to talk to Philip face to face. We take it that they are making eye contact, although Philip is looking in the general direction of the camera, not meeting its gaze. These men hail

from the same part of North Carolina and have known each other all their lives. They are chatting amiably about Philip's son, whom Ross remembers as a little boy, but who has now grown up and has done much of the repair work on Ross's car (Figure 15.2).

"You have only one son, right?" Ross asks.

"Right," Philip answers. "One son and one daughter now, uh huh," he adds with a rueful smile, looking away from the camera before returning his gaze to the filmmaker [g, h].



[g]



[h]



[i]



[j]



[k]



[l]

Figure 15.2 *Sherman's March* (First Run Features, 1986). Digital frame enlargement.

“That’s such a shame about your daughter,” Ross says, his voice solicitous.

“Yeah, that’s something.”

“That’s just one of those things that happen.”

“Uh huh.”

Again, Philip meets Ross’ gaze, looking not quite at the camera. Anguish in his eyes, Philip seems not so much to be looking *at* Ross as looking *to* him—looking to Ross to look at *him*, trusting Ross to bear witness to his pain. Simultaneous with Philip’s gesture, Ross, evidently sensing that he has touched a raw wound, zooms in to a closer, more intimate framing, the better to capture the expression of emotion that he expects to be—and is—forthcoming [i].

“I think about that girl,” Philip says, adding, with a touching smile. “Yeah, and I miss her, too,” before he looks away again, his smile lingering [j].

That smile drops when Ross asks, with sympathy palpable in his voice, “How did she die, Philip?” Again, Philip, meeting Ross’s gaze, looks almost—not quite—at the camera. The anguish that his eyes openly reveal to Ross—an expression of the pain Ross provoked touching the still fresh wound—the camera reveals to us, as well, its impact enhanced by the closer framing [k].

“She had cancer,” Philip answers, trying to sound matter-of-fact.

“Cancer?”

Philip nods.

“Bad death.”

“That’s right.” Philip shifts his eyes almost imperceptibly, as if with exquisite tact he is freeing himself from Ross’ gaze without making obvious his desire to withdraw from intimacy with him. Perhaps Philip wishes to spare Ross the burden of having to respond to his pain. Perhaps he wishes to spare himself the burden of having to respond to Ross. In any case, he does not shift his eyes away from Ross in order to look at something or someone else. He stares into the middle distance so as to be alone with his private thoughts. Turning inward, he avoids focusing on any point in space, as if by avoiding seeing he can avoid being seen. In turning inward, Philip inadvertently looks directly at the camera, but without seeming to notice its presence, so absorbed is he in his private thoughts. Can we doubt that he is thinking of his daughter, that he is missing her, that he is seeing her in his mind’s eye? [l]

After a brief moment, Philip snaps out of his trance-like absorption. Nearly simultaneously—we cannot tell which comes first—the camera’s presence dawns on him, as if what he was seeing in his mind’s eye has morphed into what he finds himself really seeing. Awakening to the fact that he is looking at a camera looking at him looking at it, Philip *quickly* turns his eyes back to Ross, whose gaze he finds less painful to bear than that of the camera.

Until this moment, Philip has behaved as if no camera were present. I am not claiming that he would have behaved the same way if Ross were not

filming their encounter. I am simply observing that up to this point, Philip's behavior gives no indication that the camera is affecting him at all. He does not behave, for example, as if he were being interviewed and was speaking guardedly to avoid having his words come back to haunt him. He behaves unself-consciously, as if he were simply being himself.

Philip has known all along that Ross was filming him. But the camera receded to the background of his consciousness, as it were, when he behaved as if he simply did not know it was present. We can say that Philip's behavior *denied* the camera's presence, as long as we keep in mind that (1) his denial of the camera's presence is not necessarily an act he is conscious of performing; (2) what one "denies," when the word is used this sense, is a reality or truth one cannot simply fail to know, but is unwilling or unable consciously to recognize; and (3) denying the camera's presence is a particular way of acknowledging its reality.

We might note that denying the presence of anyone or anything in one's presence—giving a person the "cold shoulder," for example—is a particular way of acknowledging the reality of that person or object. But this principle has special significance when it is a movie camera that is treated as if it were absent. For the camera in Philip's presence is recording its views of him. Thanks to the camera in his presence, Philip's world can be projected on the movie screen, making it possible for him to be present to viewers who are not in his presence. It is, of course, a defining feature of the medium of film that the reality of the camera's presence is also the reality of its absence, the absence of its reality.

When Philip acknowledges the camera's reality only by behaving in a way that denies its presence, he behaves as if he were simply being himself. And yet, when he knows he is being filmed and behaves as if he were not acting, he *is* acting. At the same time that he becomes an actor, he becomes a character: the character he plays when he plays himself, when he acts as if he were simply being himself. The moment Philip awakens to the reality that he is looking at a camera looking at him looking at it, however, this onset of knowledge, and self-knowledge, compels him to acknowledge the camera's reality in a way other than by acting as if he were not acting. When he responds by averting his gaze, he is not acting. This is *his* gesture. In this gesture, the split between actor and character provoked by the camera's presence—a presence that is also an absence—is overcome or transcended.

This passage of *Sherman's March* documents a real encounter between Philip and the filmmaker (and his camera). In *Documentary Film Classics*, I contrasted the introduction of Susie, the protagonist of *True Heart Susie* (D. W. Griffith, 1919), played by Lillian Gish, with that of the protagonist of *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty, 1922). Flaherty's film authorizes us to take our initial view—by extension, every subsequent view—of Nanook as documenting his encounter with a camera that was really in his presence. In Griffith's film, I asserted, "The prevailing fiction

is that it is Susie, not Lillian Gish, who is real, hence that there was no real encounter between camera and subject.”⁴ In going on to assert that in a fiction film it is the “prevailing fiction” that the characters, not the actors, are real, part of my point was that there is a reality that this fiction denies. A fiction film like *If You Could Only Cook*, no less than a documentary like *Sherman’s March*, documents encounters that really took place between a camera and its subjects. In *If You Could Only Cook*, the prevailing fiction is that it is only Joan, not Jean Arthur, who is real. Then again, *Sherman’s March* has a “prevailing fiction” of its own. It is internal to this fiction that because we are viewing a real encounter between Philip and the camera in his presence, he is simply being himself when he acts as if he is not acting. A reality that this fiction denies is that, no less than Jean Arthur playing Joan, Philip is split between the character he is playing and the actor playing that character.

In all but equating these cases, I may seem to be ignoring that Philip is playing himself, while Arthur is playing a character not herself. This distinction is problematic, though. After all, it is precisely by acting as if no camera were present—acting as if she were not acting, as if she were simply being herself—that Arthur splits into actress and character and, within the projected world, *becomes* Joan.

I may seem to be ignoring another distinction as well. Isn’t Jean Arthur, playing Joan, split between two worlds? Doesn’t the actress inhabit the one existing world, whereas the character inhabits the world projected on the movie screen? By contrast, don’t both Philip-the-actor and Philip-the-character straddle the two worlds? But this distinction, too, is problematic. Joan does not really exist, but that does not mean that she has no reality within our world. Joan *is* real. That is, she is real in the singular way that the world projected on the screen is real. That Joan is real is not really a fiction, in other words, just as it is not really a fiction that the projected world is real (although, to be sure, the projected world, with Joan in it, is unreal no less than real).

Similarly, that Jean Arthur exists within the world of *If You Could Only Cook* is not “fictionally true” (as an aesthetic philosopher might put it). Within her world, everyone calls the character she plays “Joan,” not “Jean.” But it does not follow that within the film’s world Jean Arthur has no reality. She is real in the projected world in the singular way that our world, the one existing world, is real—and unreal, to be sure—within the film’s world. Within the world of *If You Could Only Cook*, Joan is the woman Arthur really becomes when she is transformed by the medium of film. Both Jean Arthur and Joan, no less than Philip-the-actor and Philip-the-character, straddle both worlds. The world on film is not reality; it is what becomes of reality when it is projected, transformed by the medium of film. What is real within the projected world is also unreal; what is unreal is also real. The world on film renders moot our everyday distinction between real and unreal. Simultaneous with the birth of film was Freud’s intuition that the

reality of consciousness is unconsciousness. In the world on film, the reality of reality is unreality. Everything that is, is not. Everything that is not, is.

That the camera in Jean Arthur's presence has no reality within Joan's world is internal to the film's presiding fiction. The reality that this fiction denies is that within the projected world the camera enjoys the same mode of reality—is real and unreal in the same way—as Jean Arthur herself. Behaving as if she were Joan, Arthur acts as if it just happens that her every gesture manifests an attunement with the camera. But denying the camera's presence is a particular way of acknowledging the camera's reality—a way that splits her into actress and character. The camera that is in the actress's presence is absent from the character's world, but insofar as Joan behaves as if the camera has no reality within her world, she, too, is acting; she, too, is denying reality, hence acknowledging reality in a particular way. The reality Joan is denying, hence acknowledging, is what reality *becomes* when transformed by the medium of film—in particular, what becomes of the *camera* within the projected world.

Can we say that when the world is projected on the movie screen, what the camera becomes is the projected world itself, or that what the camera becomes is its view? This would not be the same as saying (in a Lacanian spirit) that the camera is the structuring absence apart from which there can be no world on film. The camera—that is, what becomes of the camera (its view)—is not the structuring *absence* of the projected world, but its structuring *presence*. In any case, this answer is problematic, if only because the camera's view, which constitutes the world on film as a whole, cannot simply be located *within* Joan's world. Nor can the camera that films Jean Arthur simply be located within her world, our world. Of course, there is a camera in her presence whose reality she acknowledges by denying its presence. But the reality of the camera's presence is also the reality of its absence, the absence of its reality. Hence, the camera, too, straddles both worlds, is real and unreal in both—at once a barrier that separates them and a bridge that joins them, making the two worlds one.

When Philip, absorbed in his private thoughts, avoids focusing on anyone or anything, he looks at the camera without seeing it. All he sees is what he is envisioning in his mind's eye. It is as if the camera's lens is for him a screen on which his inner reality is projected. Of course, all we see at this moment is Philip's face, not what he is imagining. The camera cannot read his mind. Nonetheless, "the human body is the best picture of the human soul," as Wittgenstein puts it.⁵ And the eyes are windows to the soul. Why would Philip feel the need to avert his gaze, on awakening to the reality that he is looking at a camera looking at him looking at it, if he did not harbor the belief that this camera has the power to penetrate his inner reality? That a camera possessed of such power is a projection of his imagination does not mean that it has no reality. Such a camera has the same mode of existence within Philip's world, is real and unreal in the same way, as his inner reality itself.

In fiction films, a familiar strategy for conveying that a character is turned inward is to have her or him look at the camera without seeming to see it, as Philip does. A classic example is the passage in *The Wrong Man* in which Manny (Henry Fonda), wrongfully imprisoned, stares into the middle distance, tormented by his thoughts.

Fonda looks in the direction of the camera, the way Philip does, as if what he is really seeing is not a camera lens but a screen—a screen on which is projected his (that is, Manny's) inner reality. In order to behave at this moment as if he were Manny, Fonda has to act; he has to behave in a way that denies the reality of the camera he is really seeing. Manny does not have to act in order to behave as if he were Manny; he *is* Manny. Nor does he have to deny reality in order to behave as if no camera were in his presence; no camera *is* in his presence. The camera in the actor's presence is absent from the character's world, of course. We can say that in Manny's world, an absence is what that camera *becomes*. It is as if at this moment Manny is imagining that (to paraphrase Norman Bates) there are cruel eyes—ours?—staring at him. That cruel gaze may be a projection of his fantasy, but in Manny's world, it is as real and as unreal (and in the same way) as his inner reality itself. In Fonda's world, the camera is a presence that is also an absence. In Manny's world, the camera becomes an absence that is also a presence.

When Fonda now closes his eyes, it is to convey Manny's wish to deny the reality of what he has seen in his mind's eye. Manny chooses to be "a sleepwalker, blind" (to quote Uncle Charles in *Shadow of a Doubt* [Alfred Hitchcock, 1943]), as if he could escape being seen, and judged, by the cruel eyes he is imagining. Nearly simultaneously—we cannot say which comes first—the camera begins a spiraling motion, gradually accelerating as Fonda's closed eyes and expression continue to convey that Manny is turned inward. Hitchcock has found a way for his camera, in tandem with Fonda's performance, to express the vertigo Manny is experiencing without purporting to show what this character is envisioning in his mind's eye. Or is this vertiginously spiraling world, with himself in it, what Manny is seeing with his eyes wide shut? In any case, the spiraling of the projected world induces vertigo in us, enhancing our impression that this man would find relief from his vertigo, as we would, if only the camera stopped spiraling. Within our reality, and within Manny's reality as well, the camera—or what the camera becomes—has the power to make things happen. And yet, we also have the uncanny impression that Manny has the power to make the projected world stop spiraling. All it would take is to awaken to reality, to open his eyes and find himself, as Philip does, looking at a camera looking at him looking at it.

Only later in *The Wrong Man* does Manny experience—if only briefly—an awakening to reality comparable to Philip's. I am thinking of the climax of the extraordinary sequence in which Rose (Vera Miles), his long-suffering wife, strikes Manny with a hairbrush, drawing blood and cracking

the mirror in which he, and we, view his horrified reaction, the camera's view of Fonda's transfixed face constituting both what Manny is seeing and what he is imagining.

In classical cinema, it is a familiar practice to follow a shot of a character looking at the camera but too turned inward to see it with a shot that presents us directly with the character's inner reality. Two examples from *Vertigo* come to mind. One follows a shot of Scottie (James Stewart) in bed, in that twilight zone between sleep and wakefulness, with his dream sequence. The other follows a shot of Judy (Kim Novak) with her flashback.

A difference between these passages, we might note, is that in his waking dream, Scottie, as James Stewart plays him, seems unaware of the source of his visions, which he passively endures as they assault him. Judy, by contrast, seems to marshal the images the camera presents to us, as if she were not passively receiving but authoring her visions. The shot that cues her flashback is preceded by the moment when Scottie, who has just walked back into her life, exits her hotel room and the camera pans to Judy, framed from behind, staring at the closed door.

This shot so emphatically hits us over the head with the fact that Judy's hair is different from that of the woman Scottie—and we—knew as “Madeleine” that it distracts us from registering that this woman is thinking her own private thoughts, which she and the camera seem in complicity in withholding from us.

Lovesick Judy seems anything but villainous to us. Yet her powers are akin to those of Hitchcock villains—*Psycho*'s Norman Bates (or is it Norman's mother?) preeminent among them—who knowingly confront the camera's gaze as if they possess the power not only to see what the camera sees, but to see (and mock) us as well.

When Terry (Marlon Brando), in *On the Waterfront*, asks his brother (Rod Steiger), “Before we get to where, Charley?” and waits for the answer that he knows will confirm his brother's lifetime of betraying him, Brando, too, looks directly at the camera, but out of the corner of his eye (Figure 15.3). Brando's look is anything but mocking. Nor does he look at the camera as if it were a screen on which Terry's inner reality is projected. Looking at the camera out of the corner of his eye, Brando is conspicuously not looking at Steiger. But the camera is. It frames Steiger almost full face, Brando in near profile. Although Brando is in the foreground, the edge of his face forms a diagonal that helps draw the viewer's gaze toward Steiger, who is looking at Brando, not at the camera.

In *If You Could Only Cook*, Jean Arthur brings to life the character she is playing by acting in ways that manifest an attunement with a camera that has reality in that character's world only as an absence, a projection of her inner reality. Because Terry goes further, Brando goes further. When Arthur's face is turned away from the camera, this just seems to happen. But Brando seems deliberately to fix the camera in his gaze. Like a priest who receives confession knowing that only God can judge the sinner's penance,



Figure 15.3 Rod Steiger and Marlon in *On the Waterfront* (Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, 1954). Digital frame enlargement.

Terry has no need to look his brother in the eye. But he does want Charley's words and actions now to be on the record. By looking at the camera out of the corner of his eye, Brando, behaving as if he were the character he is playing, authorizes us—commands us—to do what the shot's composition in any case encourages us to do: look at Charley.

When actors in fiction films transgress the injunction against looking at the camera, they often do so for comic effect, *à la* Laurel and Hardy, or else to convey that their characters are unmasking themselves as villains. Brando fixes the camera in his gaze not to convey that Terry is a clown or a villain, but rather a moral agent. When Philip, with anguish in his eyes, trustingly meets Ross' gaze, he looks to his friend to bear witness to his grief. Brando looks to the camera as if he (that is, Terry) is calling on us to bear witness—and to pass judgment. Terry is declaring that attention must be paid—not to himself, but to his brother. And Brando is declaring that the split between actor and character provoked by the camera's presence—a presence that is also an absence—has been overcome or transcended.

Thus, there are at least three conclusions to be drawn that cast light on our question, "What becomes of the camera in the world on film?" First, there is an entire panoply of expressive gestures—including, but not limited to: turning away from the camera, almost facing the camera, looking "through" the camera, meeting the camera's gaze—that can only have reality (it is not merely that they can only be captured) within the world on film. Second, such gestures can color our experience of whole sequences, indeed, entire films. Third, gestures of this kind are not limited to exceptional films. They are integral to the classical style, part of the repertory of gestures available to every screen performer, and are employed with sophistication and self-consciousness. Should we find this surprising?

NOTES

1. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, enlarged ed. (1971; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 28.
2. *Ibid.*, 26.
3. André Bazin, "William Wyler, or the Jansenist of Directing," in *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*, ed. Bert Cardullo, trans. Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo (1948; repr., London: Routledge, 1997), 8.
4. William Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8.
5. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (1953; repr., Malden: Blackwell, 2009), 131.

16 Sonic Bodies

Listening as Acting

Jennifer M. Barker

During a fundraising visit to Belfast's Old Museum Arts Centre, Meryl Streep entertained a question from a soft-spoken young Irishman who asked about her legendary ability to master a host of accents and dialects. How does she do it? he wanted to know. After a moment, she responded with a one-line answer delivered in a perfect, lilting imitation of his Irish brogue: "I *less-ten*."¹ Her response echoes something fairly often emphasized in discussions of acting, which is that there is an aspect of mimicry about it. An actor listens to others and channels what she or he hears into a performance that is realistic, is organic, and resonates with viewers as a result.

It's commonplace that "listening" is a key part of the actor's profession, but I'd like to suggest that listening might be not only a form of research and preparation, but also perhaps a constitutive aspect of performance itself. Indeed, I want to suggest that listening is a *form* of acting and an ethical act that occurs not only between actors and the pro-filmic characters they play, but also among actors, the cinematic apparatus and the audience. Elsewhere I've argued that film and viewer are in a mutual relationship that has an ontological, affective dimension, and that the cinematic experience is an *encounter* that lends itself to intersubjectivity between film and viewer.² Here, I want to show the actor's role in that encounter: by *listening*, the actor helps to establish the sensuous, reversible relationship among the actor, the spectator and the film itself. *Listening-as-acting* creates a resonant body that is not limited to actor, spectator or screen but that exists between and is taken up by all three.

My notion of a "sonic body" draws on scholarly work that construes the cinematic encounter as a space of mutual reversibility, in which spectator's body, film's body and actor's body are co-constituted in some way, as well as Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of listening as an ethical act that creates a "sonorous place" that "is a place that becomes a subject insofar as sound resounds there."³

HEARING AND LISTENING

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others* (2006) speaks precisely to the kind of intersubjectivity and co-constitution of self and

world that I want to explore. His main character is a Stasi secret police surveillance expert who eavesdrops on unsuspecting East Germans with an eye (but, more to the point, an ear) toward rooting out those who would so much as say a word against the state apparatus. Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler (Ulrich Mühe) takes names, files reports and regulates his subjects' autonomy and mobility within the state apparatus. He is initially assigned to spy on playwright Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch), whose Communist credentials seem above suspicion to all but Wiesler. Wiesler installs himself and his assistant in Dreyman's attic with the intent of gathering incriminating evidence. For Wiesler, the elaborate surveillance apparatus facilitates a strict division between self and other. Over the course of the film, which traces the historical decline of the GDR, Wiesler's attitude toward the act of listening and toward the technologies and objects of his surveillance changes dramatically. As he gradually becomes convinced of and profoundly moved by Dreyman's human decency, his approach shifts from a one-way panoptic eavesdropping to a mode of listening in which he himself is profoundly immersed in a world with others.

Wiesler's emotional shift—from eavesdropper to ethical listener—parallels the work of actor Mühe, who collaborates, by listening, with the technology of sound cinema to create not only an embodied character, but more profoundly an embodied encounter, and more precisely than that, *a body that is encounter*: a sonic body that is taken up by actor, apparatus and spectator alike in the process of becoming itself. “Isn't the listening body,” Nancy asks, “a hollow column over which a skin is stretched, but also from which the opening of a mouth can resume and revive resonance? A blow from outside, clamor from within, this sonorous, sonorized body undertakes a simultaneous listening to a ‘self’ and to a ‘world’ that are both in resonance.”²⁴ Nancy refers to this resonance as “soul”; indeed, it may be the soul of this performance in particular and, perhaps, of acting in the sound cinema.

Wiesler at first approaches technologies of listening and recording as unidirectional: he records others and reports on others, but never on himself. The opening scene underscores this attitude. Wiesler prepares to interrogate a suspected traitor and, prior to the suspect's arrival, meticulously prepares his tools: recorder, pencil, writing pad and, in a flourish to be explained later, a seat cover whose underside is covered with fabric that will collect sweat samples from nervous, sweaty-palmed subjects. After a brief exchange, however, the scene cuts to a large lecture hall. There, in a close-up, Wiesler dramatically flips the switch on the reel-to-reel recorder standing on a table before him and pauses a recording of the interrogation we've just witnessed, which now serves as an audio-aid in the teaching of a course on surveillance for the benefit of young Stasi police recruits. Wiesler narrates the interrogation process for his students, playing a clip, then stopping to quiz and coach them on their observational skills as he imparts lessons regarding tell-tale signs of the behavior of liars and innocent men. Each

time he hits the “play” button for another segment of the interview, the film returns us to the interrogation, which we realize now is a flashback. In these segments, we witness Wiesler speaking authoritatively and harshly, just as he does in the classroom. The moment that his interrogation subject cracks and names a name, Wiesler barks, “Again! Speak clearly!” His voice is resolute, hard and clear. He’s *hearing, recording and making sense* of this, but not *listening*, and he expects the same of his students.

In this sequence, the film supports his attitude: it goes to some trouble to deny Wiesler’s *recorded* voice in favor of the synch-sound version that he speaks in close-up during the interrogation itself. Wiesler plays back the recorded interrogation for his students, but whereas they must be able to hear *both* sides of that interrogation via the reel-to-reel, we hear *only* the victim’s words on the recording. Only in flashback do we hear Wiesler’s exhortations and rebukes. That is, every time he hits the “play” button, his victim’s voice serves as a sound-bridge to the flashback; only after we’re firmly ensconced inside that darkened office (and the flashback) do we hear Wiesler speak, and we never hear him without also seeing him. His voice, apparently, does not suffer recording and dispersal; the editing of this sequence even implies that he does not, perhaps even refuses to, hear himself *as recorded*. On the contrary, victims and suspects’ voices are subject to recording and playback, as they are “subject” to the state apparatus, and, thus, Wiesler and the film maintain a sharp distinction between speaking and listening. We may accept that Wiesler is a central figure from whose “point of audition” we experience the events of this film and with whom we engage in the acts of surveillance that occupy him throughout the film.⁵ Over the course of the film, however, Wiesler and the actor who plays him both take up a mode of listening that destabilizes the suggestion of a unified subject position and all it implies. The film and actor Mühe collaborate in constructing the eavesdropping Wiesler as a *hearer* who gradually becomes a *listener*. In that process, the film radically revises the position we occupy *not* as that belonging to a unified subject at all, but as immersed and engaged in the very resonance and reciprocity that is *listening*.

Nancy distinguishes “hearing” from “listening” in the sense that listening is an openness to the world and a resonance with it, in which meaning is not a “thing” but precisely that resonance. Listening, he suggests, is not about “hearing” or “understanding” a meaning (or “sense”) that’s given to be discovered or decoded in the sound. Rather it is a presence to sound itself, where (re)sounding *is* the meaning. “To be listening,” he writes, “is to be always on the edge of meaning . . . as if the sound were precisely nothing else than this edge, this fringe, this margin.”⁶ He traces the history of the term in French in ways that are particularly illustrative of the contradictions and ultimate resolution of *The Lives of Others*:

After it had been designated a person who listens (who spies), the word *écoute* came to designate a place where one could listen in secret. *Être*

aux écoutes, “to listen in, to eavesdrop,” consisted first in being in a concealed place where you could surprise a conversation or a confession. *Être à l’écoute*, “to be tuned in, to be listening,” was in the vocabulary of military espionage before it returned, through broadcasting, to the public space, while still remaining, in the context of the telephone, an affair of confidences or stolen secrets. So . . . [w]hat secret is at stake when one truly *listens*, that is, when one tries to capture or surprise the sonority rather than the message? . . . What does it mean to exist according to listening, for it and through it . . . ?⁷

For the first half of the film, Wiesler is committed to “hearing” rather than “listening”: his eavesdropping on Dreyman’s apartment is decidedly unidirectional (literally top-down, from the attic to the floor below). There is no give-and-take to this relationship at all, and as invasive as his technology and behavior are, Wiesler maintains a strict separation not only between himself and his subjects, but also between his space and theirs. As he supervises the bugging of Dreyman’s apartment, for example, he urges the team to get in and out in twenty minutes, which he counts off with a stopwatch, and he doesn’t return to this place until after he has experienced a drastic change of heart later.

Until that change occurs, Wiesler makes himself as disembodied a presence in his quarries’ lives and in their home as he can. Indeed, his resolute refusal to think of himself as “in” Dreyman’s home and life in anything other than an abstract way becomes clear when the writer and his friends open a bottle of champagne in the apartment to celebrate a small victory; the cork ricochets off a listening device implanted in the wall, causing considerable pain to Wiesler, who has been listening closely to the goings-on through his headphones, and who winces with annoyance at being *touched* so literally by the events downstairs. That moment reminds us, and perhaps Wiesler, that he is less voyeuristically distant from these men than he would like, more immersed in the space than he thinks he is. But he resists the knowledge, irritated; he is not yet prepared to give himself up to an immersive state of “listening.”

More profoundly in this story of Wiesler’s investigation into Dreyman’s true identity—loyalist or traitor?—is the way in which genuine “listening” would unsettle the notion of a fixed and knowable “self” and “other.” In Nancy’s description, “listening is passing over to the register of presence to self, it being understood that the ‘self’ is precisely nothing available . . . to which one can be ‘present,’ but precisely the resonance of a return.”⁸ Thus, listening would undermine the very conception of “identity” on which Wiesler’s career rests. Subsequently, Dreyman’s emotional arc is less astonishing than Wiesler’s, who ultimately gives himself over to “listening” and all that it implies.

Relatively early in the film, we witness a remarkable step in that longer trajectory. Wiesler has discovered that Dreyman’s lover, Christa-Maria

Sieland (Martina Gedeck), is engaged (against her will) in a secret affair with the GDR Minister of Culture. Wiesler decides to make Dreyman aware of the situation and watch how the good socialist playwright responds. From his set-up in the attic, Wiesler watches via surveillance camera as the statesman's car arrives. Seconds before the woman emerges, Wiesler remotely triggers the doorbell, knowing that Dreyman will go to the door and catch his lover exiting the party chairman's recognizable car.

This scene is in keeping with Wiesler's relation to the technologies of surveillance: he expertly wields the tools of the trade in order to track movements, file reports and to prod or paralyze the objects (humans and things) of his attention. After setting this scene in motion, Wiesler arrogantly leans back in his chair, waiting to watch (better, to hear) the spectacle unfold. He keeps his distance from it—visibly, physically and emotionally. He is invested only in what the ensuing events will produce for his reports.

But as the night goes on, we see not a single shot of Wiesler reacting to Dreyman's reaction to the discovery. Sieland arrives, but the couple says nothing as she showers, and Dreyman quietly wanders through the apartment waiting for her. They get into bed, silently, and after a moment she says only, "Hold me." The couple lies spooning together, facing the camera in a medium-shot, their bodies leaning toward frame-right. Finally, after this extended scene downstairs, the film cuts back to Wiesler, in a surprising pose: he hugs himself tightly, slouched sideways in his chair, leaning toward frame-right in a line that exactly parallels that of the couple in the room below. And they *are* in the room directly below him, for he has wheeled his chair to the space on the floor that he'd outlined in chalk earlier as corresponding to the bedroom, far from the table piled high with sound equipment in the center of the attic. It's late, he is asleep in his chair, the attic is cold and his gray jacket is thin, but his posture and the fact that he still wears the headphones suggest *not* a moment of inattentive drowsiness, but rather an intimate connection between the loving couple downstairs and this lonely man upstairs, who is desperate for love and warmth in both physical and emotional senses. The stark difference in his posture and attitude from the moment that he triggers the doorbell to the moment he falls asleep above the lovers' bed marks the beginnings of empathy and true *listening* on his part for, in Nancy's words, "to listen is to enter that spatiality by which, at the same time, I am penetrated, for it opens up in me as well as around me, and from me as well as toward me."⁹

This remarkable moment is only the beginning of Wiesler's changing attitude. Shortly after this, he will venture downstairs again, alone this time, and kneel close to the couple's bed, not to search for something hidden under the mattress, for example, but just to place a soft, almost tender touch on the bedclothes still mussed from a night's sleep. We later discover that, during this trip downstairs, he has taken a book by Bertolt Brecht gifted to Dreyman by a dear friend, a blacklisted playwright who has recently committed suicide rather than suffer continued suppression

and humiliation. When Dreyman asks his lover if she has seen the treasured book, the film cuts to Wiesler, lying on his own sofa and reading the pilfered book. His eyes are soft, his mouth relaxed: he wears an open expression very different from the tight-lipped sternness we have seen on him for most of the film.

As he reads, a voice speaks the book's poetic lines . . . but whose voice? Because we have watched Wiesler hearing more than we have heard Wiesler speaking, and based on our familiarity with conventions of sound cinema, we might assume this is Wiesler's voice—a kind of inner speech he hears as he reads the book to himself, presented cinematically as what Michel Chion calls "internal sound."¹⁰ However logical we are to assume this *might* be Wiesler's voice, it simply isn't—a fact that registers momentarily. The lag time required for us to "place" this voice produces a meaningful ambiguity: Wiesler and Mühe each get a bit further outside themselves, their voice(s) merging with the voice(s) they and we hear.

Wiesler begins to realize that "listening" is a two-way street, an ethical space rather than a surveillance tool. At first the headphones are a means of listening *in on* others and the reel-to-reel recorder a means of recording their names, behaviors and crimes. In the process, he does *not* listen to himself as recorded; he willfully downplays his own role and situation in this whole soundscape, until and unless it hits him in the face, as does the champagne cork. Gradually, however, he begins to hear himself, to hear the space *between* him and the others, and to realize the degree to which he is immersed in the same soundscape/world with them (and with the apparatuses of watching and listening). He begins to become intimate with people—including those who never meet him, as Dreyman does not—whom he once knew only as subjects of detached and impersonal surveillance. In the process, he becomes intimately acquainted with himself, for as Nancy writes, "To be listening is thus to enter into tension and to be on the lookout for a relation to self . . . [a] *relationship in self*, so to speak, as if forms a 'self' or a 'to itself' in general."¹¹

SPEAKING AND RECORDING

Reluctantly, painfully, Wiesler begins willingly to participate in the reversibility of perception and expression that is an inevitable aspect of communication, but one that had been abhorrent to him early in the film. For Wiesler, "sound . . . and the voice will be associated with the dream and the exercise of power," but that dream is revealed to be a fragile one.¹² After all, if the speaking voice is a mark of subjecthood, there is also something precarious about it, and if eavesdropping is a power one holds over another, it is also something we do to ourselves perpetually, every time we speak. Steven Connor reminds us that "to say that my voice comes from me is also to say that it departs from me. . . . I must

participate in my voice only by coming apart from it.”¹³ In short, Connor says, “Speaking turns me inside out.”¹⁴

At first, we remember, Wiesler resists and denies precisely this reversibility: he maintains a sharp distinction between speaking and listening. (Thus, he and we hear his interrogated subject’s voice on the reel-to-reel, but not his own.) This distinction is precisely what makes him an excellent Stasi man, but it is its unraveling that will make him human. Eventually, he loosens his grip on the surveillance act; rather than “listening in,” he begins to “listen,” in the sense that Nancy suggests, which is to “resound” and “reverberate.” In short, he becomes a *conduit* rather than a recording device, and he begins to behave like sound and sense itself, for as Nancy tells us, “to sound is to vibrate in itself or by itself: it is not only, for the sonorous body, to emit a sound, but it is also to stretch out, to carry itself and be resolved into vibrations that both return it to itself and place it outside itself.”¹⁵

Wiesler’s role as a conduit becomes quite clear when, for the first time, he intervenes personally, if subtly, on Sieland and Dreyman’s behalf. Late one night, Dreyman calls Sieland on her lie: he knows where she goes at night, he tells her, and he begs her to end her relationship with the Minister of Culture and the drug habit that he knows fuels it. More than that, he reassures her that, though she has lost faith in her talents as an actress, he and her audience have not.

Wiesler, who has heard the entire exchange from the attic, is shocked by the honesty and vulnerability of this exchange. In fact, he’s so invested in the conversation that he is caught completely by surprise when his colleague enters the attic to take the night shift. As the door opens behind him, Mühe responds to its grating metal squeak by jolting upright, as if interrupted in a private moment. Of course, he has been: his relationship between the couple downstairs has become so close that he is no longer firmly identified with, nor contained and protected by, the attic bunker: now he exists somewhere between the soundscape of the couple’s apartment and the headphones that immerse him in it.

As Wiesler leaves the attic, Mühe sonically expresses this growing investment in the couple’s lives. As he steps outside into the stairwell, Mühe breathes deeply and quickly, letting that vulnerable human sound follow closely on the mechanical squeal of the steel attic door that he closes behind him, the same sound that had caught Wiesler off guard a moment earlier. The counterpoint of these two sounds underscores the dramatic turn Wiesler is about to take, as he leaves behind the space (and attitude) of surveillance in favor of the relationship among Sieland, Dreyman and (now) himself.

Upset by the turn of events and the vulnerability his targets have shown, Wiesler stops in a nearby bar. Behind him, the door opens and a woman steps through and orders a cognac. Mühe doesn’t turn around: he knows Sieland from her voice alone. She sits two tables away from him, and he

looks shaken, unsure of how to proceed. After knocking back a shot of vodka, he stands and approaches her stiffly. The moment he sits down across from her, he stutters, averts his gaze and even shivers as he admits that he has seen Sieland on stage. He is no mere starstruck fan, though. "I am your audience," he says; he makes explicit that, by this, he means that he knows Sieland as she really is, because it is in performance more than anywhere else that she is herself. She acquiesces to what seems his uncanny knowledge of her and asks him, would the "real" Sieland betray the one she loves the most? After a long minute's thought, she leaves.

At the beginning of Wiesler's next "shift," his colleague tells us that Sieland did, in fact, return to Dreyman, and it's clear that Wiesler has, in some way, played a role in the romantic reconciliation that ensued that night. Wiesler becomes intimately involved in this couple's life in a *positive* way only at the moment he announces and, importantly, acknowledges to Sieland his role as her (and their) "audience." Thus in listening, he is taken out of himself and becomes a subject constituted only in relation to these other two (and the others, the dead and the exiled, whom they represent).

I want to return for a moment to Wiesler's fraught listening to the initial exchange where Dreyman acknowledges Sieland's lack of faith in her own talent, which Wiesler will soon redress. As Wiesler changes his attitude, he also changes his relation to media technology. The reel-to-reel is one example: he presses "record" to capture others, presses "play" to incriminate. The machine facilitates and reflects a strict division between self and other, until he abandons his recording altogether. The headphones, too, are other-directed, until the fateful moment that Dreyman plays a piece of music that changes Wiesler forever. Finally, his use of and for the typewriter changes, and Wiesler's relationship to it reflects his (and Mühe's) overall shift in terms of the relationship among being, performance and technologies of hearing/listening.

As we hear the painful exchange during which Sieland admits her devastating lack of faith in her own talent, Wiesler listens upstairs, in rapt attention. He has listened before, of course, but when taking names and taking notes, his fingers are usually poised almost aggressively over the typewriter keyboard. He generally uses it as a mechanical mode of perception, a means of recording the words of others, taking notes and names. Wiesler's initial use of a typewriter is perfunctory and unemotional, a point the film drives home in one of its rare moments of humor. As Dreyman's birthday party guests disperse for the night, he and Sieland relax on the sofa and begin to make love. The film closes in on soft caresses and breathy sighs, and . . . abruptly cuts to a close-up of Wiesler's fingers pounding at the keyboard. He types: "[Code names] Lazlo and CMS unwrap packages. Then presumably have intercourse." However, in this scene, his hands rest lightly, passively, on top of the typewriter, as if steadying himself against the shock of the emotional scene downstairs. He does not type, indeed he *cannot* type; he is too engrossed, too involved. Thus, his growing empathy alters his

relation to the technology, in this case, the typewriter. In this moment, the typewriter becomes a resonating instrument. This is a key moment, so to speak, prefacing the piano performance yet to come: this is the first time that, for Wiesler, the keyboard becomes neutral, which opens him up for his even more dramatic involvement in the couple's drama.

Like Wiesler, Dreyman also has a drastic change of attitude toward the typewriter. Dreyman is a director of plays written by others, but when his longtime friend and playwright commits suicide as a result of political oppression, Dreyman responds by writing (and publishing in the West) his own article about the GDR's suppression of its citizenry's appalling suicide rate, a piece he composes on a contraband machine identifiable by its unique red ribbon.

In short, both Wiesler and Dreyman drastically reconsider the role of media. Their change of heart comes to a head in the climax of the film: when Sieland gets arrested and is pushed to divulge the location of Dreyman's contraband typewriter, it is Wiesler who "interrogates" her. Mühe's impassioned reiteration of the line "I am your audience" to a panicked Sieland confounds his fellow Stasi agents, but it makes clear the degree to which "hearing" has become "listening." In that interrogation scene, he aims not at all to "hear" what Sieland is saying; rather, deeply invested in the relationships and beliefs at stake, he uses that line to assure her—bizarrely, and yet convincingly, given that she does not know the extent of his investment in her or Dreyman's lives—that Wiesler-the-investigator has taken a backseat to Wiesler-the-listener.

Ultimately, Sieland dies a tragic death trying to save Dreyman; at the same time, Wiesler has become *himself* in making himself aware of and vulnerable to their situation. Behind the scenes, Wiesler rescues the contraband red-ribboned typewriter from its secret hiding place in Dreyman's floorboards, thanks to Sieland's confession of its location. Significantly, he also leaves a smudged fingerprint in red ink on his final report submitted to Dreyman's Stasi file before he is demoted and sent to steam open envelopes for the remainder of the GDR's existence. It is this tell-tale red fingerprint that later alerts Dreyman to Wiesler's existence and his pivotal role in the tragic political debacle now years past.

Not incidentally, Dreyman learns Wiesler's identity by "viewing" the Stasi files that were kept on him, but we the audience "hear" the details of those files in Mühe's own voice. If, during the opening scene, Mühe and Wiesler's voice had been utterly immune to recording and replaying, here we experience them as nothing but mechanically-contingent. The actor and character are absent entirely from the image, but Mühe's voice resonates: ironically, as he reads aloud his "reports" on Dreyman, Mühe is revealing Wiesler's own devoted but invisible, invasive investment in and attention to this tragic couple.

Dreyman's realization that he'd been surveilled and, paradoxically, saved by this silent Stasi man, known only in the files as a number, prompts the

dedication in his new book: “AGW/XX7, with gratitude.” The circuit of perception (surveillance) and expression (speech and the written word) comes full circle much later when Wiesler, now a postal clerk in the eastern part of a newly unified Germany, wanders into Karl Marx Bookstore, spies a copy of Dreyman’s book and discovers his own “identity” imprinted right there on the dedication page. When the bookseller asks, “Is this a gift?,” Wiesler responds, “No, it’s for me.” Thus, the technologies he once considered to operate properly in one direction only—for listening in on, speaking to and recording details of—have become mutual, permeable, reciprocal and reversible.

RESONATING AND BEING

In what follows, I want to draw a parallel between Wiesler’s change of attitude toward the technologies of surveillance he employs and the actor Mühe’s relationship, throughout his performance, to the cinematic apparatus. In both cases, character and actor take up an attitude of “listening” as a productive, *resonant listening* that results not in a conventional sender/receiver model (which is often the model according to which acting is discussed) but rather a “sonic body” that reverberates between what we might formerly have called “subject” (actor/performance) and “object” (viewer/witnessing).

Recent phenomenological descriptions of the cinematic experience have characterized it less in the communication model and as something more immersive and intersubjective, at least with regard to the cinematic apparatus and the spectator, which take up similar rhythms and gestures.¹⁶ The actor is an inextricable part of that mutual, embodied relationship. Nancy’s concept of listening gives us a particularly intriguing way to think about the actor’s performance as an integral presence, co-constituted against, around and alongside the spectator and the film itself. The actor who *listens* engages profoundly in that reversible process: he not only speaks, but listens to himself speak; he not only projects and performs, but introjects and resounds.

If the spectator and the cinema take up similar rhythms and gestures, do they not also *listen* in similar ways? Couldn’t auditory gestures and attitudes reverberate between them? And doesn’t the actor participate in that resonance from the other side, spatially and temporally speaking, of the cinematic moment? Should we also consider how a kind of two-way sensory mimicry, mutually taken up by the cinematic apparatus and the actor, might (like the one between spectator and cinema) reactivate what Miriam Hansen calls “abilities of the body as a medium in the service of imagining new forms of subjectivity”?¹⁷ This “new form of subjectivity” would be something taken up by all three players in this scene—actor, spectator and film. This is what I’m calling a “sonic body,” a body that doesn’t make a sound, but *resounds*—a space in which the visual and sonorous intersect.

To flesh out more fully the connections between the “new forms of subjectivity” implied by Nancy’s radical call to “listening,” we might

focus for a moment on silence. Silence, in von Donnersmarck's film and in other contexts, is not just a matter of quieting one's own speech (and even inner thoughts) so as to hear what is spoken by others. For Nancy, silence provokes a relinquishing of oneself to a space in which meaning becomes possible, a space that precludes the existence of mutually exclusive subject positions.

[I]n a perfect condition of silence you hear your own body resonate, your own breath, your heart and all its resounding cave. It is a question, then, of going back from the phenomenological subject, an intentional line of sight, to a resonant subject, an intensive spacing of a rebound that does not end in any return to self without immediately relaunching, as an echo, a call to that same self. While the subject of the target is always already given, posed in itself to its point of view, the subject of listening is always still yet to come, spaced, traversed, and called by itself, sounded by itself.¹⁸

Nancy's model of subjectivity—"always still yet to come, spaced, traversed"—does not imply the meeting of mutually respectful, empathetic subjects, but rather a radically co-constituted subjectivity. We see this play out in *The Lives of Others*: it is not simply that Wiesler ultimately takes up a "new," more sympathetic subject position as a result of learning to listen and to open himself up to the possibility of meanings—spoken by others—that he hasn't anticipated or approved. Rather, Wiesler relinquishes *himself*—that is, his very sense of self—to a space where meaning and (more importantly) *being* take root. In this sense, Wiesler's journey and Mühe's own performance parallel the route that Nancy encourages the astute philosopher to take: not only to silence one's own voice, but also to silence one's own *hearing*, to relinquish themselves to the being that emerges in resonance, in listening.

Much of Mühe's performance in *The Lives of Others* is conducted in and as near-silence: as he presses the headphones against his ears to pick up private conversations, as he takes in the state-sanctioned television news in his drab apartment, even as he delivers the mail in his post-Glasnost routine, he is remarkably, poignantly silent. But if his silence is partly, at first, a means of shutting out all but the sounds of sedition, it becomes something else:

The subject of the listening or the subject who is listening . . . is not a phenomenological subject. This means that he is not a philosophical subject, and finally, he is perhaps no subject at all, except as the place of resonance, of its infinite tension and rebound.¹⁹

Nowhere is this silence more poignant and profound in *The Lives of Others* than during the film's only musical performance. Following the tragic

suicide of Dreyman's friend, Jerska, the blacklisted playwright, a devastated Dreyman retrieves from the top of his piano a score his friend had given him for his birthday, entitled "Sonata for a Good Man" (composed for the film by Gabriel Yared). As Seiland stands behind him at the piano, he plays. The music is devastating, but not only to them.

Wiesler listens to the sonata from his attic hideaway, and the camera tracks slowly from behind his seated figure, leftward, to reveal his face. His ubiquitous headphones are in place, but his expression is stricken: the music touches him as not even the original news of Jerska's death did. As he continues to play, Dreyman tells his lover about Lenin's legendary response to Beethoven's *Appassionata*, which was to lament that if he kept listening to it, he would never finish the revolution. The implication is that the music itself contains such power, but, in the case of this scene and this performance by Mühe, listening *itself* is transformative for, to quote Nancy again, "To listen, as well as to look or to contemplate, is to touch the work in each part—or else to be touched by it, which comes to the same thing."²⁰

Nancy does not seem to imagine this encounter as one subject touching and being touched by another. Rather, he suggests that subjectivity emerges in the encounter itself: "Sense, here, is the ricochet, the repercussion, the reverberation: the echo in a given body, even *as* this given body, or even as the gift of *self* to this given body."²¹

This moment demonstrates the way actor, apparatus and audience can be caught up in a reciprocal, reversible relationship by which we all come to our "selves" and sense those "selves" to have been fundamentally transformed, even reinvented. Thus, *The Lives of Others* takes up explicitly the relationship among listening (in), speaking (out) and selfhood. In so doing, the film also reveals an aspect of the actor's pursuit—an ethical, embodied, *listening-as-acting*—that may be intrinsic to all sound-film acting that moves us and echoes in our memories long after the film has run.

NOTES

1. BBC (2007). "News Nine." [Video] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tHg5WET8Y0>.
2. Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
3. See Elena del Río, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Vivian Sobchack, "What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh," in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 53–84; and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 17.
4. *Ibid.*, 42–43.
5. "Point of audition" is Rick Altman's term for the "sound version" of point of view, which classical narrative sound cinema uses to reassure us that, despite the dispersal and fragmentation that regularly characterizes the film *image*,

- at least at the level of sound, we occupy a fixed, unified position. See Rick Altman, *Sound Theory/Sound Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 60.
6. Nancy, *Listening*, 7.
 7. *Ibid.*, 4–5.
 8. *Ibid.*, 12.
 9. *Ibid.*, 14.
 10. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 76.
 11. Nancy, *Listening*, 7.
 12. Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23.
 13. *Ibid.*, 3–4
 14. Steven Connor, “Intersensoriality,” Feb 6, 2004, <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/intersensoriality/>.
 15. Nancy, *Listening*, 8.
 16. See del Río, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance*; Sobchack, “What My Fingers Knew”; and Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).
 17. Miriam Hansen, “Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street,” *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 2 (1999): 321.
 18. Nancy, *Listening*, 21.
 19. *Ibid.*, 21–22.
 20. *Ibid.*, 65.
 21. *Ibid.*, 40.

17 Dance of the Übermarionettes

Toward a Contemporary Screen Actor Training

Sean Aita

There can be little doubt that since the early 1930s there have been a great number of exceptional film actors who have been trained using techniques associated with the Method. However, North American society has undergone radical changes to its social, cultural and political philosophy since the development of this system of actor training. These changes have been reflected, and sometimes driven, by developments in critical theory that have impacted on the aesthetic practices, theatrical and cinematic metanarratives, media delivery and production mechanisms, and consequently on approaches to performance. Within the last decade, some of these mechanisms—motion capture and performance capture—have significantly impacted the production and reception of cinematic acting. What are the specific conditions that these and other digital and cybernetic technologies impose on the actor, and in what ways might performance pedagogy respond to such developments? This chapter, written from the perspective of a practitioner (actor, director and teacher of acting), will attempt to address these questions and will propose that any screen actor training suitable for working with cyber and mediated performance technologies should include a psycho-physical methodology and a role-oriented approach to character.

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, EVOLVING PERFORMANCE STYLES

During *Newsweek's* Oscar roundtable in January 2010, actors Morgan Freeman, Sandra Bullock, Jeff Bridges, Woody Harrelson, Gabourey Sidibe and Carey Mulligan were asked by interviewer David Ansen “how [they] felt about motion-capture acting.”¹ What followed next was illuminating. The majority of the actors around the table, with the exception of Bridges, who had recently finished making *Tron: Legacy* (Joseph Kosinski, 2010), had a very hazy idea of what acting via motion-capture and performance-capture technologies might encompass. Initially, Harrelson and Mulligan expressed admiration for *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (Wes

Anderson, 2009), mistakenly assuming that Ansen was referring to stop-motion animation. Eventually a consensus emerged that motion-capture was “little dots” or “rings connected to you,” but the technology’s impact on performance technique was barely explored at all.² Bridges offered that you have to “develop some new techniques,” and he touched on the difficulty of reacting naturally with a fellow actor who is covered in a matrix of dots. He also hinted teasingly at the need for an actor to change her or his psychological approach to performance: performing in a mo-cap environment requires “do[ing] a little different thing with your mind.” Bridges spoke to the complexity of dealing with the set and costume in such productions, but his remarks were curtailed by Freeman, who dismissed such concerns as irrelevancies. “As an actor, you’re going to have to learn to live without costumes and set,” Freeman opined, suggesting that the actor’s art cannot be reliant on such external and technological factors. Freeman’s use of the word “live” is important here—the fundamental assumption being that the actor creates a role that *lives* without recourse to anything outside the individual.

Although this is essentially a truth—that scenographic elements support rather than lead character creation—actors are not immune to their surroundings, the environment in which they are asked to practice their art. Indeed, it is essential that they should be mindful of the particularities of the media in which they are performing. So whereas theatre and film acting are both axiomatically acting, they differ in terms of delivery and scale. Film acting as a genre has gone through a range of modifications requiring both philosophical and practical changes since the first actor stepped in front of a film camera. James Naremore describes how early filmmakers—practitioners of so-called primitive cinema—placed the camera at a distance from the actors, which, when projected on the screen, made the figures appear at roughly the scale one might expect to find in a proscenium theatre if one were occupying a seat in the orchestra.³ The effect of this actor/spectator dynamic meant that, in general, the performers “stood in three quarter profile when they addressed one another, and gesticulated vividly to compensate for their relative distance from the audience.”⁴

This sense of physical separation, coupled with the restrictions in communication entailed in the lack of sound, led screen actors in this period to develop a codified gestural language that Kristin Thompson chooses to call “pantomime.”⁵ She describes how presentational stock gestures that “rely only minimally on facial expression, and then only for reinforcement” were frequently used.⁶ The gradual change in framing position through Vitagraph’s introduction of the nine-foot line, drawing the performer closer to the camera, and subsequently D. W. Griffith’s use of the close-up for emotional resonance also had a profound effect on how the actors achieved their effects on film. Griffith saw the close-up as providing a mechanism through which his cast could reach “real acting, restraint, acting that is

a duplicate of real life.”⁷ Thompson points out, however, that such “cinematic” acting was very much a “stylized system like the one before it,” involving the “transmitting of feelings and thoughts through a series of facial suggestions.”⁸ Other commentators have made similar claims about more modern screen acting. For example, Marlon Brando’s Method-influenced performance as Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Elia Kazan, 1951) “suggests an authenticity which contrasts dramatically with the apparent artificiality of Blanche DuBois [Vivien Leigh],” but we should also be aware that “both styles are in fact equally mannered.”⁹ From a contemporary viewpoint, then, Brando’s representation of the role may also seem highly visually codified.

While acknowledging that they are highly selective, what these brief examples imply is that Freeman’s assumptions about the essence of acting are quite blinkered. Film acting does not grow organically from the performer’s psyche in isolation, but is affected, sometimes quite radically, by technical, dramaturgical, scenographic and environmental considerations imposed on the performer by the media through which the performance takes place. The goal of the actor may always be, as Sanford Meisner put it, “to live truthfully under imaginary circumstances,” but the *way* in which the actor will approach this goal, and the specific techniques she or he can use will be subject to the *actual* conditions of her or his working environment.¹⁰

Although uncertain, then, about the practical implications of the way in which new digital technologies might impact on their approach to acting, several of the panelists on *Newsweek*’s Oscar roundtable perceived the use of computer-generated imagery to manipulate, enhance or alter a performance as a potential threat to their art. Their objections seemed colored by a conflation of ethical and labor concerns—Woody Harrelson, for example, laments that the technology seemed to offer producers the chance to make “a new film with Marlon Brando.”¹¹ What they fail to appreciate, though, is the increasing importance of an actor’s ability to become comfortable working within production environments in which a wide range of digital effects technologies are the norm. Blue screen or chroma-key effects, for example, have for some time produced a situation in which actors are obliged to perform alongside and respond effectively to characters or elements that are not physically present but are inserted later in postproduction. The contemporary screen actor is also asked to respond to other developments such as animatronics (non-CGI involving the use of hybridized robotics and mechanized puppetry), hyper-realistic CG and immersive 3D presentations, often involving facial and full-body motion capture.

The crucial difference between the effect of these technological developments on the actor and the developments of previous generations lies in the relationship between the performer and the performance outcome. Indeed the new technologies alter so fundamentally the relationship between the actor and the character/performance event that they force us to engage with complex issues relating to both presence and authorship.¹² Toward the end

of the roundtable discussion, Morgan Freeman states quite emphatically that, in his opinion, films like *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) are “a bit faddish,” and that they are “really cartoons.”¹³ His statement feeds into a lively debate current in the field of animation about what constitutes a “live action” or an “animated” film, and it also throws into question the extent to which an actor is contributing to the performance outcome.¹⁴ Meanwhile, *Avatar*’s director James Cameron has no doubts on this subject, telling us emphatically that performance capture “is nothing like animation. The creator here is the actor, not the unseen hand of an animator.”¹⁵

Clearly, then, identifying and analyzing the actor’s function and contribution in these contexts requires some re-adjustment, even to the designation “actor” itself. Jeff Kleiser and Diana Walczak proposed the name “synthespian” for these forms of mediated performance in their 1988 experimental film, *Nestor Sextone for President*, while Joel Anderson suggests the more sober sounding “source actor.”¹⁶ Andy Serkis, who played Gollum in Peter Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–2003), uses the more utilitarian term “cyber-acting” to describe his work using motion capture in this extraordinary film series.¹⁷ Henceforward the term *cyber-actor* will be used as a matter of convenience to refer to performers in this field, whereas the term *cyber-cinema* will refer to contemporary films that make extensive use of computer interventions or animatronics.

The process of digitally capturing a performance can make extreme physical demands on the actor. And yet, paradoxically, these technologies liberate him from his actual body, which can potentially be morphed into different shapes and sizes in postproduction. Summarizing these processes at work in Robert Zemeckis’ *Beowulf* (2007), screenwriter Neil Gaiman stated, “We can create a digital Beowulf, where we can get the sheer physical power and brutality of Ray Winstone’s performance, in a six foot six inch Greek God type body.”¹⁸ It is this extremity of mediation—the uncoupling of physical appearance from the requirements of the casting process—that has made it difficult for commentators and critics to determine the level of actor contribution. This difficulty was a key issue in the refusal of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences to nominate Serkis for an Oscar for his work as Gollum.

Despite his snubbing by the Academy, the actor’s contribution to the cyber-acting process was enormous. First, it required his sensitivity to new forms of fragmentation and absences. As Lisa Wildermoth, first assistant mo-cap director who worked closely with Serkis, explains, “He had to act scenes he had shot months, sometimes years earlier on the live set, without the other actors who had been with him in those scenes. Often he would act against a rubber head on a stick.”¹⁹ Second, for Serkis himself, cyber-acting required great stillness and self-discipline. In his words, “motion-capture essentializes your every breath, your every move.”²⁰ Third, it necessitates an intense physicality. Indeed, Serkis acknowledges the link between cyber-acting and the aforementioned traditions of the silent movie, pointing out



Figure 17.1 Mo-cap actor/producer/director Reuben Langdon. Reprinted with the permission of Just Cause Productions.

that mo-cap is a technique through which “every emotion is carried in pantomime.”²¹ The technique requires great stamina as the actor is expected to work for far longer periods in front of the camera than is necessary on more conventional screen acting assignments. According to film producer Steve Starkey, the cyber-actor’s “days are shorter,” but they are expected to “act all day,” unlike film actors, who would expect to spend many hours waiting for a take.²² Last, the strangeness of the mo-cap environment and costume themselves can be intimidating. Despite developments in real-time technology, the ability to visualize and respond appropriately to virtual environments that cannot be seen by the actor is still a key skill in this field. Many actors consider the technique to be potentially disorientating, in spite of real-time visualization technologies that allow the actor to see the performance space and character, and to require high levels of physical coordination. As mo-cap specialist actor Reuben Langdon puts it, “I’ve seen a lot of actors not be able to get into it very fast or even at all” (Figure 17.1).²³

PUPPETS, MACHINES AND PHYSICAL TRAINING

Contemporary screen performances mediated using computer technology and/or animatronics are therefore drawing the actor closer to designer and performance theorist Edward Gordon Craig’s century-old forecast of the future of acting. Craig’s search for a new kind of acting—not driven by a need to “reproduce nature”—led him to make unflattering comparisons between the potential of the live actor and his vision of an idealized “Übermarionette,” or super-puppet.

May we not look forward with hope to that day which shall bring back to us once more the figure, or symbolic creature, made also by the cunning of the artist, so that we can gain once more the “noble artificiality” which the old writer [an anonymous Greek traveler of 800 BC] speaks of? Then shall we no longer be under the cruel influence of the emotional confessions of weakness which are nightly witnessed by the people and which in their turn create in the beholders the very weaknesses which are exhibited. To that end we must study to remake these images no longer content with a puppet, we must create an Über-marionette.²⁴

Although a number of researchers assert that Craig did not propose the complete replacement of the actor by a puppet and was speaking metaphorically, he undoubtedly advocated that the actor should look to the puppet as a model.²⁵ To Craig, the puppet “is the ABC of the actor” and should be seen as “the actor’s primer.”²⁶ Serkis would understand this idea as he describes the mo-cap process as “more like controlling or driving a puppet than acting the character.”²⁷ For Craig, such strangeness is the locus of the

puppet's power. Moreover, Craig might also have recognized elements of the "noble artificiality" to which he refers in the cybernetic hybridity of Doug Jones' performance of the Faun in *Pan's Labyrinth* (Guillermo de Toro, 2006). When performing, Jones operated the lower half of the Faun's head while an off-camera puppeteer controlled the movement of the creature's eyes and eyebrows. When questioned about his process, Jones commented that he trusted totally that "whoever was operating the eyebrows and the eyes was working in concert with the bottom half of the face that I was operating."²⁸

So, although Shakespeare's *Macbeth* tells us that there is no art to find the mind's construction in the face, this is in fact the very challenge that animatronics and mo-cap set for the contemporary actor. Craig's ideal was of an actor who could "control his face, features, body and all just as if his body were an instrument," and it is this level of physical control that is required for these types of performances.²⁹ In this respect, then, the value to the cyber-cinema of actors who are in possession of refined and precise control of their bodies and facial expressions should be axiomatic. And yet, the majority of lecturers in film acting will recognize that many of their students have little or no awareness, let alone a disciplined ability, to control their facial musculature. Moreover, exercises emphasizing facial control and the isolation of individual musculature do not often feature prominently in screen acting syllabuses. These oversights place would-be cyber-actors at a significant disadvantage. Serkis himself describes the difficult process of developing animation references for his facial expressions: "The motion capture team drew lines on my face, breaking it up into muscle groups, making a kind of map."³⁰ They went on to place him "in the centre of a frame with angled mirrors and asked [him] to perform some basic facial poses, like raising an eyebrow or curling [his] lip."³¹ There was a long list of expressions and movements he was required to produce throughout the session, and at the end of the day, he felt as if he had "performed facial gymnastics and had lockjaw."³²

In order to facilitate this considerable degree of controlled physical expressivity, Craig found himself looking toward the cultural traditions of Africa and India, and Serkis' process is remarkably similar to techniques applied by actors in the classical dance and theatre forms of the Indian subcontinent. Serkis would undoubtedly have benefited from the exercises undertaken by the South Indian Kathakali performers whose celebrated control of facial expression is acquired through a rigorous physical training lasting many years, involving the actors in daily sessions of eye exercises, and physical gymnastics, from 3:00am to 7:30am each day. Their practice focuses on the "movement of eyes, eyebrows, eyeballs, cheek, neck, lips and other accessories of the body employed for the expression of different emotions. This strenuous practice makes the actor's eye obedient to his mind."³³

Similarly, the pioneering Russian film director Lev Kuleshov, when selecting actors for his cinema acting workshops in the 1920s, tested prospective

students for their ability to isolate parts of the face and body and memorize complex movement patterns. His actors were expected to have “the capacity to consciously control body and face muscles, [and] to have the necessary skills to solve, unassisted, any plastic problems arising from the scenario or directorial assignments.”³⁴ Seeking to develop a paradigm to distinguish good silent screen acting from its theatrical counterpart, Kuleshov used the disciplines of gymnastics, boxing and dance, as well as offering exercises that helped to isolate and control various facial muscles.

Kuleshov’s theories of performance training, like Craig’s, saw the human body as a programmable machine, capable of moving through specific coordinates without reference to the actor’s subjective thoughts or feelings at the time. His work was based on the structural analysis of movement in what he referred to as the metrical-spatial web. This web is an imaginary three-dimensional axis through which the actor’s body can move, moderated rhythmically in time. Kuleshov devised a series of etudes for his performers, in which he broke down movements, or actions, into individual elements. He then applied a temporal rhythm to these elements using a metronome. One such etude is described as follows:

1. Face normal
2. eyes squinting; move to the right
3. pause
4. forehead and brows frown
5. lower jaw moves forward
6. eyes abruptly shift to the right
7. lower jaw to the left
8. pause
9. face normal but eyes return to the previous position
10. eyes open wide, simultaneously the mouth half opens.³⁵

Despite its seemingly mechanistic quality, Kuleshov’s ideas still have resonance for today’s performer. For example, American theatre lecturer Gerry Large describes his use of these etudes with students specializing in contemporary theatrical practice as helping students to achieve a “greater command of movement as well as an experiential understanding of the position of the body in space and time.”³⁶

More important, such skills are highly transferable to mo-cap cyber-acting, which takes place in an area referred to as the “volume”: the performance space in which the computer-readable body markers placed on the actor can be seen by cameras from all directions. Actor Michael Lehr describes it as a

relative playing space. Within said volume, walls, tables, chairs, or other physical barriers might be marked by tape or other lines, but are (for obvious reasons) not built to scale. You might have a chair, but it could

be next to a table that extends beyond what you physically see. Move your body into that imaginary table and the take is botched.³⁷

Working within this volume, then, requires more than just the actor's constant attention to spatial dynamics; it necessitates intense physical concentration and constant control of the expressive minutiae of his or her body.

Lecturers in acting for the camera do not have to look far to find practitioners and theorists whose work is categorized by just this sort of body-oriented approach to actor training. Vsevolod Meyerhold, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, Rudolf Laban, Peter Brook and Jacques Lecoq are all influential figures in this field. This practice is in general led by psycho-physical approaches to acting. Commenting on a rehearsal taken by Meyerhold, actor Igor Ilinsky explains the process, through which an "idea forces the actor to sit in a sad posture, but the posture itself helps to make him sad."³⁸ Techniques and exercises can be drawn from the work of artists operating using this paradigm and applied directly to cyber-acting. Theatre director and actor Ariane Mnouchkine is one such practitioner. In preparation for her 1999 production *Tambours sur la Digue*, Mnouchkine also looked toward the puppet as a model for the actor. Drawing on the traditions of Japanese Bunraku, she trained her actors to work in pairs, with one performer acting as an operator or a handler and the other in the role of a puppet being controlled. She justified this approach by suggesting, "Being a puppet offers a wider field of expression that is otherwise unavailable to human actors. It is more hidden, more subtle."³⁹ For Mnouchkine, as for Craig, the puppet in its unreality offers more potential for artistic insight and revelation than the human actor who pretends to be real. The transformation of the actor into a marionette gives her or him "the opportunity to signal almost everything, and if [one is] able to do this, there are no limits."⁴⁰

ARCHETYPAL GESTURES, ROLE TYPES AND EXPRESSIVE QUALITIES

Yet a purely physical training—even when aligned with exercises designed to stimulate the actor's understanding of what it feels like for performance to be mediated and manipulated—cannot wholly hope to provide the requisite tools to deliver complex and nuanced performances of the quality Serkis achieved with Gollum. Techniques to develop character and to stretch the creative imagination to help fill the empty performance volume are undoubtedly as important, if not more important, to the cyber-actor as the traditional screen actor. In fact, once the actor is freed from the need to resemble physically the parts he can play, his ability to metamorphose into multiple roles psychologically becomes crucial. He is no longer bound by *who* he is, but by what he can *become*. Transformational character acting skills will become increasingly valued.

Michael Chekhov, author of one of the most important acting manuals of the twentieth century, understood this distinction between the self and the role very clearly, asserting that transformation “is what the actor’s nature, consciously or unconsciously longs for.”⁴¹ Also using a metaphor similar to that of puppetry, he describes the way in which the actor should effect this transformation: “You clothe yourself with this body, you put it on like a garment.”⁴² Gradually the actor allows this creative visualization (his imaginary body) to “stand between” and influence his real body and his psychology until his whole being is “psychologically and physically changed”—a process that could only be enhanced when supported by a real-time three-dimensional rendering of the imaginary body in the mo-cap studio.⁴³

Chekhov further advocates the use of specific movements to develop will-power and produce psychological responses in the actor. He explains that distinctions in the type of movement applied will produce a corresponding desire or feeling to which the actor can respond and use in his role. Of particular interest is the “psychological gesture”: a psycho-physical technique that seems appropriate for exploring the iconic and archetypal roles that are so prevalent in cyber-cinema. The psychological gesture is used to produce a revelation of the complete character “in condensed form”—making the actor the master of its “unchangeable core.”⁴⁴ It is a complete, powerful and simple whole-body gesture that the actor produces in order to offer an insight into the essence of his or her character. Chekhov describes it as an “archetypal gesture, one which serves as an original model for all possible gestures of the same kind,” and sees it as a mechanism through which the actor can intuitively release the character’s main desires, thereby allowing him to prepare “the entire part in its essence.”⁴⁵

Although he does not report using this specific technique in creating the role of Gollum, Serkis describes his approach to the part in psycho-physiological terms. He begins his search by experimenting with Gollum’s physical vocabulary. For Serkis, knowing the character means “embodying him . . . being inside his head his skin, his bones,” and thus, he “crawls” down an isolated mountain track and “crouches” in his trailer, keeping himself “tense as a coiled spring.”⁴⁶ Early in his process, he also recognizes that Gollum belongs within the category of the archetype. In his view, the key to his representation of the part lies in the “rich seam that runs through mythology and literature, art and cinema,” and reminds us that Gollum is part of “a line of monsters trapped within human form.”⁴⁷ The dominance of archetypal roles in the character dramaturgy of the cyber-cinema is perhaps, in some part, due to director George Lucas’ early use of anthropologist Joseph Campbell’s theories to develop the plot structure, and to inform the central characters, of the *Star Wars* series.⁴⁸ Campbell, building on Jung’s theory of the universal subconscious, posited the concept of the “monomyth”: an underlying structure linking important mythological stories from around the world.⁴⁹ Although in academic circles his theories have widely been critiqued by poststructuralist commentators, his ideas are

both influential and widely applied in certain craft discourses, primarily screenwriting.⁵⁰ Given the generic centrality of speculative fiction and fantasy to contemporary blockbusters, it is becoming increasingly important for the actor to appreciate the practical considerations of how to approach roles in which the embodiment of an archetype (e.g., hero, trickster, sage, dark mentor, shaman, herald, shape-shifter, etc.) is an essential element of character function, and which additionally may not always be drawn from human sources (e.g., aliens, beasts, mythological hybrids, etc.).

One person who has begun indirectly to approach this issue is drama therapist Robert Landy, who has attempted to define a taxonomy of archetypal role types. Landy's approach is of great value to the student of cyber-acting, as his taxonomy is not confined to human roles alone. His aim in creating "a theatrical archetype system" is to establish "connections among repeated role types" in order to help make sense of the "complexities of existence as they are revealed through character."⁵¹ On the one hand, the idea of a definable role *type* might be perceived by some as reductive and/or problematic. On the other hand, theatrical tradition has made use of such conceptualizations of character since the time of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. For theatre makers and audiences in Western Europe, Theophrastus' view of theatrical character and role as a representation of universal qualities has been applied to the creation of some of the most significant works in the theatrical canon.⁵² Landy, for his part, circumvents potential accusations of essentialism by explaining that artists and healers seek to make sense of the human personality's complexity by "isolating and focusing on selected parts."⁵³ But for the cyber-actor, as an interpretive artist working in the industry as it exists *now*, the most important issue remains practical. How do I play the part that I have been assigned?

Landy's taxonomy provides potentially helpful inroads. Classifying characters drawn from Western dramatic literature, Landy condenses them into a series of archetypes that can be drawn on and used as research material or to stimulate character creation. The taxonomy of roles is comprised of a number of parts, including domains and their sub-classifications, role types and subtypes, quality, function and style. The most expansive role categories are the domains. There are six of these: (1) *somatic*—the developmental, sexual and physical aspects of the person; (2) *cognitive*—pertaining to the mind and the thinking style; (3) *affective*—the moral perspective and feeling states; (4) *social*—socio-economic and political status, position within the family, power and relationship to authority; (5) *spiritual*—the search for meaning and the relationship with the transcendent; and (6) *aesthetic*—the artistic or creative aspect of the personality.⁵⁴ Where appropriate, these domains are further broken down into classifications that contain related role types and subtypes. The social domain is therefore subdivided into three classifications: *family*, *legal* and *authority and power*. Landy defines additionally the "quality" of a role type, which influences its form in terms of the physical, cognitive and emotional aspects of the character.

Such qualities would help the cyber-actor to identify and link specific urges or motivations through a family of characters.⁵⁵

Chekhov also uses the idea of qualities to define how character movement can inspire a sensation in both the actor and the audience. He uses the example of “caution” and explores how the quality of caution can imbue a simple gesture with significance. He describes a sensation like caution as a kind of “magnet” that “draws to it feelings and emotions akin to whatever quality you have chosen for the moment.”⁵⁶ Chekhov believes that the actor can use the characteristic qualities of a role to help influence its portrayal. “Joan of Arc will perhaps appear before your mind’s eye as permeated with qualities of tranquility, openness and extreme sincerity,” he posits as an example, reminding us that each character has its own “penetrable and definable qualities.”⁵⁷ This sense of a quality, which crucially should be actable physically, is also part of Serkis’ process. He describes Gollum as “sick, wasted, jittery and anxious”—qualities that are highly demonstrable physiologically, and therefore can consequently be captured onscreen.⁵⁸

This issue of the “actability” of such abstract concepts as heroism, villainy and wisdom poses a problem for the cyber-actor in attempting to personify role archetypes. Chekhov presents a potential solution. He advocates that parallel to the visualization of an imaginary body, the actor should also work with an “imaginary centre” that will strengthen and add nuance to this virtual body.⁵⁹ The imaginary center is moved and placed in various places both inside and outside the body by the actor through an act of will. Its placement influences the way in which the actor moves and additionally helps to engender a psycho-physiological response. In order to play a wise man, Chekhov suggests that the actor should imagine a center in his head that is “big, shining and radiating,” whereas for a fanatical or narrow-minded person, one should imagine a center that is “small, tense and hard,” or a “warm, hot or even fiery centre situated within your heart,” which he contends can awaken “loving heroic and courageous feelings.”⁶⁰

The debate between the actors at the Oscar roundtable concludes with Bridges joking that he is “green with the dots,” and he hopes that he’ll be allowed “a chance to get [his] chops down.”⁶¹ As cyber-cinema continues to grow and develop, and the use of motion capture and animatronic interventions increase, then Kuleshov’s etudes and spatial awareness, Craig’s aesthetics of the puppet, Landy’s re-identification and re-classification of a role and Chekhov’s psycho-physiological approach to character could all provide the basis for the development of a systematic approach to twenty-first-century performance training. However, this is unlikely to happen unless, and until, actors and teachers of acting are willing to consider cyber-acting as a valid representation of their unique interpretive art form. Bridges’ concluding comment, then, should remind us that “there has yet to be any course of study for investigating acting and performance that specifically relates to the expanding requirements of animation.”⁶² Perhaps it is well past time for one to emerge.

NOTES

1. David Ansen, "Freeman: *Avatar* Is Really Cartoons," Oscar Roundtable interview, *Newsweek*, January 29, 2010, <http://www.newsweek.com/video/2010/03/05/freeman-avatar-is-really-cartoons.html> (accessed August 25, 2010).
2. For the record, motion capture refers to the process whereby the movement of a body is sampled by a computer and the resultant data can be mapped into a three-dimensional model. Performance capture refers to the high-resolution, electronic conversion of a performer's face into a digital database, which forms the basis for the subsequent rendering and animation of a three-dimensional model that manifests an extraordinary degree of verisimilar correspondence to the actor's original expression.
3. James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 38.
4. *Ibid.* For a more complete account of the "pictorial style" of film acting practiced between 1903 and 1920, see Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 79–111.
5. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1988), 189.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, 191.
8. *Ibid.* For an extensive account of Griffith's transition away from the theatrical heritage of the "histrionic code" of Delsartian performance styles, see Roberta Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
9. Annette Kuhn, "Stars," in *The Cinema Book*, 2nd ed., ed. Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 37.
10. Sanford Meisner's core maxim is still the primary objective of the Neighbourhood Playhouse School of Theatre—the faculty he joined in 1935. See the "Mission & Goals" of the school at <http://www.neighborhoodplayhouse.org/mission.html>.
11. David Ansen, "Freeman: *Avatar* Is Really Cartoons," n.p. For a legal debriefing on this issue, see Joseph J. Beard, "Clones, Bones and Twilight Zones: Protecting the Digital Persona of the Quick, the Dead and the Imaginary," *Berkeley Technology Law Journal* 16, no. 3 (2001): 1165–271.
12. For a fuller exploration of this area, see Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008).
13. Quoted in David Ansen, "Freeman: *Avatar* Is Really Cartoons," n.p.
14. See Marc Mohan "Avatar and the State of the Animation Art," *Oregon Live.com*, December 17, 2009, http://www.oregonlive.com/movies/index.ssf/2009/12/avatar_and_the_state_of_the_an.html; and Brad Brevet, "Should *Avatar* Be Considered for Best Animated Oscar?," *Rope of Silicon*, December 14, 2009, <http://www.ropeofsilicon.com/article/should-avatar-be-considered-for-best-animated-oscar>.
15. Alex Ben Block, "Oscar Snubs *Avatar*'s Motion-Capture Actors," *Reuters*, February 2, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6120FL20100203>.
16. Auslander, *Liveness*, 170.
17. Andy Serkis, *Gollum: How We Made Movie Magic* (Boston: Mifflin, 2003), 36.
18. Coco Forsythe, "Poetry in Motion Capture," *Futuremovies*, November 14, 2007, <http://www.futuremovies.co.uk/filmmaking.asp?ID=225>.
19. Serkis, *Gollum*, 87.

20. Steve Silberman, "Q & A: King of Mo-cap Andy Serkis on Digital Acting and Gollum's Oscar Diss," *Wired*, September 14, 2009, http://www.wired.com/entertainment/hollywood/magazine/15-10/pl_serkis.
21. Serkis, *Gollum*, 36.
22. Forsythe, "Poetry in Motion Capture," n. p.
23. Devin Coldewey, "Interview: Reuben Langdon, Motion Capture Artist for *Avatar*," *Crunch Gear*, June 23, 2009, <http://www.crunchgear.com/2009/06/23/interview-reuben-langdon-motion-capture-artist-for-avatar/>.
24. Edward Gordon Craig, *On the Art of the Theatre*, ed. Franc Chamberlain (1911; repr., London: Routledge, 2009), 40.
25. See Irene Eynat, "Edward Gordon Craig, the Übermarionette and the Dresden Theatre," *Theatre Research International* 5, no. 3 (1980): 171-93; and Athanasios Vasilakos and others, "Interactive Theatre Via Mixed Reality and Ambient Intelligence," *Information Sciences* 178, no. 3 (February 2008): 679-93.
26. Edward Gordon Craig, "Puppets and Poets," *The Chapbook* 20 (February 1921): 13.
27. Serkis, *Gollum*, 36.
28. Sheila Roberts, "Interview: Doug Jones, *Pan's Labyrinth*," *Moviesonline.ca*, http://www.moviesonline.ca/movienews_10800.html.
29. Craig, *On the Art of the Theatre*, 32.
30. Serkis, *Gollum*, 38.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. Avinash Pandeya, *The Art of Kathakali* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1961), 56.
34. Jerry Large, "Lev Kuleshov and the Metrical-Spatial Web: Postmodern Body Training in Space and Time," *Theatre Topics* 10, no. 1 (2000): 69.
35. Lev Kuleshov, "The Training of the Actor," in *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*, ed. Jeremy Butler, trans. Ronald Levaco (1929; repr., Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1991), 58-9.
36. Large, "Lev Kuleshov and the Metrical-Spatial Web," 70.
37. "Motion Capture. Interview with Michael Lehr," *I'm On TV, Bitch!*, August 24, 2009, <http://www.imontvbitch.com/series/wk9-summer-ending/>.
38. Robert Leach, *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 56.
39. Ron Jenkins, "As If They Are Puppets at the Mercy of Tragic Fate," *New York Times*, May 27, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/27/theater/theater-as-if-they-are-puppets-at-the-mercy-of-tragic-fate.html>.
40. *Ibid.*, n.p.
41. Michael Chekhov, *To the Actor* (1953; repr., New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 85.
42. *Ibid.*, 87.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, 75.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Serkis, *Gollum*, 22.
47. *Ibid.*, 10.
48. Joseph Campbell, interview in *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, Public Broadcasting Service, June 26, 1988.
49. See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon, 1953). See also Robert Segal, *Theorizing About Myth* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); and Dean Miller, *The Epic Hero* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).
50. For example, screenwriter and producer Christopher Vogler's interpretation of Campbell's ideas in *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for*

Storytellers and Screenwriters (London: Pan Books, 1999) has inspired a number of highly successful cyber-cinema productions, and it is credited as being a key influence behind the creation of the *Matrix* trilogy. By contrast, for an excellent discussion of the problematic relationship between hero narratives and gender, race and class, see Margery Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997).

51. Robert Landy, *Persona and Performance: The Meaning of Role in Drama, Therapy and Everyday Life* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), 163.
52. Theophrastus, *The Characters*, trans. Jeffrey Rusten (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 2003).
53. *Ibid.*, 138.
54. Landy, *Persona and Performance*, 164.
55. *Ibid.*, 168.
56. Chekhov, *To the Actor*, 59.
57. *Ibid.*, 149.
58. Serkis, *Gollum*, 24.
59. Chekhov, *To the Actor*, 7.
60. *Ibid.*, 90.
61. David Ansen, "Freeman: *Avatar* Is Really Cartoons," n.p.
62. Judy Lieff, "Performance and Acting for Animators," *Animation World Magazine* 12, no. 4 (2000): 1-7, <http://www.awn.com/mag/issue4.12/4.12pages/lieffacting.php3>.

18 Articulating Digital Stardom

Barry King

An enduring premise in performance studies is that the human actor is central to the process of dramatic signification.¹ Although it is possible to cite alternative approaches (such as Gordon Craig's notion of the *übermario-nette*), the actor in live theatre (or trans-media extensions of it) still remains the crux of a complex process of signification. As one observer bluntly puts it, "Theatre could be deprived of everything but the actor. The actor is the constant unit of theatre language capable of performing various important functions."² In the case of narrative cinema, the centrality of the actor remains a stubborn fact, even though the actor's image as it is presented to audiences is a composite of cinematic practices and might therefore be considered as one input, of variable importance, into an ensemble of collaborative processes. Because of the complexity of performance work, it is always possible when analyzing a particular text to privilege other aspects of the "arts of making" instead—staging, the plot, genre, art direction and so on. Indeed it is possible (and proponents would say productive) to analyze film, taking for granted or only mentioning in passing the substance of the actors' performance, focusing instead on the total performance of a particular film or body of films as a narrative system. Film as an artwork is not, of course, cinema as an institution, and it is here that the extra-filmic (and for that matter pro-filmic) context supervenes into the process of signification.

Like a gravitational force borne so long that it is no longer noticed and taken as given, in mainstream Hollywood, it is the star system that is the primary "moment" of supervention. Stardom—sustaining a multi-phased discursive practice that encompasses casting, production, distribution—encourages audiences to value a particular film and see a particular character as "authored" by the star. Of course, although stars are actors, it is not necessarily their exceptional acting ability that gives them prominence; prominence, fame if you will, is largely a function of processes that construct a personalized economy of attention. Being cast in what turns out to be a culturally resonant role is important if we consider, for example, the impact of James Dean.³ But just as important are the investments made in advertising, publicity and subsidiary journalism, and how such efforts

“cash” out at the box office and in other windows such as television, DVD sales and other marketable windows on the long tail. Teasing out the factors and their correlation is by now a specialized branch of motion picture economics.⁴ One general relationship is clear: actors can be popular without being stars, but they cannot be Hollywood stars proper (or celebrities) without being popular on a scale that exceeds subcultural or “cultic” patterns of consumption. Being a star in Hollywood depends on calling into play the key supports of marketing, promotion and publicity to create a personal monopoly of attention.

But acknowledging such key supports, it is still the case that there must be some identification of the “essential” contribution of the star to market efficacy. Personal exchange value is understood to be a body-invested contribution, composed of physical action and personality. So it remains a question, even if all the contextual props that make a star are factored in, what is the contribution of the actor *per se*? This is an old question, and, indeed, part of the mystique of stardom rests on the fact that it is not easy to answer, in part, because it is impossible to express completely in words what we see.⁵ All this acknowledged, what interests me in this chapter is a more specific question: To what extent have changes in performance transcription technologies, such as motion capture, necessitated a rethinking of the semiotics of stardom?

In “Articulating Stardom” (1985), I aimed to set out the basic features of a political economy of stardom, arguing that stardom emerges out of the interaction of three distinct economies, which I defined as “systems of control that mobilize discursive resources to achieve specifiable effects”: (1) the cultural economy of the human body as sign, (2) the economy of signification in film and (3) the economy of the labor market for actors.⁶ Stardom, in the form codified by Hollywood, was the outcome (and reflexively an effect empowered by institutional practices and procedures) of organizing the labor market for actors to achieve a particular economy of attention among the film-going public. The part of my argument that is most germane here turned on the impact of film technology on the actor’s performance. Such an analysis was of necessity constrained to a *post festum* mode—the effects of stardom were already deeply embedded in how film technology had been developed in the studio system. Nonetheless, certain “submerged” technological potentialities, at least, could be identified by drawing on a comparison with the theatre and showing what a star-centered deployment of film technology did to the actor’s powers and capacities for character portrayal. There was (and still is) a good reason for this emphasis because it is through the norms of impersonation that the discrete role of actor is posited as central to the process of theatrical performance. Acting, in the full resonance of a system of craft and craft values, is character portrayal that is only minimally dependent on technology for its accomplishment—though what is understood by “minimally” is the bone of contention.

TWO CHALLENGES

Considered in general terms, the relationship between the actor and film-based transcription technologies presents two challenges to any actor concerned to exercise control over his or her performance specialty—the construction of believable characters. The first challenge arises from the problems of constructing intentionality by means of an externalizing medium that in Hollywood, at least, has been predominantly organized to capture short bursts of behavior. It is not difficult to cite films that make use of extensive long takes or, as in the case of *Russian Ark* (Alexander Sokurov, 2002), one continuous take. But these are exceptions. As banal as it seems to say it, production by fragments is not an intrinsic feature of motion picture technology but a matter of organizational convenience, favoring a certain kind of control over performance. It is a felicitous feature for detail control that the fragmentary nature of performance is rendered continuous through editing, because this gets over external problems such as time and spatial constraints arising from the availability of actors, seasonal settings, location availability and so on. The performance of a single actor at one time and in one location can be combined with the performance of other actors not co-present at the scene of performance. And of course, editing can exclude whole scenes, which the actor(s) might regard as having dramatic merit. Such features are well understood, and certainly montage as a general cinematic capacity is not an exclusive feature of Hollywood (as the example of Eisenstein clearly shows). Rather, it is critically a matter of degree (how much fragmentation and discontinuity is evident) and to what extent performers are consultants in the process.

That said, irrespective of the duration of shots, the editing and framing of dramatic effects can be as potent a source of dramatic effects as the continuous performance of an especially adept actor and certainly of one less accomplished. But more interesting for our purposes here is the question of what the delegation of meaning-construction to the cinematic apparatus means for actors. Many would say, “Periodic disappointment and a lot of waiting around.” Editing can limit the autonomy of an actor to craft a peculiar rendition of a character or a scene that is linked to his or her interpretation—although it must be said that editing and what today we call sampling does not axiomatically lead to an impairment of an actor’s performance. It may also rescue, to some extent, a lackluster delivery.

Thus, film acting has long adjusted to the exigencies of fragmentation, and this has prioritized a short arc of character representation with an emphasis on moments or epitomizing scenes. Whether or not such a short burst cycle of performance is effective is a matter of debate. Much will depend on the social relations of performance—for example, whether or not the director is on board with the actor’s interpretation and how far this intention is respected in the final cut (if, indeed, the director has a say

in this). Directors vary in terms of the dramatic value they give to continuous strips of performance as against the patching together of fragmented moments in which “epiphanies” are afforded by short gestures in short moments. Quentin Tarantino, for example, has developed a whole rationale for valuing “schlock” genre movies for the heightened moments and epiphanies when movie “magic” breaks through the generally amateurish efforts of the cast and crew, and, indeed, such moments may accord with a good portion of the appreciation of fans.

Acknowledging in principle that the “sampling” potential of film technology can produce effects that enhance or deplete a performance, in Hollywood, such sampling is constrained and guided by the need to preserve the integrity of the star image as it is currently understood by the general public. The star (and, with less power and more urgency, the actor who wishes to be seen as having star potential) needs to look onscreen in a manner that is consistent with his or her publicly diffused image as a highly burnished yet seemingly natural personal brand (hence the paroxysms of industrial anxiety that are produced by Bruce Willis’ refusal to shave his “Grizzly Adams” beard for an action role—a dilemma that occupies much of the running time of the satirical *What Just Happened* [Barry Levinson, 2008]). It is not entirely flippant to say that no star, even the most committed to characterization, would willingly be shown picking their nose onscreen—though a character actor might well consider it a nice touch to round out an already reprehensible character. But given stardom as an organizational axiom, there is a negative limit placed on the capacity of film to capture and recompose images. Low- or no-skill “actors” are barred from appropriating the cynosure reserved for stars. Much of this concern relates to the rise of reality television and its impact on acting employment.⁷

The second challenge, which is clearly related to the first, is hyper-semiotization, or the uncontrolled and unstructured incursion of meaning. In principle, anything, person, animal or object, appearing on a stage can be read by an audience as a contribution to the generation of fictional meaning or as “accidents” that should not semantically count.⁸ For a live performance on stage, this incursion is an ever-present threat to be contained. The theatre audience, for example, if positioned too close to the stage may have its engagement with the ongoing description of a fictional world impaired by the spectacle of spit flying accidentally from the lips of an expostulating actor onto the face of another or the visible dripping of perspiration in a freezing “dead of winter” scene. An actor’s make-up may start to run, a wig may get dislodged or some compromising article of clothing may come unbuttoned. Audience attention, primed by publicity, may fix on the sexual attractiveness of an actor’s body as a naturally existing object in situations where this is not a marked feature of character, or, for that matter, the amorous deficits of one who is supposed by character to be sexy.

In “live” (or even intermediated) theatre, performance occurs in a comparatively unbounded, loosely framed space and as such remains under

threat from dramatically irrelevant detail. It might seem that film has no such infirmity. But in fact, it has infirmities of its own as a close-up medium that uses the face and body as an intensively granulated “landscape.” Even such a contained frame can be a rich source of narratively discrepant signs. This is apparent in location shoots where ordinary people gawk at the camera. But it can also occur in close-up or medium shots, which at first sight would seem readily to exclude narratively “discrepant” details. So in two shot, over the shoulder set-ups, the image of the back of the head of stars, usually only seen frontally, can have the effect of drawing attention to the odd or expected shape of the actor’s head or ears or, as in the case of Frank Sinatra, to neck scars. In such cases, cinematic signification runs the risk of audience attention being dissociated from the flow of narrative because of the incursion of adventitious meaning. Once again, the careful management of shots can assist the actor in suppressing these aspects of his or her appearance from aspiring to mean. And yet, tight production schedules, sheer mistakes and lack of opportunity for re-takes can open up the actor to an even more personally focused process of hyper-semiotization than is found in the theatre. The theatre, too, has an additional advantage in that any specific live performance is not open to repeat viewing. Given the importance attached to appearance, the revenge of unsought meaning can be critical for stars, and this in part explains why they learn by mirror practice to develop facial and gestural clichés. Some of these clichés—following the law of Jack Black’s arched eyebrow—are as marked as the worst excesses of stage melodrama. Less extravagantly, stars take great care to benefit from make-up and costume design.⁹ They also engage in offscreen disciplinary practices that keep their bodies trim and in a state of amorous preparedness, so to speak, through exercise and dieting. These efforts may be supplemented by plastic surgery and other cosmetic procedures.

The fundamental relationship underlying these kinds of contingencies is that the actor’s body on stage or screen is both a producer and a bearer of signs. As a bearer of signs (as appearing to be a particular kind of person), the actor manipulates behaviors that are indices of his or herself in order to produce signs that resemble (as icons) the indices of his or her own behavior as properties of a fictional character.¹⁰ Following Rozik, the actor can be said to be managing a process of selective deflection of reference away from the indexical qualities of his or her body and the ostensive personality that arises there from, toward the indexical qualities of his or her character. This deflection is accomplished by a process of imprinting on the physical and behavioral stuff of the self, the signs of a fictional character. Imprinting occurs, with variable success, through the application of techniques on actor-centered resources such as voice, posture, gesture and the resources of theatre such as lighting, make-up and costume. Moreover, such imprinting is designed to repress selectively embodied or indexical reference to the self as an actual person. If successful, such deflective moves—in essence supporting an external fiction referent—become the indexical

features of the character in performance.¹¹ The degree of variance between signs already borne on the body and signs produced in constructing a fictional or quasi-fictional character marks (to some degree) the quality of the performance as character acting. Celebrities by contrast can be said to be performing their self-image, presenting an image of the human being they happen to be through acknowledged (or unacknowledged) “cameos.”¹² The difference between stage and cinema acting, broadly conceived, is that on stage, imprinting occurs at the point of performance, whereas in cinema, it can also (and most often does) occur after the fact.

The onset of digital cinema promises to re-articulate the process of image production through a double articulation of the image as produced. Hyper-semiotization, or the superfluity of unintended semantic detail, is marginalized if not eliminated, but this “chastening” of the image is accomplished through the diminution of the actor’s capacity to project the interiority of character through the medium of his or her person. Depending on the actual abilities of the actor concerned, this may be a good or a bad thing, but it is also a situation of increased dependency on externally “activated” resources.

A RHAPSODY OF IDENTITIES

The development of the digital actor or synthespian would at first sight mark a supersession of the relationships of sign work laid out above. As a matter of degree, this is certainly the case, but a more accurate conclusion is that hyper-semiotization and the centering of the actor’s performance are re-articulated rather than eliminated. What emerges is a utopian prospect of the self-moderating textual being. To begin appreciating this, we need to get a fix on the rather fuzzy assemblage of beings that might be said to be digital actors. The current state of art envisages four kinds of virtual humans:

- (1) Pure avatars and clones that have natural, that is to say, photorealistic-looking bodies and faces, which are correlated to actual bodies and faces, delivered through a real-time rotoscoping method.
- (2) Guided actors that react to data inputs from a user without mirroring the user’s own behavior. In instructing the “actor,” the user selects from a pre-given or pre-computed menu of actions and facial expressions collected from real-time examples and stored in a real-time metaphorical process. Conventional point and shoot video games such as *Grand Theft Auto* typify this mode.
- (3) Autonomous actors capable of perceiving and reacting to objects and other virtual humans in their environments and capable of conducting themselves in a distinct manner. Some cinematic examples are the self-activating background character software, Massive, developed for *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Peter Jackson, 2001–2003) and *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (Hironobu Sakaguchi, 2001).

- (4) Cyborgs, or interactive-perceptive actors conscious of other virtual actors and real people, and capable of communicating with them as well as providing autonomous reactions. This is the most futuristic and most radically “ontic” of current goals.¹³

There is a rough distinction to be made between applications (2) and (4), aimed at gaming or sport training simulations (where research into motion capture started) and applications (1) and (3), which develop autonomous and self-driving digital agents capable of sustaining (through various levels of simulation) normal everyday interpersonal interaction.¹⁴ Digital cinema is most directly implicated in this latter terrain of application. From the perspective of drama, the purpose of developing onscreen models is to provide a spectacle of character interaction for an audience that reacts with a varying degree of interpassive delegation without directly manipulating what it sees.¹⁵ There are phenomenological variations in the relationship between the avatar and the user/spectator, which in itself contributes to the fuzziness of the concept of avatar being. The most fundamental variation turns on the user/avatar relationship. Does the user consider her or himself as metamorphosed into the avatar so that the latter is a surrogate identity, or is the avatar considered an instrument or tool for the user, governed by some purpose? Between the state of being *in* or acting *through* an avatar, modalities of the real exist.¹⁶ How these modes are played out in relation to cinema is a complex issue that cannot be explored here. As a generalization, the cinematic representation of avatars favors a being *in* mode of identification, though how this plays out in reception requires careful analysis. For my purposes here, the directly relevant questions center on the production rather than the reception of signs.¹⁷

Part of the myth of digital cinema is that self-sufficient and self-activating avatars will rupture once and for all the historic connection between the actor as a bearer and producer of signs. Digital beings, robots of the visual, will become self-sufficient, posthuman technological resources that deflect reference away from the corporeal presence of the actor and (because they inhere as simulations of the physical world) from the brute obduracy of the material world. Certainly, as regards acting, it is not difficult to cite instances in the trade press that claim that digital actors (software) will replace real actors (wetware) with quite profound consequences for actors' livelihood.¹⁸ But in the current state of digital imaging technology, it is more appropriate to speak of attenuation rather than rupture. The basic reason to argue this in relation to cinema is that what appears to be an autonomously functioning, self-sustaining “synthespian” is in fact dependent on a current “real-time” (or past) performance by an actor.

Thus, the denizens of computer-generated cinematic space image can be said to operate in three distinct modes of being that, given the injunction of photorealism, derive from different articulations of the indexical and iconic. These are (1) the creatures of performance or motion capture technologies,

which I shall dub *mocaptors*; (2) digital *clones* that are constructed out of preexisting stored photographic images of stars (dead or aged beyond conformity to their established image and personae); and (3) *composites* who are actually “live” actors pretending, with the benefit of make-up or digital burnishing, to be virtual humans. Composites are basically virtual fakes. The television character, Max Headroom, played by Matt Frewer, is an early television example.¹⁹ A more recent cinematic example is the model Rachael Roberts’ uncredited performance as S1m0ne in Andrew Niccol’s eponymously titled 2002 film. Over the long run, clones may make significant inroads into the employment of actors, quick and dead. Indeed, one of the rationales for their development, if one sets aside for the moment the advantages of trading on established star “brands”—is that clones may undertake stunts that are too dangerous for human performers. But at the current time, as long as photorealistic standards dominate in computer graphics, the technical obstacles remain formidable.²⁰ Considered in terms of the transformation of the social relations of performance work in cinema, *mocaptors* (or digital puppets) offer the immediate prospect of change.²¹

AVATAR, MY AVATAR

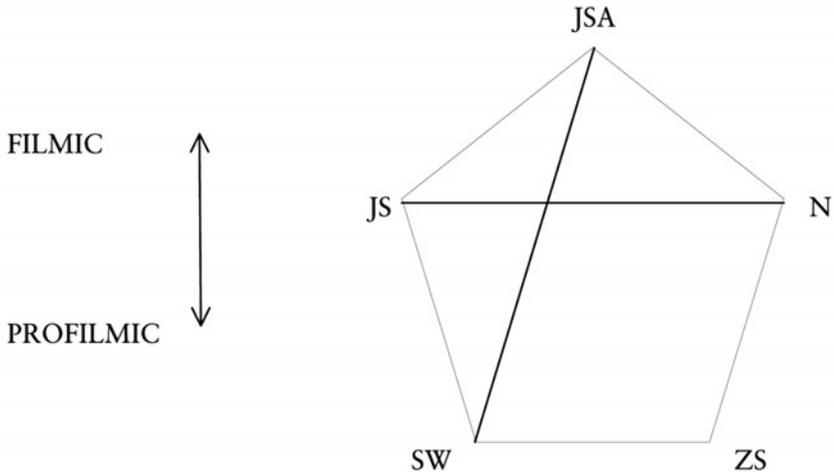
Avatar (James Cameron, 2009) seems to be a magisterial foreshadowing of what is to come. Set in the year 2154 and on a distant Moon, Pandora, the plot explores the relationship between the indigenous blue aliens, the Na’vi, and a human expedition bent on exploiting Pandora’s natural resources for corporate profit. A key element in the plot is the use of alien/human hybrids (“Avatars”) designed to look like Na’vi, which permit the human protagonists to work as infiltrators and spies. The spectacle of Pandora as a comprehensively rendered fantasy world is re-doubled by the conceit that the protagonists both on- and offscreen become their Avatars. The role of performance capture is crucial, and it seems that far from displacing the actor’s body from the process of character construction in *Avatar*, motion capture grips it like an ever-tightening glove.

In order to achieve its extraordinarily verisimilar performance effects, a more comprehensive range of capture devices was deployed—including the addition of facial motion capture sensors to full-body capture. Facial capture, warranting Cameron’s term “performance capture,” is a special innovation: a small digital camera scans reference markers on the actor’s face as lines are spoken, capturing and subsequently rendering the muscular accompaniments of voiced emotions. Given the indexical transfer from Zoe Saldana’s body and face, for example, there seems to be a powerful case that she was directly present in her depiction of Neytiri, the Na’vi princess. Indeed part of the promotional buzz surrounding *Avatar* drew on and fed the claim that, along with photorealistic rendering and three-dimensional imaging, the Na’vi were “live” embodiments of the leading actors. But the Na’vi and the Avatars are nonetheless representations

filtered and mediated through the codes of computer graphics (i.e., small “a” avatars in the computational sense of the term—graphical representations of pro-filmic actors).

The performance space of *Avatar* is therefore highly complex (Figure 18.1—all the lines in the Pentagon are two-way). Sam Worthington performs directly with Saldana in pro-filmic space, but only with Neytiri on screen. He also performs in two modes, as his cinematic image (as Marine veteran Jake Sully) and as his digital image (as a Na’vi/human Avatar). Saldana only interacts with others (Avatars, humans and Na’vi) through the mediation of Neytiri.²²

Certainly, the technical accomplishments of Cameron and his collaborators in creating this complex assemblage of beings and performances should not be diminished. But considering the performance of Saldana, we are not talking about creating another being, an Avatar, so much as a digital prosthesis more akin to the close fit of make-up than a mask. In addition, the interaction between the filmic and pro-filmic realms is also depicted in *Avatar*—in effect staging a metaphor of deflection from the actor as substance in the construction of character. Cinematic human characters such as Jake Sully and Dr. Grace Augustine (Sigourney Weaver) are shown in threshold transitions from non-digital human characters to digital Avatar characters. Such transportations are constrained by a stronger verisimilar correspondence than is the case with Saldana, who is not visible in the film



Key:

JSA= Jake Scully as Na’vi/human hybrid (“Avatar”)

JS = Jack Scully as human Marine veteran

N = Neytiri

SW = Sam Worthington

ZS = Zoe Saldana

Figure 18.1 Vectors of reference in *Avatar* performances.

(although it should be acknowledged that the actor's presence "was . . . translated in such a way that even [her] pores and skin texture would be seen," and thus might be said to be virtually "present" as a *re-constituted and re-contextualized* indexical trace).²³ It is an ingenious, not to say a crafty, feature of this simulation of shape-shifting that the opportunity to compare physically Worthington's digital, photo-realistic avatar with the actual onscreen Worthington is deflected, too, by the fact that his Na'vi Avatar (i.e., his alien alter-ego) is non-human. In a similar fashion, there is no cause to wonder, outside of the claim that Saldana is *in* as opposed to *represented by* Neytiri, how "comprehensively" indexical the transfer of qualities might be.²⁴ It seems better to conclude that the preponderant indexical transfer accomplished by motion capture is significantly based on "impersonal" properties. Such properties are *iconic* rather than indexical because they are based on resemblances that are common to a large category of essentially impersonal actions in space and time, such as walking, jumping, gesturing, raising and lowering eyebrows and so on. It is the impersonality of such qualities that make it possible to animate and anthropomorphize inanimate objects such as bouncing balls, stick men, Angle poise lamps and the like. Moreover, the beings or objects under consideration are rendered by codes of computer graphics as surfaces that are driven by commands.²⁵ Performance capture claims to do more, but the absence of fine-grained textural properties of Saldana's (or any human male or female's) hair, skin texture and color and eye color in Neytiri says that what we have are broad and metaphorical analogies.

So we arrive at the paradoxical result that the deflection of reference in digital photorealism is not accomplished by a direct transfer of the actor's indexical or bodily qualities but by a process of translation.²⁶ Such a process is an abstraction from what we otherwise know to be the "substance" of Zoe Saldana as we may pleurably observe it in other roles such as Uhura in *Star Trek* (J. J. Abrams, 2009) or from television interviews and photographs.²⁷ In a way that is not true of cinematic images, the digital image establishes its own terms of reference within a parallel but self-sufficient world. To that end, Saldana's performance of Neytiri cannot be exclusively understood as the representation of a character (that is, the iconic imprinting of indexical signs of a possible person on and through one's own body), but as a self-referencing cinematic image that replaces the real. In the same way that Vilem Flusser defines photographic signs as concepts of images appearing as images, Zoe Saldana appears in *Avatar* as a photo-realist *concept*.²⁸

It might be tempting to read Saldana's graphical avatar as a simulation in the sense developed by Baudrillard—a hyper-real image that only refers to other images and has no correlate in the real.²⁹ But that would be to underestimate the power of digital code to capture and subsume matter in the construction of a self-sufficient corpus of meaning. Part of the difficulty in grasping this goes back to the mistaken view that an icon is a kind of sign that works by resemblance when in fact it is only because iconic qualities

are captured in indexes that resemblance is given a concrete and determinate form.³⁰ A vivid demonstration of the philosophical point that iconic qualities only exist as embodiments is the point of view shot of a character coming out of a coma or a dream. What he or she sees and hears is a fuzzy array of iconic qualities—sounds, shapes and colors—which slowly resolve into the face of a fictional character that is the concrete instantiation of qualities first seen in a state of disembodied abstraction.

The concert of referents found in *Avatar* (and incidentally in *Beowulf* [Robert Zemeckis, 2007], where features of some of the actors “survive” as approximate traces in their characters and some do not) function as textual delegations of modality, or references to the real.³¹ The cinematic image of Sully becomes the “real” world referent of his Avatar, as though the former were no longer a performance but the indexical stuff that contributes to his character as an Avatar. So in general terms there is an intra-textual nesting of reference. One referent realm (Earth 2154) functions as the “real world” for another realm (Pandora). In turn, Pandora, as an “alternative world,” certifies the reality of what defines it as Other. Consistent with speculative fiction as a genre, *Avatar* claims no relation to the historical present, even if we the viewers are encouraged to make all sorts of allegorical connections. As an example of digital cinema, *Avatar* mediates modality claims as an intra-textual process. Although we can refer to what is outside the text, this is not a pro-filmic space in the sense that, say, Marilyn Monroe is “ghosted” by her persona. In film-based cinema, the indexical properties of the actor are partially determined by the capacity of the apparatus to create an image. In digital cinema, the digital image over-determines the indexical presence of the actor because *any or no actor at all* is required. This over-determination occurs not because of the limitations of digital cinema to represent the pro-filmic, but rather because digital images convert external reference into internal reference as a self-contained reality.

But Hollywood cannot acknowledge such a development because it would lead to the end of stardom and the branding function of the star. Put bluntly, the offscreen performance of Saldana disappears into a self-referential simulation of a cyborg. The performance of, say, Sam Worthington is doubly articulated because we see his cinematic image and (apart from digitally withered legs) recognize that indexes of his appearance survive in Jake Scully. But this connection is lost when he transports to become a Na’vi—Worthington’s graphical avatar, which serves as a simulation of a (fictional) Avatar. As such, *Avatar* does not announce a new condition of being, but a new means of deploying the formative and performative powers of cinema.

CODA: THE DIGIFEST OF CHAMPIONS

The onset of digital filmmaking raises issues about the social relations of film production. Here the focus on performance capture can easily overshadow significant developments. Mel Gibson, in shooting *Apocalypto*

(2006), was able to step into the frame to coach his amateur actors as the Panasonic Genesis digital camera kept running. Moreover, the touted benefits of motion capture—extended arcs of physical action—are no less a facility offered by digital cinematography.³² The digital “revolution” has also imparted a new existential depth to the exploitation of the “likeness” for the personal and corporate profit.³³ It is perhaps too cynical (yet too naive not) to regard claims for a revolutionary form of immersive cinema as mainly techno-boosterism for the corporate interests of James Cameron. A more germane question lurks here: if digital technology offers a range of affordances, how is it likely to be institutionalized in a star-driven environment?

Current indications suggest that the replacement of stars by “amateur” performers is not a likely prospect. Apparent instead is the prospect of a geriatric or even posthumous prolongation of star employment opportunities. Of the former, Ray Winstone’s digital re-incarnation as Beowulf in Robert Zemeckis’ film of that name has been widely publicized. The star acquired a toned, taller and youthful body to play a role that would have gone to a younger actor in a non-digital environment.³⁴ Winstone’s fellow stars, such as John Malkovich and Anthony Hopkins, also noted other advantages that have less to do with digital cloning and more to do with work process. Digital filming allowed for extended sequences of action reminiscent of acting live rather than the usual situation of waiting around to act in short bursts of activity.³⁵ But appreciable advantages such as these are only a benefit to those actors—stars for the most part—who get extended parts to play. Nor is the opportunity to inhabit a cool digital body entirely an expression of freedom when viewed from the perspective of young, up-and-coming actors, who rely on their natural physical assets to be cast in a particular kind of role. Such opportunity was not denied to the young Ray Winstone—see *Quadrophenia* (Franc Roddam, 1979), for example. If established stars like him, Tom Hanks or Jim Carrey can “own” their digital images, it remains to be seen if leading character actors on the verge of stardom can do the same. Will Zoe Saldana, outside *Avatar* sequels, parlay her role into stardom? Or will her credibility as an actor suffer the same fate as Andy Serkis? His performance as Gollum (and in even more direct parallel to Saldana’s work, as King Kong) was viewed by the acting sections of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences as not “real” acting, or as acting that was machine assisted.³⁶

James Cameron, a devotee of stardom, has speculated that digital cloning will move beyond the constraints of age and genre. “[I]f Clint Eastwood wanted to play Dirty Harry again,” he mused, “looking the way he did in 1970—well, first of all, I’d go see that movie. Second of all, he could do it this way. So I think we have to think outside the box in terms of just fantasy science-fiction films and those types of characters.”³⁷

It might be argued that the longevity of stars such as Sylvester Stallone and Bruce Willis has already accomplished such a foreclosure with only

a marginal, albeit increasing, support from digital techniques. Thus, fear that avatars will replace stars is a kind of deflective alibi for the real process that has seen stars of the 1970s and 1980s extend their grip over the employment opportunity for new actors. More pervasively, the fear of the posthuman protagonist serves to protect the fond illusion at the heart of stardom that onscreen effects are indices of a living presence that will bring the general moviegoer closer to the ostensive person of the actor. Revealed to the general public more starkly than before is the fact that “presence” has always been a manufactured effect, deployed to advantage by those who command and control the cinematic means of production. At the heart of the avatar is an old fetishism of personality, returning with renewed vigor through the deficiencies of the avatar “soul.”

NOTES

1. See, for example, Joachim Fiebach, “Theatricality: From Oral Traditions to Televised ‘Realities,’” *SubStance* 31, nos. 2–3 (2002): 17
2. Sanja Garic-Komnencic, “A Comparative Analysis of the Functions of Film and Theatre Language Units,” *The American Journal of Semiotics* 17, no. 3 (2001): 175.
3. Edgar Morin, *The Stars*, trans. Richard Howard (1960; repr., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 121–34.
4. See, for example, Arthur De Vany, *Hollywood Economics: How Extreme Uncertainty Shapes the Film Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 71–98.
5. For an extended consideration of this problem, see Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (New York: Penguin, 1942), 265.
6. Barry King, “Articulating Stardom,” *Screen* 26, no. 5 (1985): 27.
7. See Jessie Heistand, “SAG: Reality TV Still Hurting Actors,” *Back Stage West*, October 13, 2005, <http://www.allbusiness.com/services/amusement-recreation-services/4393408-1.html>.
8. See, for example, Larry Gross and Sol Worth, “Symbolic Strategies,” *Journal of Communication* 24, no. 4 (1974): 27–39.
9. See Maire Messenger Davies, “‘What Planet Are We On?’ Television Drama’s Relationships with Social Reality,” in *Using Visual Evidence*, ed. Robert Howells and Robert Matson (Maidenhead: Open University, 2009), 160–63.
10. See Eli Rozik, “Acting: The Quintessence of Theatricality,” *SubStance* 31, nos. 2–3 (2002): 110–24. Rozik’s focus is on the stage, and he correctly states that what is on stage is not a fictional (or quasi-fictional) world but a description of a fictional world that is evoked (with greater or lesser precision and success) in the minds of spectators. In naturalistic cinema, thanks to the transcriptive qualities of the photographic medium, selectively mobilized fragments of the real (cosmo-morphic signs) also function as bearers and producers of indices. In other words, the actual world is more directly present in the described world. But this is not an essential difference because even indexes in the cinema are selected iconically, which is to say in accordance with some operative convention of resemblance as examples such as *Dogville* (Lars von Trier, 2003) or German expressionism demonstrate.

11. Eli Rozik, "The Corporeality of the Actor's Body: The Boundaries of Theatre and the Limitations of Semiotic Methodology," *Theatre Research International* 24, no. 2 (1999): 198.
12. See Rozik, "Acting," 121.
13. For accounts of the technological development of this model, see the following: Marc Cavazza and others, "Motion Capture of Virtual Humans," *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications* 18, no. 5 (1998): 24–31; Jehee Lee and Kung Hoon Lee, "Precomputing Avatar Behaviour from Human Motion Data," *Graphical Models* 68, no. 2 (2004): 158–74; and Manuel Peinado and others, "Full-Body Avatar Control with Environment Awareness," *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications* 29, no. 3 (2009): 62–75.
14. See Zerrin Kasap and others, "Making Them Remember—Emotional Virtual Characters with Memory," *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications* 29, no. 2 (2009): 20–9.
15. For a fuller account of interpassivity, see Slavoj Žižek, "The Interpassive Subject," *Traverses* 3 (1998): n.p., http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj_zizek/articles.
16. For a brief consideration of such modalities, see Alison Gazzard, "The Avatar and the Player: Understanding the Relationship Beyond the Screen," in *Proceedings of 2009 Conference in Games and Virtual Worlds for Serious Applications*, ed. Genaro Rebolledo-Mendez, Fotis Liarokapis and Sara de Freitas (Hoboken, NJ: IEEE Computer Society Press, 2009), 190–93.
17. Though it is worth emphasizing that in motion capture set-ups, the performer can be the immediate spectator of her own performance though feedback loops. For a more thorough explanation, see David Sturman, "Computer Puppetry," *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications* 18, no. 1 (1998): 38.
18. For a typical jeremiad, see Rick Lyman, "Movie Stars Feel Inroads by Upstart Digital Actors," *New York Times*, July 8, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/08/technology/08FANT.html>.
19. See my consideration of this early composite character in Barry King, "The Burden of Max Headroom," *Screen* 30, nos. 1–2 (1989): 122–38.
20. An overview of some of these difficulties, and a suggestion for an alternative direction, is given in Amit Agrawl, "Non-photorealistic Rendering: Unleashing the Artist's Imagination (Graphically Speaking)," *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications* 29, no. 4 (2009): 81–85.
21. For a few potentialities, see Peter Debruge, "A World with No Strings," *Variety*, August 31–September 6, 2009, 416, 3, 43, <http://www.variety.com/article/VR1118007907.html?categoryid=14&cs=1>; and Sturman, "Computer Puppetry," 38–45.
22. Mutatis mutandis, this pluralization of address applies to other leading performers such as Sigourney Weaver, through to bit players shown interacting with Na'vi, which in some cases will both be synthespians.
23. Jennelle Riley, "Brave New World," *Backstage*, February 11, 2010, http://www.backstage.com/bsoc/content_display/news-and-features/news/e3iafcbd501634f9b08df5e0f413e45fd47.
24. But for reasons related more to ownership of the image, the claim has been made that she is *in* Neytiri.
25. For further details, see Sanda Monica Tartaram, "Visual Computer Programming: Semiotic and Cognitive Aspects," *The American Journal of Semiotics* 17, no. 3 (2001): 157–73.
26. Commenting on the development of "Alda 2.0," Alden Hayashi reports that computer capture of the real Alda's facial expressions requires weeks of fine tuning to create natural looking movements by the virtual Alda. See Alden

- Hayashi, "Alan Alda Meets Alda 2.0," *Scientific American* 278, no. 3 (1998): 69.
27. Though these kinds of image are in themselves selective second-order images of Saldana as paparazzi shots demonstrate.
 28. Vilem Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 74.
 29. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotexte, 1983).
 30. Umberto Eco, *The Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 191–218.
 31. As Jessica Aldred points out, the faces of the characters played by Anthony Hopkins, Robyn Wright and John Malkovich appear as shadowy traces in their onscreen avatars in *Beowulf*, as well as in the trans-mediation of their characters in the Xbox 360 video game that was concurrently developed with the film. Jessica Aldred, "I am Beowulf! Now it's your turn: Playing with (and as) the digital character in the transmedia franchise," Paper presented at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference, Los Angeles, March 17–21, 2010.
 32. See David S. Cohen, "New Cameras Have Thesps Reloading: High-def Revolutionizes the Craft of Actors and Directors," *Daily Variety*, April 13, 2007, p. B1.
 33. For further details on such exploitation and the ensuing legal ramifications, see Joseph J. Beard, "Clones, Bones and Twilight Zones: Protecting the Digital Persona of the Quick, the Dead and the Imaginary," *Berkeley Technology Law Journal* 16, no. 3 (2001): 1165–271.
 34. Paul Fischer, "Winstone Journeys Into the Heart of Beowulf," *Film Monthly*, November 15, 2007, http://www.filmmonthly.com/paul_fischer_exclusive/winstone_journeys_into_the_heart_of_beowulf.html.
 35. These benefits were articulated in Sheila Roberts, "Cast of *Beowulf* Interview," *MoviesOnline*, November 8, 2007, http://www.moviesonline.ca/movienews_13362.html (accessed April 1, 2010).
 36. For further details, see David Bloom, "Categorical Denial," *Variety*, December 16–22, 2002, 4.
 37. Jennelle Riley, "Brave New World," n.p.

Contributors

SEAN AITA trained as a classical actor at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and performed professionally in a wide range of genres on stage, film and television. He is an award-winning theatre director and playwright, and is currently Senior Lecturer in acting at the Arts University College at Bournemouth, where he designed and leads the recorded performance units. He has written about the theatre in language learning for *Scenario* (2009) and *Research in Drama Education* (2010) and has been commissioned to write a book titled *The Screen Actors Guide to Role Archetypes*.

BRENDA AUSTIN-SMITH is Associate Professor of Film at the University of Manitoba, where she teaches courses in Cult Film, Film and Affect and Film and the City, among others. Among her publications are articles on film adaptation, symbolism in American literature, Lars von Trier, Patricia Rozema, *Now Voyager* and “personal modernity,” Henry James and Alfred Hitchcock and feature-filmmaking in Manitoba. She is co-editor, with George Melnyk, of *The Gendered Screen: Canadian Women Filmmakers* (2010). Her current research is on women, weeping and cinema memory.

JENNIFER M. BARKER is Assistant Professor in the Moving Image Studies program in the Department of Communication at Georgia State University, where she teaches courses on cinema and the senses, cinephilia, documentary and the intersections between film and the other arts. She is the author of *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (2009) and articles on synaesthesia, cinematic spectacle, ethnographic documentary and feminist experimental film.

WILLIAM BROWN is Lecturer in Film at University of Roehampton, London. He has published on stars and acting in *Larger Than Life: Movie Stars of the 1950s* (2010), *Acting for America: Movie Stars of the 1980s* (2010) and *Celebrity Studies* (forthcoming), as well as on cognitive approaches to film in *Projections* (2011) and *Colour and the Moving Image* (forthcoming). He is also the author of *Supercinema: Film Theory*

and the Digital Age (forthcoming), the co-author (with Dina Iordanova and Leshu Torchin) of *Moving People, Moving Images: Cinema and Trafficking in the New Europe* (2010) and the co-editor (with David Martin-Jones) of *Deleuze and Film* (forthcoming).

SHARON MARIE CARNICKE is Professor of Theatre and Slavic Languages at the University of Southern California (Los Angeles). She is best known for her book, *Stanislavsky in Focus* (2008), and her publications on Russian theatre include award-winning Chekhov translations in *Chekhov: 4 Plays and 3 Jokes* (2009). She also writes about screen acting and co-authored *Reframing Screen Performance* (2008) with Cynthia Baron. Her current research in media involves adapting Stanislavsky's technique of Active Analysis for motion capture technology.

ALEX CLAYTON is Lecturer in Screen Studies at the University of Bristol, UK. He is the author of *The Body in Hollywood Slapstick* (2007) and co-editor (with Andrew Klevan) of *The Language and Style of Film Criticism* (2011). He has published articles on performance, color and music in film.

LIZ CZACH is Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta. Her research interests include home movies, film festivals and Canadian film. Her publications in these areas have appeared in *The Moving Image* (2002, 2004), *Cinema Journal* (2010) and in the books *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary and the National Film Board* (2010) and *Canadian Television: Text and Context* (2011). From 1995–2005, she was a film programmer at the Toronto International Film Festival, and she currently organizes Edmonton's Home Movie Day.

KEVIN ESCH is Adjunct Professor of Film Studies at Roger Williams University. His article on the Actors Studio appears in *Film Quarterly* (2007), and he has theorized actors' body transformations in *The Journal of Film and Video* (2006). He is currently at work on a book titled *In the Moment: Myth and Method in Contemporary Hollywood Film Acting*.

CHRIS HOLMLUND is Arts and Science Excellence Professor of Cinema Studies, Women's Studies and French at the University of Tennessee. She is the author of *Impossible Bodies* (2002), editor of *American Cinema of the 1990s* (2008) and co-editor (with Justin Wyatt) of *Contemporary American Independent Film* (2005) and (with Cynthia Fuchs) *Between the Sheets, In the Streets: Queer, Lesbian, Gay Documentary* (1997). She is working on *Female Trouble* (Arsenal Pulp Press), *Being John Malkovich* (Edinburgh University Press) and *The Ultimate Stallone Reader* (Wallflower).

CHARLIE KEIL is Director of The Cinema Studies Institute and Associate Professor of History at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style and Filmmaking, 1907–1913* (2001) and co-editor (with Shelley Stamp) of *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audience, Institutions, Practices* (2004) and (with Ben Singer) *American Cinema of the 1910s: Themes and Variations* (2009). His most recent publication is *Funny Pictures: Animation and Comedy in Studio-Era Hollywood* (2011), co-edited with Daniel Goldmark. His current project is an investigation of the origins of Hollywood.

BARRY KING is Professor of Communications at Auckland University of Technology. He has taught at Universities in the UK and the US and was recently a visiting Professor at Malmo University in Sweden. His publications encompass popular photography, the sociology of acting and performance, American media culture, stardom and celebrity, violence and the media and visual semiotics. He is the co-author of *Studying the Event Film: Lord of the Rings* (2008) and is completing a book on the political economy of stardom and celebrity.

ANDREW KLEVAN is University Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of St. Anne's College. His areas of interest are film interpretation, the history and theory of film criticism and film aesthetics. He is author of *Disclosure of the Everyday: Undramatic Achievement in Film* (2000) and *Film Performance: from Achievement to Appreciation* (2005). He is co-editor (with Alex Clayton) of *The Language and Style of Film Criticism* (2011).

ERNEST MATHIJS is Associate Professor in Film at the University of British Columbia. He has edited books on *The Lord of the Rings* (2006, 2006, 2007), *Cinema in the Low Countries* (2004), *Big Brother International* (2004) and *Alternative European Cinema* (2004). He also co-edited *The Cult Film Reader* (with Xavier Mendik, 2008) and published a monograph on *The Cinema of David Cronenberg* (2008). He directs the book series *Contemporary Cinema* (with Steven Schneider) and *Cultographies* (with Jamie Sexton). His most recent books are *Cult Cinema* (with Jamie Sexton, 2011) and *100 Cult Films* (with Xavier Mendik, 2011). He is preparing book-length studies of New Line Cinema, *Ginger Snaps* and Delphine Seyrig.

PAUL McDONALD trained as an actor at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He is now Chair of Creative Industries and Digital Media at the University of Nottingham, UK. He is the author of *The Star System: Hollywood's Production of Popular Identities* (2000), and his work on stardom and screen acting has appeared in the collections *More Than*

a *Method: Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance* (2004), *Screen Acting* (1999), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (1998), *Semiotics of the Media: State of the Art, Projects and Perspectives* (1998) and the updated edition of Richard Dyer's *Stars* (1998). Currently he is completing a study of stardom in conglomerate Hollywood.

MURRAY POMERANCE is Professor in the Department of Sociology at Ryerson University. He is the author of *Michelangelo Red Antonioni Blue: Eight Reflections on Cinema* (2011), *Edith Valmaine* (2010), *The Horse Who Drank the Sky: Film Experience Beyond Narrative and Theory* (2008), *Johnny Depp Starts Here* (2005), *Savage Time* (2005), *An Eye for Hitchcock* (2004) and *Magia d'Amore* (1999), and editor or co-editor of more than a dozen volumes, including *Shining in Shadows: Movie Stars of the 2000s* (2011), *A Little Solitaire: John Frankheimer and American Film* (2011), *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home* (2008), *City That Never Sleeps: New York and the Filmic Imagination* (2007) and *Cinema and Modernity* (2006). He also edits various series, including "Techniques of the Moving Image" (Rutgers), "Horizons of Cinema" (State University of New York Press), "Screen Decades" with Lester D. Friedman (Rutgers) and "Star Decades" with Adrienne L. McLean (Rutgers). In 2009 he appeared on Broadway in conjunction with *The 39 Steps*.

WILLIAM ROTHMAN is Professor of Motion Pictures and Director of the M.A. and Ph.D. Programs in Film Studies at the University of Miami. He was the founding editor of Harvard University Press' "Harvard Film Studies" series and is currently series editor of Cambridge University Press' "Studies in Film." His books include *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze* (1982; expanded edition is forthcoming), *The "I" of the Camera* (1989; expanded edition 2004), *Documentary Film Classics* (1997), *Reading Cavell's The World Viewed: A Philosophical Perspective on Film* (2000), *Cavell on Film* (2005), *Jean Rouch: A Celebration of Life and Film* (2007), *Three Documentary Filmmakers* (2009) and *Must We Kill the Thing We Love? Emersonian Perfectionism and the Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (forthcoming).

JÖRG STERNAGEL is Assistant Professor in Media Studies at the University of Potsdam's Institute for Arts and Media, where he teaches on media and aesthetics, the history of media, art and performance, image, ethics and the senses. He is author of the book *Methodische Schauspielkunst und Amerikanisches Kino* (2005), and he has published several articles and reviews on film and phenomenology, acting and performance, media and philosophy. He is co-editor (with Deborah Levitt and Dieter Mersch) of the collection *Acting and Performance in Moving Image Culture: Bodies, Screens, Renderings* (2012).

AARON TAYLOR is Assistant Professor in the Department of New Media at the University of Lethbridge. His most recent publications on film acting can be found in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* (2012), *Millennial Masculinity* (forthcoming), *Acting and Performance in Moving Image Culture* (2012), *Stages of Reality: Theatricality in Cinema* (2011) and *The Journal of Film and Video* (2007). His study of *It's a Wonderful Life* will appear in Palgrave Macmillan's *Cultographies* series (2013).

GEORGE TOLES is Distinguished Professor of Literature and Film and Chair of Film Studies at the University of Manitoba. He has been Guy Maddin's screenwriting collaborator for twenty-five years; their most recent feature film is *Keyhole* (2011). George's articles on film acting have appeared in *The Language and Style of Film Criticism* (2011), *Movie* (2010), *Exile Cinema* (2008), *Film Quarterly* (2004), *Criticism* (2003) and his collection, *A House Made of Light* (2001). He is currently writing a book on the films of Paul Thomas Anderson.

Index

Page numbers for illustrations are in italics

A

- Abrahams, Jim, 58
Abrams, J. J., 142, 280
Academy Awards: and Angelina Jolie, 178; 212, attitude toward performance capture technologies, 256–59, 267, 282; and Catherine Keener, 216; and Chris Cooper, 212; and Hilary Swank, 222; as self-congratulatory, 132
Acting in the Cinema, 153
acting vs. being: and amateurs, 158; and Benoît Coquelin, 190; and cameos, 144, 146–48; and characters, 64–65, 69–70, 74, 237; and Charlie Chaplin, 49–50; and Constantin Stanislavski, 131; and cult reception, 149; in documentaries, 236–37; and emotion, 113–17; in home movies, 153, 156, 159–60; in *It's a Wonderful Life*, 40–41; and Jean Claude Van Damme, 135–36, 149, 151n36; and Jim Carrey, 97–98; and John Wayne, 184–186, 191–92; and listening, 253; and “mad acting,” 148; and Michael Kirby, 28–29, 150n15; and performance capture technologies, 276–81; and repertory acting, 142–44; and Robert Donat, 20; and Robert Mitchum, 87; and Sergei Eisenstein, 158; and Sharon Carnicke, 154; in *Sherman's March*, 236–37; and Stanley Cavell, 8; and stars, 171–73, 184, 186, 189, 191–92, 276
action-image, 101
Active Analysis. *See* script analysis
Actor, Image, and Action, The, 112
Actors Studio, 127, 133n23
actor training, 186, 192–93, 256–67, 275
actualités, 163–64
Adaptation, 212, 224n12
Adler, Stella, 107, 133n23, 212
Adventurer, The, 44
Adventures of Sebastien Cole, The, 223n1
Aeschylus, 266
affect, 3, 21, 45, 96, 101–02, 109–11, 186–87, 243, 266
affection-image, 101–02
Affron, Charles, 7, 46, 130
aging, 85–86, 146, 282
Aguirre, the Wrath of God, 149
Airplane!, 58–59
Airplane II: The Sequel, 142
ALBA emoting technique, 115–16
Alda, Alan, 284n26
Aldred, Jessica, 285n31
Aldrich, Robert, 211
Alea, Tomás Guitérrez, 222
Alexander, 179
Alexander Technique, 107
Alger, Horiatio, 121
Alias, 148
Alice in Wonderland, 120
All About Eve, 137
Allen, Woody, 145, 146
Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, 120

- All Over Me*, 210
All That Heaven Allows, 155
 alterity, 96
 Altman, Rick, 254n5
 amateur acting, 143–44, 155–62, 274, 282
 amateur filmmaking, 152–54
 ameliorative discourse, 154–55, 162
American Beauty, 210–216, 213, 222, 224n12, 226n58
American Crime, An, 225n32
American in Paris, An, 68
 American Place Theater, 224n13
 amygdala, 115
 analysis: and ambiguity, 20, 36, 39, 41; close analysis, 15n15, 19–21, 33–35, 122, 129–31, 182, 198; and comedy, 47–48; and criticism, 1–2, 45; and description, 10, 97–98; difficulties of, 19–21, 33–38, 41, 45, 196, 271; and facial expression, 110–13; and filmic experience, 94–95, 100; and form, 97–98, 122, 130–32; and James Naremore, 15n24, 138; of movement, 263; of myth, 124; and star studies, 8, 181, 205; and theory 8–9, 13–14; vocabulary for, 20, 32n6, 200n47
 analytical editing, 231
 analytical philosophy, 8–9, 13, 237
 anaphora, 138, 146, 148
Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy, 54
 Anderson, Joel, 259
 Anderson, Wes, 256
 Anger, Kenneth, 149
 animal performance, 28–31
 animation, 258–59, 262, 267, 280
 animatronics, 258–59, 261–62
 Aniston, Jennifer, 5
 Annaud, Jean-Jacques, 183n7
Annie Hall, 146
 Ansen, David, 256
Apocalypse Now, 104
Apocalypso, 281–82
 apparatus, 12–13, 97, 243–44, 252–54, 273, 281
Appassionata, 254
 Apted, Michael, 147
 archetypes, 139, 265–67
 Aristotle, 48
 Arnette, Jeanetta, 220
 Arnheim, Rudolf, 143
 Aronofsky, Darren, 3
 Arrabal, Fernando, 148
Art and the Actor, 187
 Artaud, Antonin, 148
 art direction. *See* design
 Arthur, Paul, 163–64
 Arthur, Jean, 229–33, 230, 237–38, 240
 artifice: and belief, 71; and comic intent, 52; and dramatic action, 88; as falsity, 67, 71, 73–74, 89, 114–15, 132, 206, 221; and gentility, 81, 258; vs. natural behavior, 5, 39, 158, 161, 187–88, 192, 258, 261–62
Art of Acting, The, 187
Art of the Cinema, 157
As Good As It Gets, 210
 Assayas, Olivier, 218
 Astaire, Fred, 232
A-Team, The, 145
 audience: and the actor's body, 93–95, 97–98, 102, 114, 171; and comedy, 45, 50, 52; as community, 122, 128–29, 145; and cult acting, 135–49; and direct address, 141, 161, 164, 240–41; and emotion, 21, 107–17, 131, 139–40, 190, 267; and home movies, 164; identification, 84–85, 107, 111; internal audience, 50, 64–6, 70–72, 82–83, 204, 250–51; and listening, 243, 252, 254; in *The Man Who Wasn't There*, 69–74; and musicals, 79; and myth, 129; as non-specialist viewers, 1–6, 14n7, 19; and passivity, 7, 129; and performed performance, 10, 65–66, 68; and pleasure, 37, 45, 94, 129, 204; and phenomenology, 93–104, 243–44, 252; and queerness, 218, 222–23; and reception, 11, 63, 93, 191, 194, 277; and received acting, 138, 159; and referentiality, 141–46, 179; and staging, 63, 193; and stardom, 4–5, 76, 83–87, 201–03, 271; and theatre, 64, 68, 71, 125, 148–49, 150n6, 187, 231–33, 257, 271, 274–75
 audition, 49–52, 81, 120, 204–07
Au Hasard Balthazar, 21, 28–31, 30

- aura, 125–26, 129
 Auslander, Philip, 268n12
 authenticity. *See* sincerity
 auteur, 19, 21, 219
 authorship, 8–9, 146–48, 258, 271, 273–74
Avatar, 259, 278–82
 avatars, 276–83
Avenging Conscience, The, 130
Awful Truth, The, 182
- B**
- Babbit, Jamie, 210
 backstage, 67, 71
 Bailey, Fenton, 218
 Balázs, Béla, 7, 109, 158
 Ball, Alan, 213
Band Wagon, The, 64, 68
 Barbato, Randy, 218
 Barker, Clive, 147
Barney's Version, 147
 Baron, Cynthia: acting naturally, 154; acting vocabulary, 14n5, 20, 200n47; Chris Cooper, 212; film studies' disregard for acting, 14n2; "invisibility" of acting, 15n10, 20; interplay of performance and non-performance, 93; justification of close analysis, 15n15; mirror neurons, 112; postmodern performance styles, 216
 Barrymore, Lionel, 41,
 Bartels, Andreas, 118n5
 Barthes, Roland, 122–24
Basic Instinct, 142
Batman, 102, 103
Batman Forever, 98
Battlestar Galactica, 145
 Baudrillard, Jean, 280
 Bazin, André, 158, 231
 Beethoven, Ludwig van, 187, 254
Behind the Green Door, 137
Being John Malkovich, 210–11, 215–218, 217, 222
Bel Ami, 5
 Bel Geddes, Barbara, 86
 Benedict, Dirk, 145
 Benjamin, Arthur, 69
 Benjamin, Walter, 7, 105n13, 121, 124–26, 129, 133n15
 Benny, Jack, 56–57
 Benson, Martin, 156
 Bentley, Wes, 213
Beowulf, 259, 281–82
 Bergman, Henry, 51
 Bergman, Ingrid, 66
 Bergson, Henri, 48, 50, 60
 Berkely, Elizabeth, 139
Better Home Movies, 154
 Beuys, Joseph, 149
Beyond Borders, 179
 B film, 184
Big Love, 219
 Biograph, 130, 203
 bisexuality, 218
 Björk, 149
 Black, Jack, 54, 275
Blackmail, 65
 Blair, Rhonda, 111, 115–16
Blindness, 188
 Bloch, Ernest, 131
 Bloch, Susana, 115–16
Blood and Donuts, 147
Blue, 148
 blue screen, 258
 body: and actor training, 192–93, 256–67, 275; of Catherine Keener, 216–18; of Chris Cooper, 212; and comic intent, 51; as constraint, 193; and cult acting, 141; and digital technology, 257, 259–61, 265–67, 276, 278–283; and display, 81, 93, 137, 143–44, 171–73, 177–82, 272; and emotion, 114–15, 231, 238; and fandom, 4; genres, 144; and Gilles Deleuze, 101–02; of Heath Ledger, 98–100, 102–04; hierarchies, 63, 171–72, 181; imagined vs. real, 19, 63, 158, 171–72, 191–92, 222, 265–67, 275–76; as machine, 8, 263; and mirror neurons, 113–16; and perception, 94–98, 243; and phenomenology, 98–101, 243–44, 248–49, 252–54; and semiotics, 8, 20, 191, 272, 274–76, 280; and staging, 63; and story, 169–70, 173–77, 181–82, 265–67; and verisimilar acting, 192, 202, 257–58
 Boetticher, Budd, 193
 Bogart, Humphrey, 37–38, 38, 76, 138–40
 Boleslavsky, Richard, 127
 Bondi, Beulah, 40
Boozecan, 147

- Bordwell, David, 130
 box office, 98, 181, 183n7, 183n8, 183n10, 192, 272
Boys Don't Cry, 210–11, 218–222, 221
 Brambilla, Marco, 145
 Brando, Marlon: 80, 241; in *Apocalypse Now*, 104; in *Guys and Dolls*, 76–81; in *On the Waterfront*, 81, 233, 240–41, 241; in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 81, 258
 Braudy, Leo, 7
Breach, 212
Breathless, 140, 141, 161
 Brecht, Bertolt, 247, 264
 Bresson, Robert, 21, 28, 101
 Brest, Martin, 183n7
 Brewster, Ben, 268n4
 Bridges, Jeff, 256–57, 267
 Broadway, 79, 81, 212
Brokeback Mountain, 102, 106n31
Brood, The, 139
 Brook, Peter, 148, 264
 Brooks, Hadda, 37
 Brooks, James L., 210
 Brooks, Richard, 72
The Brothers Grimm, 102
 Brown, Blair, 107
 Browning, Tod, 137
 Buckton, Clifford, 70
 Bullock, Sandra, 256
 Bunraku, 264
 Burckhardt, Jacob, 124
 Burton, Tim, 102
 Buscemi, Steve, 219
But I'm a Cheerleader, 210
- C**
Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, The, 137
 Caine, Michael, 188
 cameos, 136, 142, 144–48, 151n22, 151n23, 177, 276
 camera: acting and the, 19, 129, 156, 170, 187–88, 192–97, 264; and Alfred Hitchcock, 63, 72; and Cavell, 8; in *Christmas Holiday*, 82; in *The Conversation*, 25–26; digital, 263, 278, 281–82; distance, 114, 202, 257; and emotion, 116; and home movies, 152–64, looking at the, 51, 152–53, 141, 155, 161–64, 233–37, 240–41, 275; and naturalism, 188; presence of the, 229–241; and presentation, 52, 63, 146, 207–08, 220
 Cameron, James, 259, 278–79, 282
Camille, 33–35, 34
 Campbell, Joseph, 265
 Campbell, Martin, 118n5, 179
 Campbell, Nicholas, 147
 Canadian cinema, 147–48
 Canli, Turhan, 115
Cannibal Ferox, 144
Cannibal Holocaust, 144
Cape Fear, 88
Capote, 216, 224n12
 Capra, Frank, 38, 39, 85, 158
 Carey, Jr., Harry, 193, 196, 196
 Carnicke, Sharon Marie: acting naturally, 154; acting vocabulary, 14n5, 20, 200n47; Coquelin vs. Stanislavski, 199n11; film studies' disregard for acting, 14n2; "invisibility" of acting, 15n10, 20; interplay of performance and non-performance, 93; justification of close analysis, 15n15; mirror neurons, 112; performance choices, 193; performance's resistance to verbalization, 127; Stanislavki and Diderot, 199n32; tacit knowledge in acting, 198n7
 Caron, Leslie, 68
 Carpenter, John, 145
 Carrey, Jim, 97–98, 282
 Carroll, Noël, 9, 14n7, 110
 Carson, Diane, 212
 Caruso, D. J., 179
Cars, 145
 Carter, June, 130
Casablanca, 76, 137–39, 141
 casting, 157–59, 192, 203–04, 222, 259, 271
 Cavanagh, Tom, 120
 Cavell, Stanley: the camera's presence, 229; expressive freedom, 29; Greta Garbo, 33; intuition, 6; *The Philadelphia Story*, 35–37; privacy, 21; *Pursuits of Happiness*, 35; stage acting, 8
 celebrity, 12, 122, 136, 272, 276
 CGI. *See* computer generated imagery
 Chekhov, Michael, 265, 267
 Champagne, John, 130
Changeling, The, 178

- Chaplin, Charlie, 44–45, 49, 49–53, 158
- Chapman, Graham, 55
- character: actors, 4, 143–44, 264, 274, 276, 282; and the actor's body, 63, 97–99, 187–91, 193, 198, 231, 244; and comedy, 51–54, 59; freedom of, 21–23, 29, 77, 88; identification with a, 4–5, 84–85, 107, 109–117, 191–92; and impersonation, 29, 78, 136–38, 172–81, 189, 265, 272; mysteriousness of, 31, 41, 43–44, 83–84, 88–89, 232–33; non-human, 28–31, 265–66; and performed performance, 62–74; portraying, 20–21; privacy of, 21, 25–27, 29; psychology, 4, 13, 138, 202, 257, 264–65; and queerness, 211, 221–23; and realist acting, 4, 107, 186, 198, 212; and stage acting, 8, 56–57, 193; and technology, 257–261; vs. actor, 19, 169, 232–33, 236–38; vs. star, 76, 84, 144–47, 169–82, 191–93, 208–09; vs. type, 157–58, 219
- Chesterton, G.K., 86
- Child, Julia, 169
- child acting, 156
- Children Fishing for Shrimp*, 163
- Chion, Michel, 248
- Cholodenko, Lisa, 210
- Christmas Holiday*, 82–84
- cinema of attractions, 166n34, 170, 209, 257
- cinematography, 3, 112, 282
- cinéma vérité*, 161
- Circus, The*, 49, 49–52
- Citadel, The*, 20
- City of the Living Dead*, 144
- Clark, Larry, 219
- classical style, 4, 126, 129, 133n19, 161–62, 231, 240–41, 254n5
- clones, 258, 276, 278, 282, 285n33
- Clooney, George, 177, 183n8
- Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, 151n22
- close-up: acknowledging the camera in, 161; and acting technique, 193–94, 196–97, 257–58; and emotional expression, 35, 110–11, 215; and empathy, 109–11; and listening, 250–51; and performed performance, 73, 142; and posing, 221; and signification, 275; and spectator engagement, 99–101, 104; and star acting, 171; and tactility, 10, 101; and thought, 29–30
- clowning, 49–52, 77, 99, 155
- Clurman, Harold, 127
- cognitive theory, 11, 107–08, 116–17, 266
- Comédie Française*, 184, 186
- comedy, 42–45, 47–61, 77–81, 174, 217–18, 229, 241
- comic twinkle, 51–52, 54, 56, 58
- communication: and expression, 141; and gesture, 43; and interiority, 21, 27, 31; and literature, 128–29; and mirror neurons, 111; non-verbal, 39, 257; and phenomenology, 95, 100–01, 252; pre-linguistic, 109; problem of, 121; and theatre, 148
- community, 11, 121–22, 128–29, 223n5
- composites, 278
- composition. *See* framing
- computer generated imagery: actors' suspicion towards, 256–57, 59; and blue screen, 258; and 3D, 258
- Condon, Bill, 210
- Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, 177
- confrontation, 83, 96, 98–99, 101–02, 104, 146, 240
- Connor, Steven, 249–50
- Conran, Kerry, 179
- consciousness, 11–12, 30, 33, 53, 94–95, 103–04, 115, 189, 199n32, 230, 238
- Conversation, The*, 21, 25–28, 26
- Cooper, Alice, 145
- Cooper, Chris, 210–16, 213, 222–23, 224n13, 226n58
- Copeau, Jacques, 148
- Coppola, Francis Ford, 21, 25, 104
- Coquelin, Constant-Benoît, 184–93, 198
- Corneille, Pierre, 187
- costume: and Benoît Coquelin, 189; and Catherine Keener, 216; and Chloë Sevigny, 220; as disguise, 73; and motion capture, 261; as performance element, 104, 172,

- 174, 211, 257, 275; and play-acting, 39, 68; and star acting 184
- craft: acting as, 72, 116, 185–87, 272–73; and audience recognition of 3, 19, 142, 188, 192; discourses, 14n5, 266, 272; and home movies, 154–57, 159–62; and John Wayne, 184–85, 192–93; and myth 126–27, 130; and stage acting, 19, 184
- Craig, Edward Gordon, 261–62, 264, 267, 271
- Crash*, 147
- creativity, 1–2, 20, 93, 96, 122, 142, 156, 184–85, 264–66
- Crews, Laura Hope, 34
- Crisp, Donald, 51
- Cristofer, Michael, 179
- criticism, 1–6, 45, 47, 88–89, 179–80
- Cronenberg, David, 139, 145–148
- Cukor, George, 33, 35, 137
- cult acting, 135–149, 274
- cult cinema, 136, 138, 141, 272
- culture: and analysis of stars, 8; and the body as sign, 272; and cameos, 146; and celebrity actors, 169–70, 192, 272; and comedy, 47; and cult acting, 135–149; and facial expression, 113, 116; and Film Studies, 12; and the Kuleshov Effect, 112; and myth, 121, 124–29; and naturalism, 191; and queer characters, 221–223; and referential acting, 144; and typage, 143, 157
- Curry, Tim, 139
- Curse of the Golden Flower*, 3
- Curtis, Tony, 57
- Curtiz, Michael, 76, 137
- Cusack, John, 215–17, 217
- cyber-acting. *See* mocaptors and motion capture
- cyber-cinema, 259, 265
- D**
- Dale, Holly, 147
- Damasio, Antonio, 114–15
- Damon, Matt, 183n8
- Dancer in the Dark*, 149
- Daniell, Henry, 35
- Dante, Joe, 145
- Dark Knight, The*, 94, 98–100, 99, 100, 102–104, 103
- Dark Victory*, 4
- Davis, Bette, 4, 20
- Day, Doris, 62, 68–73
- Dead Ringers*, 147
- Dean, James, 271
- de Bont, Jan, 178
- DeCarlo, Yvonne, 137
- deception, 58, 65–66, 73–74, 78–79, 86, 206–07
- Decety, Jean, 111
- deCordova, Richard, 127, 201
- Deleuze, Gilles, 94, 101–02, 106n27, 106n29
- del Río, Elena, 106n29, 254n3, 255n16
- Delsarte, François, 32n6, 268n8
- de Man, Paul, 124
- Demme, Jonathan, 145, 211
- Dennis, Sandy, 219
- Deodato, Ruggero
- Depp, Johnny, 5, 137
- description, 10, 16n30, 33–35, 37–38, 94–95, 97, 274, 283n10
- De Sica, Vittorio, 158
- design, 68, 219, 271, 275
- Devil's Own, The*, 177
- de Vito, Danny, 182n6
- dialectical enchantment, 125
- dialogue, 3, 173–76, 190, 197, 212
- Diaz, Cameron, 217–18
- DiCillo, Tom, 183n7, 216, 224n32
- Dickens, Charles, 86
- Diderot, Denis, 190, 199n32, 199n37
- Dietrich, Marlene, 67, 130, 145
- digital cinematography, 281–82
- digital stardom, 271–283
- digital technology, 256–61, 267, 271–74, 277, 281–82
- direct address: and Alfred Hitchcock, 240; and the cinema of attractions, 209; in comedy, 51; in home movies, 153, 155, 161–64; and Marlon Brando, 80, 240–41; and referential acting, 141; and staging, 64; in *Sherman's March*, 233–37
- direction: and actor's intention, 273–74, and Alfred Hitchcock, 72, 84; and character acting, 143; directionless performance, 139; director cameos, 145–47; and Frank Capra, 39; and home movies, 155, 160; and Lev Kuleshov, 263–64; and mechanical

- performances, 129; and realistic performance, 114, 156–59, 212; and stars, 81, 83, 180
- Dirty Harry*, 282
- disability, 144
- Divine, 149
- documentary, 152–53, 160–61, 164, 233–37
- Documentary Film Classics*, 236
- Dogville*, 284n10
- Donat, Robert, 20
- Donen, Stanley, 68
- Donnellan, Declan, 5
- Donnie Darko*, 139, 145
- Doty, Alexander, 210
- Downey Jr., Robert, 3
- Dream of Passion*, A, 121
- Dreams*, 145
- dual consciousness, 189–91, 199n32
- Dudek, Duane, 179
- Duerr, Edwin, 189
- Dumont, Bruno, 158
- Durbin, Deanna, 81–84, 86
- Duvall, Shelley, 106n30
- Du Welz, Fabrice, 146
- Dwan, Allan, 191
- Dyer, Richard: characters, 14n9; Humphrey Bogart, 138; performance signs, 20; star images 8, 170, 183n16; types, 223n7
- E**
- Eastwood, Clint, 78, 192, 210, 282
- Easy Rider*, 102
- Eckhart, Aaron, 104
- Eco, Umberto, 122, 137–39, 141, 151n22
- Edelstein, Dan, 123–24
- Edge of Seventeen*, 223n1
- editing: and actors' autonomy, 19, 104, 112, 129, 170–71, 273; analytical editing, 231; and emotion, 110; and the Kuleshov effect, 29–30, 112–13, 139–141
- Eisenstein, Sergei, 157–58, 273
- Election*, 210
- El Mechri, Mabrouk, 152n36
- embodiment: and character 4, 19, 143, 158, 244, 265, 275, 281; and comedy, 51; and conceptualization, 20, 147, 204, 266; and consciousness, 95–97, 185; and filmic experience, 97, 244, 252–54; and meaning, 93–94
- emotion: and audience, 21, 107–17, 131, 139–40, 190, 267; and the body, 114–15, 231, 238; and close-ups, 35, 110–11, 215; and facial expression, 108–13, 258; and gesture, 114–16, 267; and movement, 22–25; and realism, 107; and sincerity, 7, 114, 207
- emotional contagion, 108–111, 113, 116–17, 119n32
- emotional memory, 8, 86, 107, 115, 212, 234–35
- empathy, 109–11, 114, 117, 250–51, 253
- encounter, 47, 94–96, 99–104, 236–37, 243–44, 254
- energy, 59, 82, 88, 93, 98
- Entertainer, The*, 67
- entrances, 82–83, 99
- Ephron, Nora, 169
- essence, 94, 265
- essentialism, 128, 266
- ethics, 7, 12, 243–44, 248, 254, 258
- E. T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, 145, 151n22
- Eumig's Manual for Better Home Movies*, 156
- Euripides, 266
- Evans, Ray, 69
- Everman, Welch, 137
- excess: and cult acting, 136–39; and home movies, 153–55, 164; and “mad acting,” 148–49; and Marlon Brando, 79; in *Ménilmontant*, 24; and stage melodrama, 275; and star acting 84, 149
- experience: of the actor's two bodies, 171, 190; of emotion, 107–109, 111, 114–117, 121; experiential dimensions of film, 2–3, 11, 93–100, 243 252; of incongruity, 48; in *Ménilmontant*, 23–25; of the other 100–02, 105n12, 106n32; and screened reality, 232, 239, 241; and training, 114–117, 156, 187, 263
- exploitation, 122, 137, 139, 144, 146–47, 282, 285n33
- expressive incoherence, 15n24, 54–55
- Extreme Measures*, 147
- Eynat, Irene, 269n25

F

- fabrication, 65–66, 70, 73–74
 facial expression: in amateur film, 163; Angelina Jolie's, 174–77 179; and animatronics, 262; Brad Pitts' 174–78; and character acting, 143; Chloë Sevigny's, 219; Chris Cooper's, 212–13; in comedy, 54; control of, 262–63; and cult acting, 138–141, 146; in *The Dark Knight*, 99–104; and emotion, 108–13, 258; and intentions, 52–54; interpreting, 33–35, 37–39; and mirror neurons, 108–09, 114; and pantomime, 202, 257, 275; and performance capture technologies, 262, 268n2, 278, 284n26; as performance sign, 20, 93, 193–97; as presented by the camera, 229–233; and thought, 7, 238–39, 258; in video games, 276
- fandom, 4, 147, 208, 274
Fantastic Mr. Fox, 256
 fantasy, 69, 72, 177, 239, 266, 278, 282
- Farr, Pauline, 70
 Farrell, Colin, 5
 Farrow, Mia, 219
Fawty Towers, 60
 Faylen, Frank, 38
Female of the Species, The, 203
 femininity, 57–58, 207, 218–22
 femme-ininity, 218–22, 226n55
 Ferrell, Will, 54
 Fey, Tina, 121
- fiction: and audience, 64, 73; and character, 19, 21, 236–38, 275–76, 281; and emotion, 108; and home movies, 152–53, 155, 157, 160–61, 164; and hyper-semioticization, 274; and intention, 50, and myth, 121, 128; and world, 37, 237–39, 283n10
- Fields, W.C., 52–53
Fight Club, 177–78
Film Art: An Introduction, 130
 Film Studies: and acting, 1–2, 8–9, 14n2, 19, 129–32; and neuroscience, 108, 110, 112; and myth, 121–22; and star studies, 181–82; and theory, 10–13
- Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, 276
 Fincher, David, 177
 Finkleman, Ken, 142
 first self vs. second self, 189–91, 198
 Fischer, Jenna, 120
 Flaherty, Robert, 236
Flawless, 210
 fluency, 33–35, 39, 42–45, 57
 Flusser, Vilem, 280
The Fly, 145–47
 Folland, Alison, 220
 Fonda, Henry, 239
 Ford, John, 12, 184, 193–94, 196–97
 form: acting as formal element, 3–5, 93–94, 112, 127, 184, 258, 267, 271; and the actor's body, 100–01, 192, 266; and analysis, 97–98, 122, 130–32; and classical style, 229–31, 241; and comedy, 48–49, 53–54; and home movie performances, 152, 162–64; and internal audiences, 68; and listening, 243; and naturalism, 188–89, 212; and ostentation, 8, 139; and postmodern acting, 216–18; and technology, 10, 12–13, 192, 256–61, 273, 278–81; and transitional cinema, 201–02, 208–09, 257
- Forman, Milos, 102
 Forrest, Frederic, 25
 Forster, Marc, 201
 fragmentation, 254n5, 259, 273–74
 framing: actor's adjustments to, 192; and close-ups, 101, 153, 235, 257; and comedy, 52; context, 112–13; and emotion, 114; as formal element, 29–30, 93, 146, 156, 170–71, 273; and looking, 230–31, 233, 241
- Freaks*, 137, 144
 Freeman, Kathleen, 53
 Freeman, Morgan, 256–57, 259
 French Legion of Honor, 186–87
 Freud, Sigmund, 48, 237
 Frewer, Matt, 278
From Dusk 'till Dawn, 141–42, 142
From the Journals of Jean Seberg, 141
Friends, 135
 Fulci, Lucio, 144
Full Frontal, 177
 functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), 113

G

- Gaiman, Neil, 259
 Gallese, Vittorio, 107, 113, 117n4
 Gallo, Vincent, 219
Gangs of New York, 144–45
 Garber, Victor, 120
 Garbo, Greta, 33–35, 34, 38, 46n3, 130
 Garcia, Allan, 49
 Gardner, Ava, 64
 Garfield, Alan, 27
 Garland, Judy, 139
 Garr, Terry, 27
 Garris, Mick, 148
 Gaut, Berys, 110
 gaze, 8, 30–31, 67, 96, 101–02, 104, 204, 220, 230–41
 Geddeck, Martina, 247, 249–51
 Gelder, Beatrice de, 113
 Gélín, Daniel, 69
 gender. *See* sexuality
 genre, 9, 47, 77, 138, 143–44, 170, 211, 282
 German Democratic Republic, 244, 247, 251
 gesture: anaphoric, 146, 148; and Angelina Jolie, 179; and animation, 280; and audiences, 138; and Brad Pitt, 176, 178; and the camera, 241, 274; and Catherine Keener, 216–18; and characterization, 25–28, 189; and Chloe Sevigny, 218–21; and Chris Cooper, 212–15; and comedy, 51–55, 59; in *The Conversation*, 25–28; in *The Dark Knight*, 99–104; and emotion, 114–16, 267; fluency of 33–35, 37–39; and François Delsarte, 32n6; gestural collage, 211, 216, 218, 222; in *If Only You Could Cook*, 229–233; in *It's a Wonderful Life*, 38–41; in *Ménilmontant*, 22–25; in *The Music Box*, 42–44; and ostentation, 142; as performance sign, 20, 31, 93, 112, 185, 211, 275; and phenomenology, 95–98, 252; psychological, 265; and referential acting, 140–41; self-conscious, 153, 155, 163–64; in *Sherman's March*, 235–36; and star acting, 4, 180, 190, 193–198; theatrical, 69, 193, 202, 204–06, 257, 275
 Gibson, Mel, 281–82
Gilda, 88
 Gilliam, Terry, 102, 183n7
 Gilmore, Patrick, 177
Girl, Interrupted, 178
 Gish, Lillian, 203, 219, 236–37
 Gleason, Jacky, 149
Glenn Miller Story, The, 72
 globalization, 126, 132, 133n20
 goal-oriented actions, 108
 Godard, Jean-Luc, 141, 161
Gods and Monsters, 210
 Goffman, Erving, 59–60, 63, 65, 68, 70
GoldenEye, 118n5
 Golden Globe Awards, 219
 Goldwyn, Samuel, 78
Gone in Sixty Seconds, 178
 Goranson, Alicia, 220
 Gould, Heywood, 147
 Grahame, Gloria, 37–38, 38, 76
 Grand Guignol, 137
Grand Theft Auto, 276
 Grant, Cary, 58, 84
 Grier, Pam, 139
 Grifasi, Joe, 107
 Griffith, D. W., 130, 203, 236, 257
 Grodal, Torben, 110, 118n18
 Grotowski, Jerzy, 148, 264
 Group Theatre, 127
 Grunes, Dennis, 106n31
 guided actors, 276
 Guilbert, Jean-Claude, 29
 Gunning, Tom, 166n34, 170
Guys and Dolls, 76–81, 80
 Gyllenhaal, Maggie, 100, 104
- H**
 Hackman, Gene, 21, 25–28, 26, 31
 hamming. *See* theatricality
 Handman, Wynn, 224n13
 Hanks, Tom, 137, 211, 222, 223n5, 282
 Hansen, Miriam, 252
Happiness, 210
Happy Town, 148
 Hara, Setsuko, 229
 Hardwicke, Katherine, 139
 Hardy, Oliver, 42–44, 46n10, 241
 Harnett, Josh, 3
 Harrelson, Woody, 256, 258
 Harron, Mary, 219
 Harvey, James, 37–38, 82, 87

- Hasson, Uri, 119n32
 Hawks, Howard, 12
 Hayek, Selma, 141, 142
 Haynes, Todd, 102, 210
 Hayworth, Rita, 88
 Headroom, Max, 278
 Heath, Stephen, 7
He Knows You're Alone, 137
 Helmore, Tom, 86
 Hensley, Wayne E., 112–13
 Hepburn, Katherine, 35–37, 36
 Herek, Stephen, 178
 Herodotus, 124
 Herrmann, Bernard, 69
 Herzog, Werner, 149
 heterosexuality, 211, 214–15, 218, 220, 222–23
 Hickey, Dave, 87
High Art, 210
 Hinds, Samuel S., 40–41
 historiography, 121–25
History of the French Revolution, 123
 histrionic style, 3, 184–86, 188, 203–05, 221, 268n8
 Hitchcock, Alfred: actors as “cattle,” 28; and *Blackmail*, 65; cameos 145; and *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, 62, 68–74; and *Notorious*, 66, 84; optical legibility, 63; and *Psycho*, 66, 151n23, 233, 240; and *Saboteur*, 65–66; and *Shadow of a Doubt*, 239 and *Stage Fright*, 65–68; and *The 39 Steps*, 65; and *Torn Curtain*, 72; and *Vertigo*, 66, 84 151n23, 233; and *The Wrong Man*, 233, 239–40
 Hobbes, Thomas, 48
 Hoffman, Dustin, 58
 Hoffsess, John, 147
 Hollywood: and acting mythology, 129, 132; and Brad Pitt, 177; and labor, 120, 126, 130; new Hollywood, 21, 126, 133n20; imperialism, 126; production norms, 133n19, 152, 154–55, 159–60, 162; and queerness, 211, 222; and Stanley Cavell, 35–36; and stardom, 72, 271–72, 274, 281; and technology, 273; and typecasting, 192
 Holmes, John, 144
 Holofcener, Nicole, 216, 224n32
 Home Movie Day, 153, 164n1
 home movie performativity, 152–53, 155
 home movies, 152–64
 homosexuality, 210–216, 222–23, 226n58
 Hopkins, Anthony, 282, 285n31
 Hopper, Dennis, 102
 horror, 106n30, 141, 144–45, 147
 Hourihan, Margery, 270n50
House of Darkness, The, 203
House on the Edge of the Park, 144
How to Act for Home Movies, 156
Hud, 72
 Hugon, Paul, 159
 Hunter, Jeffery, 193, 196, 196
 Hunter, Ross, 155
 Huston, John, 182n6
 hyper-semioticization, 274–76
- I**
 Iacoboni, Marco, 113
I Am Legend, 169
 iconic signs, 189, 277, 280–81
 identification. *See* sympathy
 ideology, 19, 123–26, 181, 191,
If You Could Only Cook, 229–33, 230, 237–38, 240
 Ilinsky, Igor, 264
 imagination, 36, 50, 80, 107, 115, 189, 238–40, 258, 264–65, 267
 imitation. *See* mimesis
I'm Not There, 102
 impersonation, 29, 78, 136–38, 172–81, 189, 265, 272
 impression management, 60–61
 impressions, 6, 14n5, 60–61, 76, 87, 131
 imprinting, 189, 191, 198, 275–76, 280
In a Lonely Place, 37–39, 38, 76
In & Out, 210
 incongruous intentions, 52–54, 57–60
 independent cinema, 147, 210–11, 216, 219, 223
 indexical signs, 31, 117, 275, 277–78, 280–81, 283, 283n10
Inoperative Community, The, 128
Inside the Actors Studio, 127
 insincerity. *See* artifice
 integrated performance, 129, 173, 176
 intention: and the actor's body, 96–97, 99, 102, 105n12; actor's vs. director's, 177, 215, 273–74; and animal acting, 29, 31; and audience, 5; and comedy,

- 47–60; and emotion, 111; and facial expression, 52–54; of filmic characters, 169, 173–76; and Gene Hackman, 26; and hyper-semioticization, 274–76; and incongruity, 52–54, 57–60; intentional agency, 97; and Marlon Brando, 77; and mentalization, 109; and sincerity, 52–53
- interiority: and the camera, 231–32, 238–39; and classical realism, 4; and emotion, 113–16; and internal sound, 248; and naturalism, 212, 216; and performance capture technologies, 276; and queer performance, 211–12; and Robert Bresson, 28, 30; and the sonic body, 252–54
- internal audiences, 50, 64–6, 70–72, 82–83, 204, 250–51
- internal sound, 248
- interpassivity, 277, 284n15
- interpellation, 164
- interpretation, and *Au Hasard Balthazar* 28–31; and *caméos*, 144–48; and *Christmas Holiday*, 81–84; and *The Conversation*, 25–28; and cult acting, 135–36; difficulties of, 1–2, 8, 10, 19–21, 33–38, 41, 45, 196; and fluency, 33–45; and *Gyps and Dolls*, 76–81; and the Kuleshov effect, 112–13, 139–41; and *Ménilmontant*, 22–25; and phenomenology, 97–98; and *The Philadelphia Story*, 36; and *The Searchers*, 194–97; and star persona, 76, 88–89; and *Vertigo*, 84–87
- intersubjectivity, 96–97, 243, 252
- intertextuality, 137, 142–45, 170, 178–80
- Interview with the Vampire*, 177, 183n7
- intimacy, 7, 27–28, 82, 163–64, 187, 235, 248
- Into the Night*, 145
- Into the Wild*, 224n32
- intuition, 2, 6–7, 14, 60, 84
- invisible acting, 4, 15n10, 19–20, 107
- Invocation of My Demon Brother*, 149
- Ireland, John, 137
- irony, 51–53
- Irving, Henry, 190
- Isaac, Jim, 147
- It's a Gift*, 52–53
- It's a Wonderful Life*, 38–41, 40, 42, 46n9, 85
- Ivens, Joris, 161
- J**
- Jackson, Peter, 259, 276
- Jackson, Philip L., 111
- Jacobs, Lea, 268n4
- Jacoby, Russell, 132
- Jancovich, Mark, 145
- Jason X*, 147
- JCVD*, 152n36
- Jeremy, Ron, 144
- Johnny Suede*, 183n7, 224n32
- Johnson, Tim, 177
- Joker, the, 98–104
- Jolie, Angelina, 5, 170, 173–81, 175, 176, 177
- Jones, Doug, 262
- Jones, Terry, 54
- Jonze, Spike, 210, 212, 216
- Jordan, Neil, 183n7
- Julie and Julia*, 169
- Jung, Carl, 265
- K**
- Kael, Pauline, 1, 76–77
- Kalifornia*, 183n7
- Kantorowicz, Ernst, 124
- Kaplan, David, 95
- Kapoor, Anil, 120
- Karns, Todd, 40
- Kathakali, 262
- Kaufman, Charlie, 215–16, 225n32
- Kazan, Elia, 158, 211, 233, 258
- Keaton, Buster, 51
- Keener, Catherine, 210–11, 215–18, 217, 222–23, 224n32
- Keeping Up Appearances*, 60
- Kelly, Gene, 68
- Kelly, Richard, 139
- Kermode, Mark, 145–46
- Kidman, Nicole, 219
- Kids*, 219
- Kier, Udo, 149
- Killing of Sister George, The*, 211
- King, Barry, 8, 149n1, 172, 180, 283n6, 284n19
- King of Comedy, The*, 151n25
- Kinski, Klaus, 139, 149
- Kirby, Michael, 29, 150n15
- Kirsanoff, Dimitri, 21

- Kleiser, James, 259
 Klevan, Andrew, 15n15, 46n7, 46n9
 Koch, Sebastian, 244, 247–51
 Kolker, Robert, 106n30
 Konstantine, Leopoldine, 66
 Korine, Harmony, 219
 Kosinski, Joseph, 256
 Kouvaros, George, 10, 16n30, 106n24
 Kracauer, Siegfried, 8, 62–63
 Krämer, Peter, 19, 150n13
 Kristel, Sylvia, 139
 Krutnik, Frank, 48
 Kubrick, Stanley, 102
 Kuleshov, Lev: acting exercises and workshops, 262–63, 267; actor as machine, 8, 263; Kuleshov Effect 30, 105n16, 112–13, 116, 139–41; and mimesis, 157; typage, 143, 157–58
- L**
- Laban, Rudolf, 32n6, 264
 labor: acting as, 142, 159–60; and digital technology, 258, 261, 281–83; and political economy, 272; and the Screen Actors Guild, 120–22; star labor, 181–82, 272; and theory, 7–8; and utopian rhetoric, 130–32
 LaBute, Neil, 210
 Lacan, Jacques, 238
Ladies' Man, The, 53, 53–54
 LaFarge, Francois, 28
 Lahaie, Brigitte, 146
 Laine, Tarja, 110
 Landis, John, 145, 148, 151n25
 Landy, Robert, 107, 266–67
 Lang, Helmut, 216
 Lang, Walter, 68
 Langdon, Reuben, 260, 261
 language, 9, 96, 122, 124, 212, 257
Lara Croft: Tomb Raider, 178
Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life, 178–80, 183n10
 Large, Gerry, 263
 LaSalle, Martin, 101
Last Night, 147
 Laurel, Stan, 42–44, 46n10, 241
 Lawrence, Francis, 169
 LeBlanc, Matt, 135, 149
 Lecoq, Jacques, 264
 Ledger, Heath, 94, 98–104, 99, 100, 103
 LeDoux, Joseph, 114–15
 Lee, Ang, 102
 Lee, Bruce, 139
 Lee, Nell Harper, 216
Legends of the Fall, 177
 Lehr, Michael, 263
 Leigh, Vivien, 258
 Lenin, Vladimir, 254
 Lenzi, Umberto, 144
 lesbianism, 210–11, 215–223, 226n55
 Lévinas, Emmanuel, 94, 103–04, 106n32
 Levinson, Barry, 274
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 122–24
 Lewis, Jerry, 53, 53–54, 59
 Lewis, Richard J., 147
 Li, Gong, 3
Life of Brian, 54–55, 55
Life or Something Like It, 178–79
Lili, 68
 Liman, Doug, 170
 limitations: and amateur acting, 159; and animal acting, 28; and cameos, 146; and comedy, 47, 49–50, 58; and editing, 273; and hyper-semiotization, 276; range, 139–40; self-consciousness, 153, 156, 161–63; and stardom, 88, 179–80, 184, 189–91, 274; visible acting, 20
 Lindsey, Enid, 70
 linguistics, 123–24
 Linklater, Richard, 54
 Lipton, James, 127
 listening, 243–254
 literature, 128–29
Little Foxes, The, 20
Lives of Others, The, 243–54
 Livingston, Jay, 69
 Livy, 124
 Lloyd, Norman, 65–66
 Loesser, Frank, 82
 Logan, Joshua, 192
 Lohmar, Dieter, 110–11
 Lombard, Carole, 56–57, 57
Lone Star, 224n12
 long tail, 272
 loopy systems, 98
Lord of the Rings, The, 259, 276; and Gollum, 259, 262–67, 282
 Lovell, Alan, 19
Lovely & Amazing, 224n32
Love! Valor! Compassion!, 210
 Lowe, Vicky, 20

- Lowenstein, Adam, 147
 Lowry, Lynn, 144
 Lubitsch, Ernst, 56, 182n6
 Lucas, George, 151n22, 265
 Ludwig, Adam, 107
 Lugosi, Bela, 145
 Lumière, Auguste, 163–64
 Lumière, Louis, 163–64
 Lumière, Marguerite, 163
- M**
 mad acting, 137, 148–49
 Magnani, Anna, 219
Magnificent Seven, The, 155
 Mailer, Norman, 77
 make-up, 99, 102, 146, 157, 172, 211,
 219–20, 275, 278–79
 Mali, Joseph, 122, 124–26
 Malkovich, John, 215–18, 224n29,
 282, 285n31
 Maltby, Richard, 63, 171
 Maltin, Leonard, 160
 Mamoulian, Rouben, 130
 Mancini, Don, 145
 Mangold, James, 132, 178
 Mankiewicz, Joseph L., 76, 137
 Mann, Anthony, 72
 Mantello, Joe, 210
Man Who Knew Too Much, The,
 68–74
 Marceau, Marcel, 42
 Margheriti, Antonio, 144
 Marin, Cheech, 142
 Marsh, Mae, 203
 Marshall, Herbert, 229
 Marvin, Lee, 192
 Marx, Groucho, 59
 Marx, Karl, 131, 252
 masculinity, 54, 58, 78, 207, 211–15,
 218, 220
 masks, 55–59, 71–73, 78, 102–04,
 146, 241, 279
 Massive software, 276
 material dimensions, 20, 93–94,
 169–70, 182, 185, 191, 193, 275
Matewan, 212
 McCarey, Leo, 182n6
 McElwee, Ross, 233–36, 241
 McDonald, Paul, 15n15, 19
 McDowell, Claire, 203
 McKay, Adam, 54
 McKellan, Ian, 210–11
 McKellar, Don, 147–48
 McLeod, Norman Z., 52
 McLuhan, Marshall, 146
 McRae, Elizabeth, 27
 meaning: actors' contributions to, 112,
 116, 273; and ambiguity, 20,
 36, 39, 41; and analysis, 19–22,
 45, 93–94, 130, 200n47; and
 audience formations, 11; and
 fluency, 34–35, 45; and hyper-
 semioticization, 274–75; and
 incongruous intentions, 52; and
 listening, 245, 253; and mis-
 communication, 43; and myth,
 124; and performance frames,
 74; and phenomenology, 96–97;
 and polysemous expression,
 140; and referentiality, 138,
 141, 146, and stardom, 170–71,
 181–82
 medium: actors' adjustments to the,
 187–88, 190–91, 193; actor's
 body as, 252, 276, 283n10;
 and aura, 126; and convention,
 187, 208; and formal features
 8, 170–71; and intention, 273;
 and intimacy, 187; and mirror
 neurons, 108; and naturalism,
 188; and reality, 229, 236–38;
 specificity, 206, 236; and spec-
 tacle, 171, 173, 181; spectator's
 body as, 95
Meet Joe Black, 177, 183n7
 Meirelles, Fernando, 188
 Meisner, Sanford, 133n23, 258,
 268n10
 melodrama: and excess, 137, 275; and
 genre 3, 144; and history, 125;
 and *Ménilmontant*, 21; in soap
 operas, 58
 Melville, Wilbert, 204
 Mendes, Sam, 210, 213
Ménilmontant, 21, 22, 22–25
 mentalization, 109
 Merhige, Elias, 152n35
 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 94–97, 100,
 106n29
 Method acting: and Alfred Hitch-
 cock, 28; biases in favour of,
 20, 256; and Chris Cooper,
 212, 222; and communica-
 tion, 121, 127; excesses in 3; and
 Gilles Deleuze, 101–02; and
 Lee Strasberg, 133n22, 185;
 and Marlon Brando, 258; and
 mirror neurons, 116–17; and

- personal memory, 107; vs. star acting, 136
 Metz, Christian, 122
The Mexican, 178, 183
 Meyerhold, Vsevolod, 264
 Michelet, Jules, 123–24
Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil, 210
Mighty Heart, A, 178
 Miles, Bernard, 73
 Miles, Vera, 240
 Miller, Bennett, 216, 224n12
 Miller, Dean, 296n49
 Miller, George, 102
 Miller, Glenn, 72
 mimesis: and amateur actors, 156–60; and comedy, 44, 54; and imitation, 78, 109–111, 138, 140, 146, 190, 222, 243; and Lev Kuleshov, 157; and perception, 96; and polysemous expression, 140; and social mimicry, 44; and transparent acting, 15n10, 188
 mimicry. *See* mimesis
 mind, 94, 107–16, 189, 231–32, 238, 257, 266
 Minghella, Anthony, 210
 Mingus, Charles, 33
 Ministry for State Security. *See* Stasi
 Minnelli, Vincente, 64, 68
 mirroring, 107, 109–111, 115, 275
 mirror neurons, 107–117
 miscasting, 78, 85
mise-en-scène, 8, 39, 110, 174
 Mitchell, Artie, 137
 Mitchell, Jim, 137
 Mitchum, Robert, 87–89, 88
 Mnouchkine, Ariane, 264
 Mobbs, Dean et al., 112–13
 modernism, 28, 126
 modernity, 65, 123, 125
 Molière, 187, 189
 Mona Lisa, 125, 219
 monomyth, 265
 Monroe, Marilyn, 281
Monster's Ball, 102
 mood, 33, 41, 44, 77, 112–13, 196, 231
 Moore, Julianne, 188, 219
 Moore, Roger, 139
 Moreton, David, 223n1
 Morghen, John. *See* Radice, Giovanni Lombardo
 Morisset, Micheline, 160
Morocco, 130
 Morrison, Marion Robert. *See* Wayne, John
 Moscow Art Theatre, 127
Mothering Heart, The, 203
 motion-capture: actor training and 261–67; definition of 268n2; digital cinematography and, 282; dismissive attitudes toward, 256–59, 282; Jeff Bridges on, 256–57, 267; “mocaptors” and 259, 277–80; and requirements on actors, 259–61; semiotics of stardom and, 272
 motivation, 5, 74, 77, 98, 138, 216–17, 266–67
 movement: and actor training, 262–67; and Angelina Jolie, 179; and Brad Pitt, 176, 178; and Catherine Keener, 216–18; and characterization, 25–28, 189; and Chloe Sevigny, 218–21; and Chris Cooper, 212–15; and emotion, 22–25, 114–15; and expressive freedom, 20–21, 29; and film technology, 8, 163, 171, 202, 231, 259; and Florence Turner, 205–07; and Heath Ledger, 99–102, 104; interpretation of, 33–35, 38–44; and John Wayne, 193–97; and Marlon Brando, 81; and mirror neurons, 108, 114–15; movement-image, 101, 106n27; as performance sign, 20, 93, 140, 222, 275; and phenomenology, 95–98, 101; and Robert Mitchum, 87–88; and Rudolf Laban, 32n6
Movie Acting: A Film Reader, 13
Movie Maker's Handbook, The, 157
 Mozhukhin, Ivan, 112, 141
Mr. & Mrs. Smith, 170–82
Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, 85
 Mühe, Ulrich, 13, 244–54
 Mulcahy, Russell, 147
 Mulhall, Stephen, 7
 Mulligan, Carey, 256
 Mulvey, Laura, 129
 Murnau, F. W., 139
 music, 39, 113, 119n32, 127, 253–54
 musicals, 68, 71, 77–81, 170

Music Box, The, 42–44
 myth, 120–32, 265–66, 277
 mythistory, 122, 124–26
Mythologies, 123

N

Nancy, Jean-Luc, 122, 128–29, 243–49, 252–54
Nanook of the North, 236
 Naremore, James: affective thinking, 21; close readings, 130, 183n17; definition of performance, 153, 160; “doubling”, 151n24; early cinema, 257; expressive incoherence, 55; formal elements of acting, 138; Lee Strasberg, 149; performance frame, 15n24; performance-within-performance, 54; received acting, 138; stars, 93, 191; types, 143–44
 narrative comprehension, 3, 20–22, 39–41, 63–64, 98, 169–173, 181–82, 193
 naturalism, as acting style, 154–60, 188–89; and Benoît Coquelin, 186–88; and Catherine Keener, 216, 218; and Chloë Sevigny, 218–19; and Chris Cooper, 212, 222; and comedy, 52; and the everyday 39–41; and home movie performances, 162–164; and James Stewart, 86; and John Morghen, 144; and John Wayne, 184, 188, 190–92, 198; and ordinary behavior, 160–62; as professional norm, 161–62; and semiotics, 283n10; and Siegfried Kracauer, 8, 62; and stars, 5, 136, 189–93, 198, 274; and talent, 5, 20; vs. neo-naturalism, 212, 218
Navigator, The, 51
 Neale, Steve, 48
 Negra, Diane, 210, 223
 Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre, 268n10
 neo-naturalism, 212, 215–16, 218–19, 222
 neo-realism, 158
Nestor Sextone for President, 259
 neuroscience, 107–111
 Newman, Paul, 72
 New Queer Cinema, 12, 210–11
 Niccol, Andrew, 278

niche stars, 210–11, 221–23
 Nicholson, Jack, 102, 103, 106n30, 137
 Nicotero, Greg, 142
 Nielsen, Leslie, 58–59
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 124
Nightbreed, 147
 nine-foot line, 202, 257
 Nolan, Christopher, 94
 non-specialist viewers, 1–6, 14n7, 19
Nosferatu, 139, 149
Notorious, 66, 84
 Novak, Kim, 86, 240

O

objects of attention, 193, 200n60
Ocean's Eleven, 177–79, 183n8
Ocean's Twelve, 177–79, 178, 183n8
 O'Connor, Donald, 68
Office, The, 60, 120
 O'Haver, Tommy, 223n1, 225n32
 Oldman, Gary, 104
 Old Museum Arts Centre, 243
 Olivier, Laurence, 67
 Olsen, Christopher, 69
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, 102
On the Waterfront, 81, 233, 240–41, 241
 ontology, 12, 19, 21, 28–29, 229, 243, 258
Opposite of Sex, The, 210
Ordeal, The, 146
Original Sin, 179
 ostensiveness, 10, 12, 275, 283
 ostentation, 12, 58, 68, 72, 138–39, 142, 144, 148–49
 other, the, 94–97, 99–100, 102, 105n12, 106n32, 128–29
 Oz, Frank, 210
 Ozu, Yasujiro, 229

P

pain, 108–09, 235
Painted Lady, The, 203
Paint Your Wagon, 192
 Pakula, Alan J., 183n7
Palace of Pleasure, 147
 Palin, Michael, 54–55, 55
Pan's Labyrinth, 262
 pantomime, 50, 59, 257, 261
 paradox of the actor, 189–90
 Paris Conservatory, 185
 Parker, Trey, 210

- parody, 3, 47–48, 54–55, 58–59, 106n30, 136, 206
- Parrot, James, 42
- Party Monster*, 218
- Pasolini, Pier Paolo, 122
- Pattinson, Robert, 5
- Patton, Cindy, 211, 223n5
- Pavlov, Ivan, 162
- Payne, Alexandre, 210
- Pearl, Mariane, 178
- Pearson, Roberta, 130, 202, 268n8
- Peary, Danny, 137, 151n23
- Peirce, Kimberly, 210, 218–20, 225n39
- Penn, Sean, 224n32
- perception, 14n7, 66, 94–102, 108–11, 138, 243
- perception-image, 101
- performance capture: 256, 259, 278, 280–81; definition of 268n2
- performance choices: and audience engagement, 93, 102; defined, 19, 193; and freedom 21–22, 29; of John Wayne, 195–97; and performing queerness, 211, 213, 222; as transparent, 15n10
- performance frame, 15n24, 66, 68, 141
- performance signs: and the actor's body, 275–76; critique of acting as, 96; definition of, 20–21; and Deleuze, 101–02; and empathy, 109; as index of character, 31; and John Wayne, 193–197; and personification, 172; and received acting, 138; and semiotics, 271–72; and sexuality, 211, 223n7
- performative exchange, 164
- performed performance, 54, 62–75, 116–17, 138–41, 203–09
- period drama, 177, 179
- Perrugoria, Jorge, 222
- persona: and comedy, 56–60; and Deanna Durbin, 81–84; and digital technology, 268n11, 278; and familiarity, 76, 83–84, 86–89; and Florence Turner, 201–09; and Humphrey Bogart, 76; and James Stewart, 84–74; and Marlon Brando, 76–81; and Mickey Rourke, 3; and *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* 177–81; and niche stars, 210; and performed performance, 65; vs. personality, 180–81; and realism, 4; and referential acting, 141–42; and Robert Pattinson, 5; and stardom, 177–81, 191, 271–72, 274, 281–83; and transitional cinema, 201–203
- personification, 136, 172–73, 178–81
- Petersen, Wolfgang, 177
- phenomenology, 93–106, 110, 243–44, 252–53, 277
- Philadelphia*, 211, 223n5
- Philadelphia Story, The*, 35–37, 36
- photorealism, 276–78, 280
- physical cinema, 110–11
- Pickpocket*, 101
- picture personality, 133n22, 201–04, 208–09
- Pink Flamingos*, 149
- Pinky*, 211
- Pipolo, Tony, 30
- Piranha*, 145
- Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*, 145
- Pitt, Brad, 5, 170–83, 177, 178
- Pixar, 145
- Plan Nine From Outer Space*, 145
- Plantinga, Carl, 109–10
- Playtime*, 51
- pleasure, 37, 45, 94, 129, 204
- point-of-audition, 245, 254n5
- point-of-view, 110, 114, 229, 254n5, 281
- Polan, Dana, 30
- Polanyi, Michael, 185
- Pollack, Sydney, 58
- polysemous expression, 138–141, 146, 148–49
- pornography, 144
- Porter, Cole, 65
- Posey, Parker, 210
- postmodern acting, 211, 216–18, 221–22
- poststructuralism, 265
- posture: and actor training, 264; in amateur filmmaking, 152–53; and Angelina Jolie, 179; and Brad Pitt, 176, 178; and Catherine Keener, 216–18; and Chloe Sevigny, 218–21; and Chris Cooper, 212–15; and comedy 44, 54–55, 58; and cult acting, 141, 143–44; in *The Dark Knight*, 99–104; fluency of 34; and neo-naturalism, 222; as performance sign, 69, 93, 275;

- and phenomenology, 95–98; in *The Philadelphia Story*, 35–37; and star acting, 180–81
- Preminger, Otto, 149
- premotor neurons, 108, 110
- presence: of actor and character, 63, 171–72, 207; of audience, 64; and belief 69, 72; of the camera, 156, 161–62, 229–242; and confrontation, 96, 98–99, 102–04; co-presence of story and spectacle, 171, 173; and digital technology, 258, 273, 277–81, 283; and listening, 245–46, 252; screen presence, 72, 78–81, 93, 137, 145, 158–59; taxonomies of 7–8
- presentational acting, 54, 141–42, 162–64, 170–72, 257
- pretending, 28–29, 45, 52, 58, 64–67, 78, 88, 176, 264
- primitive cinema. *See* cinema of attractions
- Prince, Stephen, 112–13
- Prince of Darkness*, 145
- Prizzi's Honor*, 182n6
- Propp, Vladimir, 122
- props, 50, 86, 101, 146, 208
- proscenium, 187–88, 257
- Proudfit, Scott, 216
- Proving His Love*, 207–08
- Psycho*, 66, 151n23, 233, 239–40
- Pudovkin, Vsevolod, 7, 96, 129, 158, 169, 173
- puppets: animatronic, 258; *Being John Malkovich* and, 216–18; Bunraku, 264; digital, 261, 278; Edward Gordon Craig and, 261–62, 267; imprinting and, 189; as metaphor for “mocaptors,” 261–62; Ariane Mnouchkine and, 264; show, 68
- Q**
- Quadruphenia*, 282
- Queen Christina*, 130
- queer performance, 210–223
- Quirk, Charlie, 70
- R**
- Rabid*, 147
- Radice, Giovanni Lombardo, 144
- Rains, Claude, 66
- Ranft, Joe, 145
- Rappaport, Mark, 141
- Rashad, Phylicia, 120–21
- Ratzenberger, John, 145
- Ray, Billy, 212
- Ray, Nicholas, 37, 76, 139
- reaction shot, 110, 229
- reading gay, 211, 223n5
- Reagan, Nancy, 137
- realism: and amateur actors, 155–60; and bit players, 136; in *Boys Don't Cry*, 220–21; and CG, 276–78, 280; in cult cinema, 138; and emotions, 107; and “good” acting, 4, 20; in home movies, 162–64; and “invisible” acting, 107; and listening, 243; and performed performance, 71; and post-modern performance, 216; and Stanislavsky, 193; and *trompe l'oeil*, 189; and typage, 157; vs. non-realism, 4
- reality television, 274
- Rebel Without a Cause*, 139
- received acting, 138–39, 141, 146, 148
- reception. *See* audience
- Red River*, 12
- Reed, Oliver, 139
- referential acting, 136, 141–44
- reflexivity, 9, 137, 144, 205, 272
- Reframing Screen Performance*, 13
- rehearsal, 67–68, 73, 81, 160
- Reid, Beryl, 211
- Reisner, Charles, 51
- Reitman, Ivan, 145
- Renunciation*, 204–07
- Repas de Bébé*, 163
- repertory acting, 136, 142–145, 150n18
- representational acting, 3–4, 142, 162–63
- residual payments, 120–21
- resonance, 100–01, 243–45, 252–53
- Resurrection*, 147
- rhythm: and Angelina Jolie, 179; and craft, 20; and Heath Ledger, 98–100, 104; and interaction, 39, 41, 43; and movement, 263; and phenomenology, 93, 95–98, 252; and vocal expression, 58, 197
- Rice, Archie, 67
- Rich, B. Ruby, 222
- Richards, Keith, 145

- Richardson, Tony, 67
 Righthart, Ruthger, 113
 Ritchie, Guy, 177
 Ritt, Martin, 72
 road movie, 142
 Roberts, Julia, 219
 Roberts, Rachel, 278
Rocky Horror Picture Show, The, 137, 141
 Roddam, Frank, 282
 Rodowick, David, 7
 Rodriguez, Robert, 141
 role. *See* character
 role domains, 266
 role-play, 57–59, 77–78, 84, 153, 160–61
 Rollin, Jean, 146
 romance, 22–25, 37, 77–81, 84–86, 173–77, 204–07, 218–221, 229
 romantic comedy, 179, 229
 Roos, Don, 210
 Rose, Tony, 156
 Rosellini, Roberto, 158
 rotoscopy, 276
 Rourke, Mickey, 3
 Rowlands, Gena, 219
 Rozik, Eli, 189, 191, 275–76, 283
Russian Ark, 272
- S**
- Saboteur*, 65–66
 Sakoguchi, Hironobu, 276
 Saldana, Zoe, 278–82, 285n27
 Salkin, Leo, 157–58
 Sandler, Adam, 5
 Sarsgaard, Peter, 220
 Sartre, Jean-Paul, 62
Satan's Cheerleaders, 137
 Saussure, Ferdinand de, 123
 Savini, Tom, 142, 145–46
 Sawyer, Tom, 120
 Sayles, John, 212–13, 224n12,
 Scheff, Thomas, 66
 schema, 100
Schindler's List, 125
School of Rock, 54
 Schreck, Max, 149, 151n35
 Schumacher, Joel, 98, 210
 Schwan, Stephan, 119n32
 Schwarzenegger, Arnold, 145
 science fiction, 179, 266, 281–82
 Scorsese, Martin, 144–45, 151n24
 Scott, Ridley, 182n7
 Scott, Tony, 177, 183n7
- Screen Actors Guild, 120–21, 126, 212, 224n12
 screened reality, 229–41
 screwball comedy, 174, 182n6
 script analysis, 212, 32n6
Searchers, The, 184, 191, 193–98, 194–97
 Seberg, Jean, 140, 140–41
Seed of Chucky, 145
 Segal, Robert, 269n49
 Seiter, William A., 229
 self-consciousness: and amateur acting, 155–56; and animal performance, 28; and auditioning, 49–50, 206; and the camera, 235–36; in home movies, 161–63; and postmodern acting, 222; and referential acting, 141; and theatricality, 153
 self-presentation, 11, 54, 60, 163
 semiotics, 12, 32n6, 96, 122–24, 189, 272–78
 Sena, Dominic, 178, 183n7
 Serkis, Andy, 259, 261–62, 264–65, 267, 282
Se7en, 177, 183n7
Seven Years in Tibet, 177, 183n7
 Sevigny, Chloë, 210–11, 218–23, 221, 225n43, 226n57
 Sexton, Brandon, 220
 sexuality: in *American Beauty*, 212–215; and audience attention, 274; in *Being John Malkovich*, 216–218; in *Boys Don't Cry*, 218–221; and Catherine Keener, 216; and Chloë Sevigny, 219; and cult acting, 144; in *Gilda*, 88; in *In a Lonely Place*, 37–38; and Kevin Spacey, 226n58; in *Kids*, 219; in *The Killing of Sister George*, 211; and Marlon Brando, 77, 81; in *Ménilmontant*, 22–25; in *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, 173–74, 176, 179; and performed queerness, 210–223; in *Philadelphia*, 211, 223n5; in *Some Like it Hot*, 57–58; and stereotyping, 211; in *To Be or Not to Be*, 56–57; in *Tootsie*, 58
Shadow of a Doubt, 239
Shadow of the Vampire, 152n35
 Shakespeare, William, 262
 Sharman, Jim, 137
 Shatner, William, 139, 142

- Shaw, Daniel, 110
Sherman's March, 233–39, 234, 241
 Shields, Ronald, 222
Shining, The, 102, 106n30
Shivers, 147
Showgirls, 139
 Sibirskaia, Nadia, 14, 21–25, 22
 Sichel, Alex, 210
 Sidibe, Gabourey, 256
 signs: the body as, body as sign, 272, 275–76, 283n10; and connotative signification, 5; digital technology and 277, 280; and hyper-semiotization, 274–75; as index of character, 31, 275–76; performance signs, 20–21, 31; and phenomenology, 96; and received acting, 138; semiotics, 271–72; and sexuality, 211, 223n7; taxonomies, 101
 silence, 21, 253
 silent cinema: and Charlie Chaplin 44–45, 49–52; and Chloë Sevigny, 219; and Florence Turner, 201–09; and Laurel and Hardy, 43; and Lev Kuleshov, 262–63; and *Ménilmontant*, 22–25; and motion-capture, 259–61; and pantomime, 257–58; and persona, 59; and picture personalities, 201–02, 208–09
 Simmel, Georg, 64
 Simmons, Jean, 77–81
SlmOne, 276
 simulation, 113–16, 277, 280–81
 Sinatra, Frank, 78–79, 275
Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas, 177
 sincerity: and audiences, 74; and comedy, 44, 54, 56; and emotion, 7, 114, 207; in *Guys and Dolls*, 77–81, and intention, 52–53; and Method acting, 127, 258; and modern life, 65–66; and postmodern performance, 216–221; and Sanford Meisner, 258
 Singer, Tania et al., 108–09
Singin' in the Rain, 68
 Siodmak, Robert, 81, 83
 Sirk, Douglas, 155
Skidoo, 149
Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow, 179
 Slade, David, 3
 slapstick, 42–45, 51–54
Slumdog Millionaire, 120
 Smith, Murray, 110
 Smith, Will, 169
Snatch, 177
 soap operas, 47, 58, 147, 211
 Sobchack, Vivian, 97–98, 105n21, 254n3, 255n16
 social economies, 130, 169–70, 210, 222–23, 271–72, 281–83
 social problem film, 211
 Soderbergh, Steven, 177, 216
 Soergel, Matt, 179
 Sokurov, Alexander, 273
 Solondz, Todd, 210
 somato-motor representation, 109
Some Like It Hot, 57
Something Wild, 145
 song, 68–73, 76–84, 220–221
 sonic body, 243–44, 249, 252–54
 Sophocles, 266
 sound, 43, 55, 59, 96, 243–54, 254n5, 257
 soul, 65, 78, 238, 244, 283
South Park: Bigger, Longer, Uncut, 210
 Spacek, Cissy, 219
 Spacey, Kevin, 213–15, 226n58
 spectacle: and capitalism, 129, 131–32; of character interaction, 277; and the cinema of attractions, 170; and Constantin Stanislavski, 131; defined, 171; and fantasy, 278; and *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, 171; vs. narrative, 171, 181–82; vs. “spectacular elements,” 171; and stage acting, 274; and star acting, 170–72, 181
 spectator. *See* audience
 speculative fiction. *See* science fiction
 Spencer, Herbert, 48
 Spielberg, Steven, 125, 145, 151n22
Spirit of Utopia, The, 131
Spy Game, 177
 Stack, Robert, 56
 stage acting: and Alfred Hitchcock, 65–68; and backstage space, 67, 71; biases in favor of, 19–20, 89, 93; and *Comédie Française*, 184, 186; and Florence Turner, 201–09; and hyper-semiotization, 274–75; and imprinting, 276; and Kathkali, 262; as a

- medium, 193, 257, 271–72, 275; and mysticism, 148–49; and naturalism, 188–89; nineteenth century, 187; and pantomime, 257, 263; and physical etudes, 263; and primitive cinema, 257; and puppetry, 261–62, 264; and repertory acting, 143; and Sanford Meisner, 133n23, 258, 268n10; and *Stage Fright*, 65–68; and staging, 231–33; and the Stanislavski System, 127; and Stanley Cavell, 8; and theatrical archetypes, 266; in *To Be or Not to Be*, 56–57; and transitional cinema, 201; vs. types, 143
- Stage Fright*, 65–68
- staging, 52, 63–64, 67–68, 171, 192
- Stallone, Sylvester, 145, 282
- Stam, Robert, 9
- Stanislavski, Constantin: Active Analysis, 32n6; and audiences, 150n6; and beats, 127; and Benoît Coquelin, 186; and characterization, 143; and dual consciousness, 189; and narrativization, 127; and naturalism, 131, 193; the System, 107, 127, 138, 186
- star acting: and Alfred Hitchcock, 72; and Angelina Jolie, 178–80; and Benoît Coquelin, 184–85; and Brad Pitt, 171–72, 177–80, 182n7, 183n8; and Carole Lombard, 56; and Chloë Sevigny, 218–19; and Chris Cooper, 212; and David Cronenberg, 145–47; and Doris Day, 68–69; as exhibition, 19, 21, 135–36, 170–73, 180–81, 275; and familiarity, 76–89, 171–72, 177–80, 189–93, 198, 275; and Florence Turner, 202–09; and Jim Carrey, 97–98; and John Wayne, 191–98; and labor, 120–22, 130, 272, 282; and myth, 127; and niche stars, 210–11, 221–23; and power, 130; and public image, 141, 184–85, 201–03, 271–74; and queerness, 210–11, 221–23; and realism, 4–5, 188–89, 198; and semiotics, 8, 12, 189–91, 274–75; and social economies, 130, 169–70, 210, 222–23, 271–72, 281–83; and star studies, 8, 12, 181–82, 272; and technology, 256–59, 272, 278–83; and transitional cinema, 201–03, 207–08; vs. impersonation, 29, 169–70, 172–77, 191–93
- stardom, 141, 169–70, 181, 193, 201–03, 208–10, 271–72, 281–83
- Star Is Born*, A, 137
- Starkey, Steve, 261
- star studies, 8, 12, 130, 141, 170, 181–82, 272
- Star Trek*, 142, 280
- Star Wars*, 145, 151n22, 265
- Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*, 151n22
- Stasi, 244, 249, 251
- Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, 51
- Steele, Barbara, 145
- Steiger, Rod, 240–41, 241
- stereotypes: and cult acting, 139; and Hollywood, 192; and queerness, 211, 216, 222, 223n7; and referential acting, 141; and typage, 141, 157
- Stern, Lesley, 10, 16n30, 98, 106n24
- Stewart, James, in *It's a Wonderful Life*, 38–41, 40; in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, 69–72; in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, 85; in *The Philadelphia Story*, 35–37, 36; in *Vertigo*, 84–87, 85, 240
- Stiller, Ben, 2
- Stillman, Whit, 219
- Stone, Oliver, 179
- Stone, Sharon, 142
- story. *See* narrative comprehension
- Story-telling Home Movies and How to Make Them*, 157
- Strasberg, Lee, 107, 117, 121, 127, 133n23, 149, 185
- Strawberry and Chocolate*, 222
- Streep, Meryl, 169, 243
- Streetcar Named Desire*, A, 81, 258
- structuralism, 122–24
- Stupids, The*, 148
- style. *See* form
- subjectivity: and emotions, 114, 263; and empathy, 114; and identification, 3–4; and impressions, 8;

and intersubjectivity, 96–97, 99, 104, 109, 243, 252–54
 subcultural capital, 145
 subjectivity. *See* interiority
Sunset Boulevard, 99
 supporting actors, 44, 78, 171–72, 183n7, 208, 210–11, 215–16, 222
 surveillance, 25–28, 244–45, 247–49, 252
 Swan, Rachel, 220
 Swank, Hilary, 220–22
 Swanson, Gloria, 99
 Swayze, Patrick, 139, 145
 Sweet, Blanche, 203
Sweet and Lowdown, 145
Sweet Bird of Youth, 72
 sympathy: and behavior, 37; and emotion, 113–17 and humanist engagement, 3–5; as “identification” with stars, 72, 84–85, 182, 191–92; and listening, 253, and mirror neurons, 107, 111, 113; as viewer affect, 21; withholding of, 83–84
Synecdoche, New York, 225n32
 synthespian. *See* motion-capture and “mocaptors”

T

Tabio, Juan Carlos, 222
 tacit dimension, 185
 tactility, 95, 100–102
Taking Lives, 179
 talent, 5, 82, 115, 139, 142, 190, 192
Talented Mr. Ripley, The, 210
Tambours sur la Digue, 264
 Tarantino, Quentin, 274
Tartuffe, 189
 Tati, Jacques, 51
 Taussig, Michael, 105n13
Taxi Driver, 145
 taxonomy: of signs, 101; of role types, 266
 technology: and the camera, 229, 233, 241; and change, 9, 10; and digital cinema, 256–61, 267, 272–74, 277, 281–82; and fascism, 126; and performance, 114, 116, 187, 191–92, 198, 256–62, 273; and puppetry, 261–62; and Siegfried Kracauer, 8; and sound, 244, 252; and surveillance, 25, 244–250, 252; and theory, 12–13; and Vsevolod Pudovkin, 129; and Walter Benjamin, 125
 Teena, Brandon, 218–21, 225n39, 225n57
 television, 58, 120–21, 135–36, 223, 272, 274, 278, 280
Terror, The, 137
 theatre. *See* stage acting
 theatricality: comic, 55, 58; as exaggeration, 56, 98, 102, 136–39, 153–155, 162, 164; disregard for 4, 32n4; as “framing,” 138; and full-body gestures, 193; impersonation and, 272; and “mad acting,” 148–49; and stage melodrama, 275
Thelma and Louise, 182n7
 Theophrastus, 266
theoria, 7–9
 theory: acting as, 4–6, 267; and aesthetics, 2, 10; and Benoît Coquelin, 185–87; and Constantin Stanislavski, 107, 127, 138, 186, 189; of cinematic facial recognition, 109–10; of comic acting, 47–49, 60; desirability of 1–2; domains of, 10; of dramaturgy and Erving Goffman, 59–60, 63, 65, 68, 70; and intuition, 3–7, 14; of listening, 245–46, 253; and myth, 122–126, 265; of neo-naturalism, 212; and neuroscience, 107–109, 116; and non-specialist viewers, 1–6; and persona, 87; of phenomenology, 94–97, 252; propaedeutic function of, 8–9; of polysemous expression, 138–41, 146; of postmodern performance, 216, 221; resistance to, 1, 185; as “self-accounting,” 7–8, 10, 13–14; and semiotics, 12, 32n6, 189, 272–78; and Soviet filmmakers, 138–41, 157–58, 262–63; and Stanley Cavell, 6, 8, 21, 33, 229; and syncretism, 8–9; as *theoria*, 7–9
There’s No Business Like Show Business, 68
30 Days of Night, 3
39 Steps, The, 65
30 Rock, 121, 145

- Thompson, Kristin, 130, 257–58
 3D, 258
 thriller, 145, 147, 177, 179
 Thucydides, 124
 time-image, 101, 106n27
 timing, 37–39, 52, 87–88, 197
 Tisdell, Lana, 217
To Be or Not To Be, 56–57, 57
To Die For, 147
 Tomasulo, Frank, 212
Tootsie, 58
 Töpper, Jörn, 119n32
Torn Curtain, 72
Touch of Evil, 145
 Tracy, Spencer, 127
Train Arriving at Ciotat, 163
 transformation: and the camera, 52, 237–38; and facial expression, 34–35, 45; and “good” acting, 88–89, 131; and impersonation, 29, 78, 136–38, 172–81, 189, 265, 272; and ordinary behavior, 138, 198; and the performance frame, 71–72, 138
 transgender, 218, 222
 transitional cinema, 13, 59, 170, 201–09, 257
 trans-mediation, 271, 285n31
 Trejo, Danny, 141
Trial By Jury, 147
 Tribiani, Joey, 135–37, 139, 149
trompe l’oeil, 189
Tron: Legacy, 256
Tropic Thunder, 2–3
Trouble in Paradise, 182n6
 Troy, 177, 183n8
True Heart Susie, 236
True Romance, 183n7
 Tucker, Patrick, 192
 Turner, Florence, 201–09
 Turvey, Malcolm, 8
Twelve Monkeys, 177, 183n7
Twilight, 5, 139
Twilight Zone: The Movie, 151n25
Twins, 145
 typepage, 143–44, 157–58
 types: and archetypes, 265–67; and Brad Pitt, 177, 179; and character acting, 143–44; and comedy, 44, 57–58, 97–98; role types, 266; and star acting, 88–89, 179–80; and typecasting, 143, 157–58, 192–93; vs. characters, 4
- U**
 übermarionette, 261, 271
 utopia, 120–22, 125, 131–32, 276
- V**
 Van Damme, Jean-Claude, 135–36, 136, 139, 149, 151n36
 Van Sant, Gus, 147
 Vasiliades, Tom, 107
Velvet Goldmine, 210
 Verbinski, Gore, 145, 178, 183n7
 Verhoeven, Paul, 139, 142
 verisimilar style, 3, 158, 202–05, 207, 278–79
Vertigo, 66, 84–87, 85, 151n23, 233, 240
 Vico, Giambattista, 124
 videogames, 179, 276–77, 285n31
 Vidor, Charles, 88
 Vidor, King, 20
 Vietnam War, 213
 viewers. *See* audience
 villainy, 20, 65–66, 73, 98, 111, 141, 240–41, 267
 Vincent, Mal, 179
 Vitagraph, 202–04, 207–08, 257
 Vogler, Christopher, 269n50
 voice: and the actor’s body, 95; in amateur films, 159; and Angelina Jolie, 179; and Brad Pitt, 176, 178; and Catherine Keener, 216–18; and character acting, 143; and characterization, 172–76; and Chloe Sevigny, 218–21; and Chris Cooper, 212–15; and comedy, 55–58; and communication, 42–43; and Deanna Durbin, 82–84; of Doris Day, 69; of Greta Garbo, 33; of Heath Ledger, 99–102; and improvisation, 58; interior, 248, 253; and Jean-Luc Nancy, 253; of Jim Carrey, 98; of John Wayne, 190–91, 193, 197–98; in *The Lives of Others*, 245, 248–49; of Marlon Brando, 79–81; as material dimension of acting, 20, 93, 169–70, 182, 185, 191, 193, 275; of Meryl Streep, 169, 243; and performance capture, 278; and star acting, 171, 176–80
 von Donnersmarck, Florian Henckel, 13, 243, 253

von Sternberg, Josef, 130
 von Trier, Lars, 149, 219, 283n10
 vulnerability, 23–28, 60, 79–81, 180,
 212, 220, 249–51

W

Walczac, Diana, 259
 Waldenfels, Bernhard, 105n12
Walking and Talking, 224n32
Walk the Line, 132
 Walters, Charles, 68
 Walthall, Henry B., 130
 Warburg, Aby, 124
War of the Roses, 182n6
 Waters, John, 145, 149
 Waugh, Tom, 160–62
 Wayne, John, 12, 184–88, 190–98,
 194–97
 Weaver, Sigourney, 279, 284n22
 Welles, Orson, 139, 145
 West, Simon, 178
 Westerns, 184–85, 196
What Just Happened?, 274
 White, Hayden, 125
 White, Patricia, 211, 222, 225n57
 Whitlock, Alfred, 63
 Wiazemsky, Anne, 28
 Wiene, Robert, 137
 Wilder, Billy, 57, 99
 Wildermoth, Lisa, 259
Wild One, The, 81
 Wilde, Oscar, 120

Williams, Cindy, 25
 Williamson, Fred, 142
 Willis, Bruce, 274, 282
 Wilson, Elizabeth, 115
 Winstone, Ray, 259, 282
 Winterbottom, Michael, 178
The Witches of Eastwick, 102
 Witherspoon, Reese, 132
 Wittgenstien, Ludwig, 239
 Wojcik, Pamela Robertson, 8–9
Workers Leaving the Factory, 163
World Viewed, The, 229, 15n24
 World War II, 106n27, 137, 185
 Worthen, William, 190
 Worthington, Sam, 279–81
Wrestler, The, 3
 Wright, Robin, 285n31
Wrong Man, The, 233, 239–40

Y

Yared, Gabriel, 254
 Yimou, Zhang, 3
Your Friends and Neighbors, 210
 YouTube, 152
 Yun-Fat, Chow, 3

Z

Zeki, Semir, 118n5
 Zemeckis, Robert, 259, 281–82
 Zola, Émile, 186
 Zucker, Carole, 9, 14n2
 Zwick, Edward, 177