

Wild (2014; director Jean-Marc Vallée)



CHAPTER

ACTING

7

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- ✓ Explain how the coming of sound into the movie industry affected acting.
- ✓ Describe how movie acting today differs from that of the classical studio era.
- ✓ Explain why the relationship between the actor and the camera is so important.
- ✓ Describe the criteria used to cast actors.
- ✓ Explain the differences between naturalistic and nonnaturalistic movie acting.
- ✓ Define *improvisational acting*.
- ✓ Explain the potential effects on acting of framing, composition, lighting, shot types, and shot lengths.

What Is Acting?

It's actors that draw us to the movies. And today's movies are rich with talented actors, including (to name just a few) Christian Bale (*The Fighter*, 2010), Cate Blanchett (*Blue Jasmine*, 2013), Anthony Hopkins (*Hitchcock*, 2012), Viola Davis and Victoria Spencer (*The Help*, 2011), Michael Fassbender (*Shame*, 2011), Nicole Kidman (*Stoker*, 2013), Anders Danielson Lie (*Oslo, August 31st*, 2012), Paulina Garcia (*Gloria*, 2013), Daniel Day-Lewis (*Lincoln*, 2012), Emmanuelle Riva (*Amour*, 2012), Michael B. Jordan (*Fruitvale Station*, 2013), Jennifer Lawrence (*Silver Linings Playbook*, 2012), Chiwetel Ejiofor (*12 Years a Slave*, 2013), Dane De Haan (*The Place Beyond the Pines*, 2012), and Agata Trzebuchowska (*Ida*, 2013). We all have our favorite actors, and while you may not be familiar with all of these actors, you can easily check out their performances to see what great acting is all about.

It's easy to define narrative, *mise-en-scène*, or cinematography because those formal aspects of filmmaking depend in part on techniques and conventions that are widely accepted by filmmakers. Acting, by comparison, presents a different challenge because there is no one

way to do it; every actor is a master of his or her own technique in creating characters. Yet Joaquin Phoenix, one of today's most impressive actors, does not even try to define his work, and it's not a cliché to say that it speaks for itself. In *Her* (2013; director Spike Jonze), Phoenix plays Theodore Twombly, a lonely introvert who falls in love with Samantha, the female voice of his computer's operating system, voiced by Scarlett Johansson, whom we hear but never see. Their relationship falls apart when Samantha dumps him (she has thousands of cyberlovers just like him). It's both funny and sad when Theodore is devastated by something that is as impossible as it is peculiar. Throughout, Phoenix's portrayal of this character sustains the film's development. He is almost always on the screen, something that only a very few actors in film history have ever accomplished, and he amazes us with his control as an actor. Although he worked closely with the director, costar, and supporting actors, Joaquin Phoenix delivers the movie.¹

Screen acting of this kind is an art in which an actor uses imagination, intelligence, psychology, memory, vocal technique, facial expressions, body language, and an overall knowledge of the filmmaking process to realize, under the director's guidance, the character created by the screenwriter. The performance and effect of that art can seem mysterious and magical when we're enjoying a movie, and acting turns out to be even more complex than we might at first assume.

Our initial interest in a movie is almost always sparked by the actors featured in it. As the critic Pauline Kael said, "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."² The power of some actors—Angelina Jolie or George Clooney, for example—to draw an audience is frequently more important to a movie's financial success than any other factor. For this reason, some observers regard screen actors as mere commodities, cogs in a machine of promotion and hype designed only to generate revenue. Although even the most accomplished screen actors can be used as fodder for promotional campaigns, such a

1. In *Locke* (2013; director Steven Knight), star Tom Hardy is the only actor in the film, and he carries on various telephone conversations while driving his car down a British highway. Like *Her*, this drama depends more on the voices than the visuals, but because the actor never leaves the car, it is far more claustrophobic. Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013) is almost exclusively devoted to a space scientist (Sandra Bullock) trying to save herself, and by contrast, the visuals seem more important than the voices.

2. Leonard Quart, "I Still Love Going to Movies: An Interview with Pauline Kael," *Cineaste* 25, no. 2 (2000): 10.



The camera and the actor

English film actor Michael Caine has compared the movie camera to an impossibly attentive lover who “hangs on your every word, your every look; she can’t take her eyes off you. She is listening to and recording everything you do, however minutely you do it.”³ That appears to be exactly what the camera is doing in this expressive close-up of Caine as Thomas Fowler in Phillip Noyce’s *The Quiet American* (2002). The business and art of Hollywood moviemaking intersect when “bankable” stars such as Michael Caine (and in this example, his costar Brendan Fraser, left, back to camera) take on challenging, unglamorous roles that transcend their physical attractiveness.

view overlooks the many complex and important ways that skillful acting can influence the narrative, style, and meanings of a film. Actor Cate Blanchett believes that “when acting works, when performance works, when theater’s great, when films connect—whether it’s a piece of profound satire or a work of great drama—it expands what it means to be human.”⁴ Writer-director-producer-actor Orson Welles, who questioned nearly every other aspect of filmmaking dogma, firmly believed in the importance of acting: “I don’t understand how movies exist independently of the actor—I truly don’t.”⁵

Despite its central importance, acting is also the aspect of filmmaking over which directors have the least precise control. Directors may describe literally what they want from their principal collaborators—for example, screenwriters or costume designers—but they can only suggest to actors what they want. That becomes quite different when a director-screenwriter like Paul Thomas Anderson writes parts specifically for the actors he casts. This approach has led to many memorable performances—for example, by Daniel Day-Lewis and

Paul Dano in *There Will Be Blood* (2007), Amy Adams and Philip Seymour Hoffman in *The Master* (2010), and Josh Brolin and Reese Witherspoon in *Inherent Vice* (2014)—in which the director, screenwriter, and actor enjoy an unusually close collaboration. However, screen actors, or at least experienced screen actors, know that the essential relationship is between them and the camera—not between them and the director or even the audience. Actors interpret the director’s guidance in the area between them and the lens—an intimate and narrowly defined space that necessarily concentrates much of the actors’ energy on their faces. Through composition, close-ups, camera angles and movements, and other cinematic techniques, movie actors always come closer to the audience and appear larger than actors on the stage do.

The camera makes possible an attention to detail that was impossible before the invention of cinema, mainly because stage acting forced actors to project their voices and their gestures to the back of the theater. Screen acting, as an experience, can be as tight and intimate as examining a painting at arm’s length. As American screen actor Joan Crawford put it, “A movie actor paints with the tiniest brush.”⁶

Movie Actors

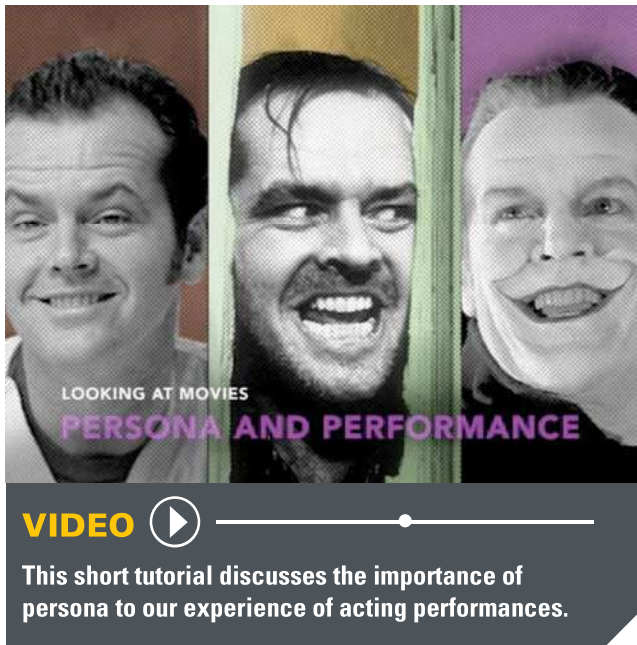
The challenges facing movie actors in interpreting and pretending to be their characters, and the responsibilities involved in performing those characters on the screen, are very different from the challenges and responsibilities facing stage actors. Stage actors convey their interpretations of the characters they play directly to the audience through voice, gesture, and movement. By contrast, movie actors, using gesture and movement—and voice since the coming of sound—convey their characters directly to the camera. In turn, that camera is what makes the movie actor’s performance so different from the stage actor’s. Stage actors play to a large audience and must project their voices so they can be heard throughout the theater. They must avoid the soft speech, subtle facial expressions, or small gestures that are fundamental tools of the movie actor.

3. Michael Caine, *Acting in Film: An Actor’s Take on Movie Making* (New York: Applause, 1990), p. 4.

4. Qtd. in Melena Ryzik, “Desperate Times Call for Her,” *New York Times* (February 13, 2014), p. C1; www.nytimes.com/2014/02/13/movies/awardsseason/cate-blanchett-has-front-runner-oscar-status.html (accessed February 6, 2015).

5. Orson Welles and Peter Bogdanovich, *This Is Orson Welles*, ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 262.

6. Joan Crawford, qtd. in Lillian Ross and Helen Ross, *The Player: A Profile of an Art* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962), p. 66.



Stage actors, who must memorize their lines, have the advantage of speaking them in the order in which they were written. This in turn makes it much easier to maintain psychological, emotional, and physical continuity in a performance as the play proceeds. By contrast, movie actors are subject to the shooting schedule. For budgetary and logistical reasons, most shots are not made in the sequence indicated in the screenplay, so movie actors learn only those lines that they need for the moment. Therefore, movie actors bear the additional burden, particularly on their memory, of creating continuity between related shots, even though the shots may have been made days, weeks, or even months apart.

Judith Anderson had an illustrious stage career before achieving fame as a movie actor as Mrs. Danvers in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940). She emphasizes how each form affects an actor's movements. On the stage she is free (to move where she wants, scratch her ear if she wants, add a bit of business if she wants), but on the screen she is constrained by the physical space before the camera, the lighting and other technical aspects, and the much greater size of the image on the screen as opposed to the natural appearance of an actor on the stage.⁷

To achieve the goal of maintaining continuity (as we will discuss in Chapter 8), editing is a major factor in putting shots together and creating the performance. During a play, the stage actor performs each scene only once; in the shooting of a movie, the actor may be asked

to do many takes before the director is satisfied with the performance. Before a shot is made, the movie actor must be prepared to wait, sometimes for long periods, while camera, lighting, or sound equipment is moved or readjusted; the stage actor faces no such delays or interruptions.

Although the theater and the movies are both collaborative arts, once the curtain goes up, stage actors need not think much about the backstage crew, for the crew will perform scenery or lighting changes according to a fixed schedule. Movie actors, however, must play directly to the camera while dozens of people are standing around just outside the camera's range. These people are doing their jobs, but also watching and listening to everything the actors do. Some people are there because they have to be (e.g., the director, script supervisor, cinematographer, sound recordist, makeup artist, hair-stylist); others are there waiting to make the necessary changes in scenery, properties, or lighting required for the next shot. Over the years, some temperamental actors have succeeded in closing the set to all but the most essential personnel, but that is an exceptional practice. Traditionally, however, movie sets have been closed to visitors, particularly the media.

Although there are probably as many types of actors as there are actors themselves, for the purposes of this discussion, we can identify four key types:

1. actors who take their personae from role to role (personality actors)
2. actors who deliberately play against our expectations of their personae
3. actors who seem to be different in every role (chameleon actors)
4. actors who are often nonprofessionals or people who are cast to bring verisimilitude to a part

In our everyday lives, each of us creates a persona, the image of character and personality that we want to show the outside world. For movie actors, those personae are their appearance and mannerisms of moving and delivering dialogue—unique creations that are relatively consistent from role to role and from performance to performance. Actors' personae are usually (but not always) rooted in their natural behavior, personality, and physicality. Current actors defined by their personae include Tom Cruise, Cameron Diaz, and Will Smith.

7. See interview with Anderson on Disc 2 of the Criterion Collection DVD release of *Rebecca* (2001).

Paul Giamatti is not, by Hollywood standards, a leading man, yet in Richard J. Lewis's *Barney's Version* (2010), this actor—whose persona might be described as an overweight, balding, neurotic but likable loser—channels these attributes and attitudes in a way that makes us care about his character, Barney Panofsky. Even more versatile actors, not just those who are popular action or comedy stars, rely on persona. Among them are Susan Sarandon, Sean Penn, Morgan Freeman, Jack Nicholson, William H. Macy, Chris Cooper, Ewan McGregor, and Benicio Del Toro.

For many movie actors, the persona is the key to their career as well as an important part of film marketing and why we choose particular movies over others. One reason audiences go to movies is to see a certain kind of story. That's a big part of what the concept of genre is all about. You go to a romantic comedy, an action movie, a horror film, or a comic-book adaptation because you know what to expect, and you want what you expect. Having made your choice on the basis of story, you should get familiar and appealing narrative structures, cinematic conventions, character types, dramatic situations, and payoffs.

The same thing goes for persona-identified actors like Tom Cruise. He's not only good-looking, but he projects an interesting balance of arrogance and vulnerability

that appeals to many viewers. When you go to a Tom Cruise movie (the kind where the star's name is the most important factor in your choice), you have an expectation of the kind of performance he's going to give you, based on his persona. And you expect to see that performance, that persona, in the context of a certain kind of story. Part of the fun comes from seeing that persona in different kinds of movies, enjoying its interaction with a particular role or genre. So part of the reason you might go to see Cruise in Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) is to see what he makes of Dr. William Harford, a Manhattan physician facing serious sexual and moral issues; or, in Michael Mann's *Collateral* (2004), how he portrays Vincent, a hit man; how he pushes the comic side of his persona and unfortunately becomes the stereotype of an end-of-the-line rock star in *Rock of Ages* (2012; director Adam Shankman); keeps his investigator/agent role going (honed perfectly in the *Mission Impossible* and *Jack Reacher* series). His foray into the science-fiction genre continues with *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014; director Doug Liman).

Sometimes an actor with a familiar, popular persona takes on a role that goes against what we expect—for example, Jack Nicholson as Warren Schmidt in Alexander Payne's *About Schmidt* (2002) or Cate Blanchett as Jude in Todd Haynes's *I'm Not There* (2007). A major factor



Cate Blanchett's complete transformation as Bob Dylan

In *I'm Not There* (2007; director Todd Haynes), Cate Blanchett transforms her glamorous self into Jude, a skinny, ragged, androgynous folksinger at the beginning of his career: Bob Dylan. In this image, Jude is responding to an obnoxious British journalist who questions his motives in switching from acoustic to electric guitar in 1965. To understand how accomplished Blanchett's portrayal is, compare her Dylan with the real Dylan as he appears in D. A. Pennebaker's *Dont Look Back* (1967) or Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan* (2005).

affecting our enjoyment of actors in such roles is not just the role, but the strange sensation of seeing an actor whose persona we have come to know well play a totally different sort of role. In Nicholson's case, the normally crafty, strong, menacing man portrays a powerless, mundane, befuddled, and cuckolded insurance salesman. In Blanchett's career, we are astonished to see an actor known for her regal beauty in such roles as Queen Elizabeth I in Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth* (1998) or Lady Galadriel in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–3) when she undergoes a complete physical transformation as Jude, one of six different interpretations, by six different actors, of Bob Dylan in Todd Haynes's *I'm Not There* (2007). Blanchett is famous for her ability to change her distinctly Australian accent to meet the needs of any role. She can speak the Queen's English as Elizabeth and Galadriel or, with a pitch-perfect accent redolent of New York's upper East Side, she can become Jasmine Francis, a woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown, in Woody Allen's *Blue Jasmine* (2013). In *I'm Not There*, she hits the mark squarely with her interpretation of Dylan's twangy Midwestern speech. In creating her gender-bending portrait of a diffident, slightly androgynous singer, she uses every technique in the actor's stock besides her voice: movements and gestures, wig, makeup, eyeglasses, costumes, and props.

On the other side of the acting scale is the chameleon actor, named for the lizard that can make quick, frequent changes in its appearance in response to the environment. Chameleon actors adapt their look, mannerisms, and delivery to suit the role. They surprise us as persona actors when they are cast, as Jack Nicholson or Charlize Theron often are, in a role we do not expect—one that extends their range. For example, Jeff Bridges often looks so different in roles that he's unrecognizable at first (see p. 292): Starman/Scott Hayden in John Carpenter's *Starman* (1984), Preston Tucker in Francis Ford Coppola's *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* (1988), Obadiah Stane in John Favreau's *Iron Man* (2008), or Rooster Cogburn in Ethan and Joel Coen's *True Grit* (2010). Indeed, along with such multitalented colleagues as Leonardo DiCaprio, Brad Pitt, and Christian Bale, Bridges is a marvel of flexibility.

Johnny Depp, an actor who makes quick and frequent changes in the roles he plays, has reached star status without any fixed persona. Although he's earned the reputation as the ideal *nonnaturalistic* actor for such Tim Burton movies as *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Sweeney*

Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street (2007), *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), and *Dark Shadows* (2012), he's also played an astonishing range of very different roles, such as Raoul Duke/Hunter S. Thompson in Terry Gilliam's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998); the cocaine king George Jung in Ted Demme's *Blow* (2001); Sir James Matthew Barrie, the author of *Peter Pan*, in Marc Forster's *Finding Neverland* (2004); Lord Rochester, the seventeenth-century English poet, in Laurence Dunmore's *The Libertine* (2004); and gangster John Dillinger in Michael Mann's *Public Enemies* (2009). In the current phase of his career, among other roles, he's played the over-the-top character of Captain Jack Sparrow in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series (various dates and directors); a scientist in Wally Pfister's *Transcendence* (2014); Guy LaPointe, a Canadian cop, in Kevin Smith's bizarre comedy *Tusk* (2014); and Charlie Mortdecai, an eccentric art dealer in search of a stolen painting, in David Koepp's crime caper *Mortdecai* (2015).

Finally, there are the nonprofessional actors, real-life people who take roles in feature films (not documentaries) to play characters whose lives are much like their own. The earliest movies were cast with only nonprofessionals, and the tradition has remained in movies that call for such casting. Memorable examples include almost all the movies in the Italian neorealist tradition, including an entire community re-creating their daily lives in Ermanno Olmi's *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* (1978). Michel Gondry recruited a group of Bronx high school students to act as Bronx high school students in *The We and the I* (2012). Similarly, Laurent Cantet recruited François Bégaudeau, as the teacher, and a group of mixed-race students, many of them immigrants, for *The Class* (2008), his film about the challenges of teaching in a French school. In *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), William Wyler's powerful movie about three veterans of World War II, a nonprofessional almost steals the movie away from the professionals when Harold Russell, who lost both arms in the conflict, portrays the challenges facing such a handicapped man. In *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012; director Benh Zeitlin), the two leading characters are played by nonprofessionals Quvenzhané Wallis and Dwight Henry. And in Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* (1999), a haunting film about a Scottish slum kid, fledgling actor Tommy Flanagan plays the lead.

Although previous generations of stage actors knew that their duty was to convey emotion through recognized conventions of speech and gesture (mannerisms), screen actors have enjoyed a certain freedom to adopt



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The versatile Johnny Depp

A contemporary actor of style and substance, Johnny Depp has exhibited impressive flexibility, both in the roles he chooses and the techniques he employs, to convey his characters' often complex emotional lives. [1] As Gilbert in Lasse Hallström's moving drama *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (1993), he plays a man who tenderly looks after Arnie (Leonard DiCaprio, *left*), his younger brother who has developmental disability. [2] In Mike Newell's *Donnie Brasco* (1997), in a complete change of pace, Depp plays an FBI agent who, under the alias Donnie Brasco, infiltrates a New York crime family. Benjamin "Lefty" Ruggiero (Al Pacino, *left*), a minor gang member who's going nowhere in the mob, makes Donnie his protégé with the hope that he'll be successful. In this image, Lefty tells Donnie (*right*) that if he successfully kills an adversary, he'll be a "made man" (a full-fledged member of the gang). Donnie knows he's betrayed Lefty and that when this assignment is over, Lefty will be arrested. Depp masterfully shows how Donnie undergoes a fascinating psychological change, slowly becoming attracted to a life of crime rather than fighting it, but ultimately remaining true to his real job. Lasse Hallström's romantic comedy *Chocolat* (2000) is a slight tale about two free spirits who find themselves in a conservative French village, some of whose inhabitants regard them as undesirable. Depp is Roux, a roguish, Irish "river rat," seen here [3] with Vianne (Juliet Binoche), a French chocolate maker. Their affair doesn't amount to much, but Depp was born to play this kind of role, and he makes the most of it, Irish accent and all. In *The Curse of the Black Pearl*, the first movie in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series, a return to the Hollywood genre involving swashbuckling heroes, Depp plays Jack Sparrow. He's seen here [4] looking unlike any pirate you've ever seen on-screen, a look reportedly inspired by guitarist Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones. His performance, enhanced by extraordinary makeup and costuming, helped make the series a major box-office hit, and Depp, one of the highest-paid actors in movie history.

individual styles that communicate emotional meaning through subtle and highly personal gestures, expressions, and varieties of intonation. American screen actor Barbara Stanwyck credited director Frank Capra with teaching her that "if you can think it, you can make the audience know it. . . . On the stage, it's mannerisms. On the screen, your range is shown in your eyes."⁸ In

addition, many different types of inspiration fuel screen acting; many factors guide actors toward their performances in front of the camera.

Consider the work of Meryl Streep, who has been nominated eighteen times for an Oscar. That's more nominations than any actor in the history of the Academy Awards (15 for Best Actress, 2 wins; 3 for

8. Barbara Stanwyck, qtd. in *Actors on Acting for the Screen: Roles and Collaborations*, ed. Doug Tomlinson (New York: Garland, 1994), p. 524.

Best Supporting Actress, 1 win). Despite her success in over fifty feature films, Streep, like many seasoned actors, finds it difficult to describe her talent. She says it is

an art that I find in its deepest essence to be completely mysterious. . . . I have been smug and willfully ignorant. I've cultivated a deliberate reluctance to investigate my own method of working because I'm afraid of killing the goose. I'm afraid if I parse it I won't be able to do it anymore.⁹

Streep has played an astonishing variety of fictional and actual people on the screen. Fictional characters include Anna in Karel Reisz's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981), a particularly interesting movie because Anna, a film actor, is creating the character of Sarah, a romantic of the Victorian era; Sophie Zawistowski, a woman haunted by her Nazi-era past, in Alan J. Pakula's *Sophie's Choice* (1982); or Miranda Priestly in David Frankel's *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), where the character, though fictional, is thought to have been influenced by Anna Wintour, the longtime editor of *Vogue*. By contrast, you might also study Streep's portrayals, often controversial with audiences, of such real people as Karen Blixen, the Danish novelist writing under the name of Isak Dinesen, in *Out of Africa* (1985; director Sydney Pollack); Julia Child, America's irresistible master of French cooking, in *Julie & Julia* (2009; director Nora Ephron); Margaret Thatcher, the British prime minister, in *The Iron Lady* (2011; director Phyllida Lloyd), or feminist Emmeline Pankhurst in *Suffragette* (2015; director Sarah Gavron). Given this variety that requires her to be different in every role, Streep says: "Acting is not about being someone different. It's finding the similarity in what is apparently different, then finding myself in there."¹⁰

A director's individual style plays a significant role in how actors develop their characters. The many approaches include encouraging actors to identify with characters (e.g., Elia Kazan), promoting a style loosely referred to as method acting (Terence Malick); favoring spontaneity, unpredictability, and sometimes improvi-

sation (Richard Linklater); and encouraging actors to see their performances from a cinematographic point of view and explicitly imagine how their gestures and expressions will look on-screen (Alfred Hitchcock). This latter approach encourages actors to think more than to feel, to perform their roles almost as if they are highly skilled technicians whose main task is to control one aspect of the *mise-en-scène* (performance), much as set designers control the look and feel of sets, sound mixers control sound, directors of photography control camera work, and so on.

No matter what type a movie actor is—how definite or changeable the persona is, how varied the roles are, how successful the career is—we tend to blur the distinction between the actor on-screen and the person offscreen. The heroes of today's world are performers—athletes, musicians, actors—and a vast media industry exists to keep them in the public eye and encourage us to believe that they are every bit as fascinating in real life as they are on the screen. Inevitably, some movie actors become rich and famous without having much art or craft in what they do. Essentially, they walk through their movies, seldom playing any character other than themselves. Fortunately, for every one of these actors there are many more talented actors who take their work seriously; try, whenever possible, to extend the range of roles they play; and learn to adapt to the constantly shifting trends of moviemaking and public taste.

One definition of great acting is that it should look effortless, but that takes talent, training, discipline, experience, and hard work. It also takes the skills necessary for dealing with pressures that range from getting older (and thus becoming more apt to be replaced by a younger, better-looking actor) to fulfilling a producer's expectation that you will succeed in carrying a multimillion-dollar production and making it a profitable success.

As we continue this discussion of acting, remember that it is not actors' personal lives that count, but their ability to interpret and portray certain characters. In today's world, where the media report actors' every offscreen activity, especially indiscretions, maintaining the focus required for good acting poses a challenge.

9. Jennifer Greenstein Altmann, "Meryl Streep Talks about the 'Mysterious' Art of Acting" (December 1, 2006), www.princeton.edu/main/news/archive/S16/49/92S82 (accessed February 5, 2014).

10. www.goodreads.com/quotes/140679-acting-is-not-about-being-someone-different (accessed February 5, 2014). See also Karina Longworth, *Meryl Streep: Anatomy of an Actor* (London: Phaidon Press, 2014).

Although the media have always done this, the behavior of some of today's actors not only is more reckless but also is seldom covered up by a studio's public-relations department like it was in Hollywood's golden age.

The Evolution of Screen Acting

Early Screen-Acting Styles

The people on the screen in the very first movies were not actors but ordinary people playing themselves. The early films caught natural, everyday actions—feeding a baby, leaving work, yawning, walking up and down stairs, swinging a baseball bat, sneezing—in a simple, realistic manner. “Acting” was simply a matter of trying to ignore the presence of the camera as it recorded the action. In the early 1900s, filmmakers started to tell stories with their films and thus needed professional actors. Most stage actors at the time scorned film acting, however, and refused to take work in the fledgling industry.

Therefore, the first screen actors were usually rejects from the stage or fresh-faced amateurs eager to break into the emerging film industry. Lack of experience (or talent) wasn't the only hurdle they faced. Because no standard language of cinematic expression or any accepted tradition of film direction existed at the time, these first actors had little choice but to adopt the acting style favored in the nineteenth-century theater and try to adapt it to their screen roles. The resulting quaint, unintentionally comical style consists of exaggerated gestures, overly emphatic facial expressions, and bombastic mouthing of words (which could not yet be recorded on film) that characterized the stage melodramas popular at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1908, the Société Film d'Art (Art Film Society), a French film company, was founded with the purpose of creating a serious artistic cinema that would attract equally serious people who ordinarily preferred the theater. Commercially, this was a risky step not only because cinema was in its infancy but also because, since the sixteenth century, the French had seen theater as a temple of expression. Its glory was (and remains) the Comédie-Française, the French national theater. To begin its work at the highest possible level, the Société Film d'Art joined creative forces with this revered organization, which agreed to lend its actors to the society's films. In addition, the society commissioned leading

theater playwrights, directors, and designers, as well as prominent composers, to create its film productions.

Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923), adored by her public as *la divine Sarah*, was the first great theatrical actor to appear in a movie, Clément Maurice's *Le Duel d'Hamlet* (*Hamlet*, 1900, 2 min.), a short account of Hamlet's duel with Laertes. She appeared in at least seven features, the most important of which is *Les Amours d'Elisabeth, Reine d'Angleterre* (*Queen Elizabeth*, 1912, 44 min.), directed by Henri Desfontaines and Louis Mercanton and produced by the Société Film d'Art.

As interesting as it is to see one of the early twentieth century's greatest actors as Elizabeth I, it is even more interesting to observe how closely this “canned theater” resembled an actual stage production. The space we see is that of the theater, which is limited to having actors enter and exit from stage left or right. It is unlike the cinema, where characters are not confined to the physical boundaries imposed by theater architecture. For all her reputed skill, Bernhardt's acting could only echo what she did on the stage. Thus we see the exaggerated facial expressions, strained gestures, and clenched fists of late-nineteenth-century melodrama. Although such artificiality was conventional and thus accepted by the audience, it was all wrong for the comparative intimacy between the spectator and the screen that existed even in the earliest movie theaters.

Despite its heavy-handed technique, *Queen Elizabeth* succeeded in attracting an audience interested in serious drama on the screen, made the cinema socially and intellectually respectable, and therefore encouraged further respect for the industry and its development. What remained to be done was not to teach Sarah Bernhardt how to act for the camera, but to develop cinematic techniques uniquely suitable for the emerging narrative cinema as well as a style of acting that could help actors realize their potential in this new medium.

D. W. Griffith and Lillian Gish

American film pioneer D. W. Griffith needed actors who could be trained to work in front of the camera, and by 1913 he had recruited a group that included some of the most important actors of the time: Mary Pickford, Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Mae Marsh, Blanche Sweet, Lionel Barrymore, Harry Carey, Henry B. Walthall, and Donald Crisp. Some had stage experience, some did not. All of them earned much more from acting in the movies

than they would have on the stage, and they all enjoyed long, fruitful careers (many lasting well into the era of sound films).

Because the cinema was silent during this period, Griffith worked out more naturalistic movements and gestures for his actors rather than training their voices. The longer stories of such feature-length films as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Intolerance* (1916), *Hearts of the World* (1918), and *Broken Blossoms* (1919) gave the actors more screen time and therefore more screen space in which to develop their characters. Close-ups required them to be more aware of the effect that their facial expressions would have on the audience, and actors' faces increasingly became more important than their bodies (although, in the silent comedies of the 1920s, the full presence of the human body was virtually essential for conveying humor).

Under Griffith's guidance, Lillian Gish invented the art of screen acting. Griffith encouraged her to study the movements of ordinary people on the street or in restaurants, to develop her physical skills with regular exercise, and to tell stories through her face and body. He urged her to watch the reactions of movie audiences, saying, "If they're held by what you're doing, you've succeeded as an actress."¹¹ Gish's performance in *Broken Blossoms* (1919) was the first great film performance by an actor. Set in the Limehouse (or Chinatown) section of London, the movie presents a stylized fable about the love of an older Chinese merchant, Cheng Huan (Richard Barthelmess), for an English adolescent, Lucy Burrows (Gish). Lucy's racist father, the boxer Battling Burrows (Donald Crisp), beats her for the slightest transgression. Enraged by her friendship with the merchant, Burrows drags her home, and when Lucy hides in a tiny closet, he breaks down the door and beats her so savagely that she dies soon after.

The interaction of narrative, acting, extremely confined cinematic space, and exploitation of the audience's fears gives this scene its beauty, power, and repulsiveness. Seen from various angles within the closet, which fills the screen, Lucy clearly cannot escape. Hysterical with fear, she finally curls up as her father breaks through the door. At the end, she dies in her bed, forcing the smile that has characterized her throughout the film.



Lillian Gish in *Broken Blossoms*

Lillian Gish was twenty-three when she played the young girl Lucy Burrows in D. W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919). It was, incredibly, her sixty-fourth movie, and she gave one of her long career's most emotionally wrenching performances.

Terror and pity produce the cathartic realization within the viewer that Lucy's death, under these wretched circumstances, is truly a release.

In creating this scene, Gish invoked a span of emotions that no movie audience had seen before and few have seen since. Her performance illustrates the qualities of great screen acting: appropriateness, expressive coherence, inherent thoughtfulness/emotionality, wholeness, and unity. Amazingly, the performance resulted from Gish's own instincts—her sense of what was right for the climactic moment of the story and the *mise-en-scène* in which it took place—rather than from Griffith's direction:

The scene of the terrified child alone in the closet could probably not be filmed today. To watch Lucy's hysteria was excruciating enough in a silent picture; a sound track would have made it unbearable. When we filmed it I played the scene with complete lack of restraint, turning around and around like a tortured animal. When I finished, there was a hush in the studio. Mr. Griffith finally whispered: "My God, why didn't you warn me that you were going to do that?"¹²

11. Lillian Gish with Ann Pinchot, *Lillian Gish: The Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 97–101, quotation on p. 101. See also Jeanine Basinger, *Silent Stars* (New York: Knopf, 1999).

12. Gish, *Lillian Gish*, p. 200. For another version of how this scene was prepared and shot, see Charles Affron, *Lillian Gish: Her Legend, Her Life* (New York: Scribner, 2001), pp. 125–131.

Gish gives a similarly powerful performance—her character shoots the man who raped her—in Victor Sjöström’s *The Wind* (1928), and her work in confined spaces influenced such later climactic scenes as Marion Crane’s (Janet Leigh) murder in the shower in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) and Jack Torrance’s (Jack Nicholson) attempt to get out of a bathroom where he is trapped in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980).

With the discovery and implementation of the principles of screen acting, Gish (and her mentor, Griffith) also influenced excellent performances by her contemporaries: Emil Jannings in F. W. Murnau’s *The Last Laugh* (1924) and Janet Gaynor and George O’Brien in Murnau’s *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927), Gibson Gowland in Erich von Stroheim’s *Greed* (1924), and Louise Brooks in G. W. Pabst’s *Pandora’s Box* (1929).

The Influence of Sound

Not long after Griffith and Gish established a viable and successful style of screen acting, movie actors faced the greatest challenge yet: the conversion from silent to sound production. Instead of instantly revolutionizing film style, the coming of sound in 1927 began a period of several years in which the industry gradually converted to this new form of production (see Chapter 9). Film-makers made dialogue more comprehensible by developing better microphones; finding the best placements for the camera, microphones, and other sound equipment; and encouraging changes in actors’ vocal performances. At first they encased the camera, whose overall size has changed relatively little since the 1920s, in either a bulky soundproof booth or the later development known as a **blimp**—a soundproofed enclosure, somewhat larger than a camera, in which the camera may be mounted so that its sounds do not reach the microphone.

Such measures prevented the sounds of the camera from being recorded, but they also restricted how freely the camera—and the actors—could move. Actors accustomed to moving around the set without worrying about speaking now had to limit their movements to the circumscribed sphere where recording took place. Furthermore, technicians needed time to adjust to the recording equipment, which also restricted their movements. Eventually, technicians were able to free the camera for all kinds of movement and find ways of recording sound that allowed the equipment and actors alike more mobility.



Early sound-film acting

Sound technicians on the earliest sound films were challenged with recording the actors’ voices with stationary microphones, which restricted their movements. This problem was solved later with microphones suspended on **booms** outside the camera’s range and capable of moving to follow a character’s movements. In looking backward, the classic movie musical *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952; Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, directors) found nothing but humor in the process of converting movie production to sound. In the background of this image, we see a reluctant and uncooperative actor, Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen, *right*), next to Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly, *left*). A microphone concealed in the bodice of her gown is connected by wire to the loudspeaker in the glass booth in the foreground, where the exasperated director and sound recordist discover that it has recorded only Miss Lamont’s heartbeat. Obviously, they’ll have to find a different microphone placement if they want to hear her voice. And if you’ve seen the movie, you know that her voice is so bad that she had little chance of making the transition to sound movies.

As monumental as the conversion to sound was in economic, technological, stylistic, and human terms, Hollywood found humor in it. It’s the subject of one of the most enjoyable of all movie musicals: Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly’s *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952). This movie vividly and satirically portrays the technical difficulties of using the voice of one actor to replace the voice of another who hasn’t been trained to speak, trying to move a camera weighted down with soundproof housing, and forcing actors to speak into microphones concealed in flowerpots. As film scholar Donald Crafton writes:

Many of the clichés of the early sound cinema (including those in *Singin’ in the Rain*) apply to films made during this period: long static takes, badly written dialogue, voices not quite in control, poor-quality recording, and

a speaking style with slow cadence and emphasis on ‘enunciated’ tones, which the microphone was supposed to favor.¹³

How did the “talkies” influence actors and acting? Although sound enabled screen actors to use all their powers of human expression, it also created a need for screenplays with dialogue, dialogue coaches to help the actors “find” their voices, and other coaches to help them master foreign accents. The more actors and the more speaking a film included, the more complex the narrative could become. Directors had to make changes, too. Before sound, a director could call out instructions to the actors during filming; once the microphone could pick up every word uttered on the set, directors were forced to rehearse more extensively with their actors, thus adopting a technique from the stage to deal with screen technology. Though many actors and directors could not make the transition from silent to sound films, others emerged from silent films ready to see the addition of sound less as an obstacle than as the means to a more complete screen verisimilitude.

An innovative production from this period is Rouben Mamoulian’s *Applause* (1929; sound-recording technician Ernest Zatorsky). After several years of directing theater productions in London and New York, Mamoulian made his screen-directing debut with *Applause*, which is photographed in a style that mixes naturalism with expressionism. From the opening scene, a montage of activity that plunges us into the lively world of burlesque, the film reveals Mamoulian’s mastery of camera movement. But when the camera does not move, as in the many two-shots full of dialogue, we can almost feel the limited-range microphone boom hovering over the actors, one step beyond the use of flowerpots. In contrast to the vibrant shots with the moving camera, these static shots are lifeless and made even more confusing by the loud expressionist sounds that overwhelm ordinary as well as intimate conversations.

Obviously, such limitations influence how we perceive the acting, which is *Applause*’s weak point throughout. Most likely because Mamoulian knew that symphonies of city sounds and noises would be the main impression of many scenes, the actors have little to say or do. However, the movie remains interesting thanks to a new technique in sound recording that Mamoulian introduced and that soon became common practice. Earlier, all sound in a particular shot had been recorded and manipulated on a single sound track. Mamoulian persuaded the sound technicians to record overlapping dialogue in a single shot using two separate microphones and then mix them together on the sound track. When April Darling (Joan Peers), her head on a pillow, whispers a prayer while her mother, Kitty (Helen Morgan), sits next to her and sings a lullaby, the actors almost seem to be singing a duet—naturally, intimately, and convincingly.¹⁴

The conversion to sound, a pivotal moment in film history that simultaneously ruined many acting careers while creating others, has long fascinated movie fans. And it has been treated with pathos as well as humor in movies other than those discussed here, including Billy Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and Michel Hazanavicius’s *The Artist* (2011).

Acting in the Classical Studio Era

From the early years of moviemaking, writes film scholar Robert Allen, “the movie star has been one of the defining characteristics of the American cinema.”¹⁵ Most simply, a movie star is two people: the actor and the character(s) he or she plays. In addition, the star embodies an image created by the studio to coincide with the kinds of roles associated with the actor. That the star also reflects the social and cultural history of the period when that image was created helps explain the often rapid rise and fall of stars’ careers. But this description reveals at its heart a set of paradoxes, as Allen points out:

13. Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema’s Transition to Sound, 1926–1931* (New York: Scribner, 1997), p. 14.

14. In his next films, Mamoulian made other innovations in sound, including the sound flashback in *City Streets* (1931) and the lavish use of contrapuntal sound in the opening of *Love Me Tonight* (1932).

15. For a study of stars in Hollywood from which this section liberally draws, see Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 172–189, quotation, p. 174 (reprinted as Robert C. Allen, “The Role of the Star in Film History [Joan Crawford],” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 5th ed., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999], pp. 547–561).

The star is powerless, yet powerful; different from “ordinary” people, yet at one time was “just like us.” Stars make huge salaries, yet the work for which they are handsomely paid does not appear to be work on the screen. Talent would seem to be a requisite for stardom, yet there has been no absolute correlation between acting ability and stardom. The star’s private life has little if anything to do with his or her “job” of acting in movies, yet a large portion of a star’s image is constructed on the basis of “private” matters: romance, marriage, tastes in fashion, and home life.¹⁶

British actor Dirk Bogarde drew a further distinction between film stars, calling them “people with extrovert personalities and the sparkling quality that puts the glamour, the glitter and the ‘stardust’ into a very tough work-a-day job.” He viewed film actors as “people who without being great extrovert personalities or looking particularly glamorous . . . have been trained in the craft of acting and . . . [are] sound knowledgeable technicians.”¹⁷

The golden age of Hollywood, roughly from the 1930s until the 1950s, was the age of the movie star. Acting in American movies then generally meant “star acting.” During this period, the major studios gave basic lessons in acting, speaking, and movement; but because screen appearance was of paramount importance, they were more concerned with enhancing actors’ screen images than with improving their acting.

During the golden age, the studio system and the star system went hand in hand, and the studios had almost complete control of their actors. Every six months, the studio reviewed an actor’s standard seven-year **option contract**: if the actor had made progress in being assigned roles and demonstrating box-office appeal, the studio picked up the option to employ that actor for the next six months and gave him or her a raise; if not, the studio dropped the option, and the actor was out of work. The decision was the studio’s, not the actor’s. Furthermore, the contract did not allow the actor to move to another studio, stop work, or renegotiate for a higher salary. In addition to those unbreakable terms, the con-

tract had restrictive clauses that gave the studio total control over the star’s image and services; it required an actor “to act, sing, pose, speak or perform in such roles as the producer may designate”; it gave the studio the right to change the name of the actor at its own discretion and to control the performer’s image and likeness in advertising and publicity; and it required the actor to comply with rules covering interviews and public appearances.¹⁸

These contracts turned the actors into the studios’ chattel. To the public, perhaps the most fascinating thing about making actors into stars was the process of changing their names. Marion Morrison became John Wayne, Issur Danielovitch Demsky became Kirk Douglas, Julia Jean Mildred Frances Turner became Lana Turner, and Archibald Leach became Cary Grant. Name and image came first, and acting ability often was considered secondary to an actor’s screen presence or aura, physical or facial beauty, athletic ability or performance skills, or character “type.” Although many stars were also convincing actors capable of playing a variety of parts (e.g., Bette Davis, Henry Fonda, Barbara Stanwyck, Jimmy Stewart), surprisingly little serious attention was paid to screen acting. As Charles Affron observes:

An almost total absence of analytical approaches to screen acting reflects the belief that screen acting is nothing more than the beautiful projection of a filmic self, an arrangement of features and body, the disposition of superficial elements. Garbo is Garbo is Garbo is Garbo. We mortals are left clutching our wonder, and victims of that very wonder, overwhelmed by our enthusiasm and blinded by the light of the star’s emanation.¹⁹

In her comprehensive study *The Star Machine*, Jeanine Basinger offers a list of observations of what a movie star is:

A star has exceptional looks. Outstanding talent. A distinctive voice that can easily be recognized and imitated. A set of mannerisms. Palpable sexual appeal. Energy that comes down off the screen. Glamour. Androgyny.

16. Allen and Gomery, *Film History*, p. 174.

17. Dirk Bogarde, qtd. in John Coldstream, *Dirk Bogarde: The Authorised Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004), p. 223.

18. Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939* (New York: Scribner, 1999), p. 145.

19. Charles Affron, *Star Acting: Gish, Garbo, Davis* (New York: Dutton, 1977), p. 3. See also Roland Barthes, “The Face of Garbo,” in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Braudy and Cohen, pp. 536–538; Alexander Walker, *Stardom: The Hollywood Phenomenon* (New York: Stein and Day, 1970); and Leo Braudy, “Film Acting: Some Critical Problems and Proposals,” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (February 1976): 1–18.

Glowing health and radiance. Panache. A single tiny flaw that mars their perfection, endearing them to ordinary people. Charm. The good luck to be in the right place at the right time (also known as just plain good luck). An emblematic quality that audiences believe is who they really are. The ability to make viewers “know” what they are thinking whenever the camera comes up close. An established type (by which is meant that they could believably play the same role over and over again). A level of comfort in front of the camera. And, of course, “she has something,” the bottom line of which is “it’s something you can’t define.”²⁰

Today, film acting has become the subject of new interest among theorists and critics in semiology, psychology, and cultural studies who wish to study acting as an index of cultural history and an aspect of ideology.²¹ This approach stresses that stars are a commodity created by the studio system through promotion, publicity, movies, criticism, and commentary. As Richard Dyer notes, “Stars are involved in making themselves into commodities; they are both labour and the thing that labour produces. They do not produce themselves alone.”²² Such analyses tend to emphasize the ways in which culture makes meaning rather than the art and expressive value of acting, the ways in which actors make meaning.

Materialistic as it was, the star system dominated the movie industry until the studio system collapsed. It was replaced by a similar industrial enterprise powered essentially by the same motivation of making profits for its investors. However, because every studio had its own system, creating different goals and images for different stars, there was no typical star. For example, when Lucille Fay LeSueur (also known early in her theater career as Billie Cassin) went to Hollywood in 1925, MGM decided that her name must be changed and altered her image to be that of an ideal American “girl.” Through a national campaign conducted by a fan magazine, the public was invited to submit names. The first choice, “Joan Arden,” was already being used by another actress, so Lucille LeSueur became Joan Crawford, a name



What makes a movie star?

Jeanine Basinger’s list of observations on what makes a movie star could have been written about Cary Grant, for her criteria fit him perfectly. Regarded by the public, as well as critics and colleagues, as the finest romantic comedian actor of his time, the handsome actor was often cast as a glamorous, high-society figure in a series of 1930s screwball comedies, including George Cukor’s *The Philadelphia Story* (1940). In this image, Grant’s wide-open, handsome face and laid-back manner mask the charming wiles of a man who succeeds in remarrying a former wife, played by Katharine Hepburn. He played against some of Hollywood’s most glamorous stars, including Mae West, Marlene Dietrich, Audrey Hepburn, Ingrid Bergman, Doris Day, and Grace Kelly. Long before the birth of the independent production system, Grant was unique among Hollywood actors by not signing a studio contract but rather controlling every aspect of his career himself, including the directors and actors he wanted to work with and the roles he wanted to play. Perhaps the high point of his career was working with Alfred Hitchcock on *Suspicion* (1941), *Notorious* (1946), *To Catch a Thief* (1955), and *North by Northwest* (1959), films in which he still plays a lighthearted rogue. His assets—sleek good looks, ease, lack of self-consciousness, physical grace, and natural comic sense—make him one of the great movie actors of all time; some say the greatest.

that she objected to for several years. However, her new name became synonymous with the public’s idea of a movie star—indeed, one proclaimed by MGM to be a “star of the first magnitude.”²³

Crawford’s career soon took off, reaching a high level of achievement in the mid-1930s when she became

20. Jeanine Basinger, *The Star Machine* (New York: Knopf, 2007), pp. 3–4.

21. See Richard Dyer, *Stars*, new ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1998); and his *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986). See also Richard deCordova, “The Emergence of the Star System in America,” *Wide Angle* 6, no. 4 (1985): 4–13; Carole Zucker, ed., *Making Visible the Invisible: An Anthology of Original Essays on Film Acting* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1990); and Christine Gledhill, *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

22. Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, p. 5.

23. See Richard Oulahan, “A Well-Planned Crawford,” *Life* 56 (February 21, 1964), pp. 11–12.



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The movie star

Elizabeth Taylor epitomizes what we mean by the term *movie star*: talent, beauty, sex appeal, and a glamour that dazzled the world. As a child star, the product of the studio system, she appeared in such movies as *Lassie Come Home* (1943) and *National Velvet* (1944). As a teenager, she came to prominence as Angela Vickers in [1] George Stevens's *A Place in the Sun* (1951), a romantic but tragic melodrama. During her most fruitful period—the 1950s and 1960s—she starred in such movies as George Stevens's *Giant* (1956), Richard Brooks's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959), and Daniel Mann's *Butterfield 8* (1960). Her career took a brief downward spin with Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra* (1963), one of the most lavish, expensive, and unsuccessful films of all time. A survivor, she recovered in two impressive roles: Martha [2] in Mike Nichols's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) and Katharina in Franco Zeffirelli's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967). In all, Elizabeth Taylor appeared in more than fifty films and was awarded three Oscars as Best Actress. Long after she quit her acting career, she remained a star, lending her name and reputation to raising hundreds of millions of dollars for AIDS research and other humanitarian causes.



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identified with the “woman’s film.” Subsequently, in a long series of films, she played women who, whether by family background or social circumstances, triumphed over adversity and usually paid a price for independence. No matter what happened to them, her characters remained stylish and distinctive in their looks—chic, self-generated survivors. Like many other stars, Crawford became indelibly associated with the roles she played. Yet she received little serious acclaim for her acting until the mid-1940s, when she left MGM for Warner Bros. For Michael Curtiz’s *Mildred Pierce* (1945), her first film there, Crawford won the Academy Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role—her only Oscar, although she received two more nominations. After her success at Warner Bros., Crawford worked for various major studios and independents, shedding her image as the stalwart, contemporary American woman. Sometimes her performances were excellent, as in Curtis Bernhardt’s *Possessed* (1947), David Miller’s *Sudden Fear* (1952), and, costarring with Bette Davis, Robert Aldrich’s *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962).

Davis was a star of another sort, leading a principled and spirited fight against the studio and star systems’

invasion into virtually every aspect of actors’ personal and professional lives. In fact, Davis’s career (from 1931 to 1989) comes as close to any as demonstrating these systems at their best and worst. In the mid-1930s, when she walked out of Warner Bros. demanding better roles, the studio successfully sued her for breach of contract. She returned to work rewarded by increased respect, a new contract, and better roles. But her career sagged after World War II, for she had reached her early forties, an age at which female actors are seldom offered good parts. Ironically, playing just such a character—an older stage actress in danger of losing roles because of her age—she triumphed in Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s *All about Eve* (1950), generally regarded as her greatest performance. During her long career, Davis was nominated eleven times for the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role, winning for Alfred E. Green’s *Dangerous* (1935) and William Wyler’s *Jezebel* (1938). Nominations for an Oscar as Best Actor in a Leading Role involve a peer-review process in which only actors vote. Davis’s record of nominations is exceeded only by Meryl Streep’s (fifteen nominations), Katharine Hepburn’s (twelve), and Jack Nicholson’s (eight).

Method Acting

During the studio years, movie acting and the star system were virtually synonymous. Although acting styles were varied, the emphasis was on the star's persona and its effect at the box office—on the product, not the process, of acting. And as production processes were regularized, so too was acting. Even so, screen acting in the 1930s and 1940s was not formulaic or unimaginative; quite the contrary. On Broadway, however, stage actors were becoming acquainted with a Russian theory that became known as method acting. Method acting did not make a major impact on Hollywood until the 1950s, but it marks a significant point in the evolution of screen acting from the studio system's reliance on "star acting" in the 1930s and 1940s to a new style.

What Americans call method acting was based on the theory and practice of Konstantin Stanislavsky, who co-founded the Moscow Art Theater in 1897 and spent his entire career there. In developing what became known as the **Stanislavsky system** of acting, he trained students to start by conducting an exhaustive inquiry into their characters' background and psychology. With an understanding of those aspects, they could then work from the inside out. In other words, they had to *be* the character before successfully *playing* the character. Whether that works on the stage or screen is another issue.

Stanislavsky's ideas influenced the Soviet silent film directors of the 1920s—Sergei Eisenstein, Aleksandr Dovzhenko, Lev Kuleshov, and Vsevolod I. Pudovkin—all of whom had learned much from D. W. Griffith's work. But they often disagreed about acting, especially about how it was influenced by actors' appearances, and by editing, which could work so expressively both for and against actors' interpretations.

Among this group, Pudovkin, whose *Film Acting* (1935) was one of the first serious books on the subject, has the most relevance to mainstream movie acting today. Although he advocates an explicitly Stanislavskian technique based on his observations of the Moscow Art Theater, he writes from the standpoint of film directors and actors working together. Because film consists of individual shots, he reasons, both directors and actors work at the mercy of the shot and must strive to make acting (out of sequence) seem natural, smooth, and

flowing while maintaining expressive coherence across the shots. He recommends close collaboration between actors and directors as well as long periods devoted to preparation and rehearsal. He also advises film actors to ignore voice training because the microphone makes it unnecessary, notes that the close-up can communicate more to the audience than overt gestures can, and finds that the handling of "expressive objects" (e.g., Charlie Chaplin's cane) can convey emotions and ideas even more effectively than close-ups can.

Through his teaching and books, especially *An Actor Prepares* (1936), Stanislavsky had a lasting impact on Broadway and Hollywood acting. Actor Stella Adler taught principles of method acting to members of the experimental Group Theatre, including Elia Kazan. In 1947, Kazan, now a director, helped found the Actors Studio in New York City. In 1951, Kazan was replaced by Lee Strasberg, who alienated many theater people including Kazan, Adler, Arthur Miller, and Marlon Brando. Today the studio is guided by three alumni: Ellen Burstyn, Harvey Keitel, and Al Pacino. In 1949, Adler went her own way and founded the Stella Adler Studio of Acting, where Marlon Brando was her most famous and successful student.

These teachers loosely adapted Stanislavsky's ideas. They used his principle that actors should draw on their own emotional experiences to create characters as well as his emphasis on the importance of creating an ensemble and expressing the subtext, the nuances lying beneath the lines of the script. The naturalistic style that they popularized (and called **method acting**, more popularly known as the *Method*) encourages actors to speak, move, and gesture not in a traditional stage manner but just as they would in their own lives. Thus it is an ideal technique for representing convincing human behavior on the stage and on the screen. The Method has led to a new level of realism and subtlety, influencing such actors, in addition to those already mentioned, as James Dean, Montgomery Clift, Marilyn Monroe, Morgan Freeman, Robert De Niro, Jack Nicholson, Jane Fonda, Sidney Poitier, Dustin Hoffman, Daniel Day-Lewis, and Shelley Winters, among many others.²⁴

To understand method acting, you have to see it. Fortunately, there are some wonderful examples, including

24. See Carole Zucker, "An Interview with Lindsay Crouse," *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities* 12, no. 2 (Winter 1993): 5–28. See also Foster Hirsch, *A Method to Their Madness: The History of the Actors Studio* (New York: Norton, 1984); and Steven Vineberg, *Method Actors: Three Generations of an American Acting Style* (New York: Schirmer, 1991).



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Elia Kazan and method acting

Elia Kazan is notable, among many other things, for directing two of the iconic method-acting achievements: Marlon Brando as Terry Malloy in *On the Waterfront* (1954)—here [1] we see Kazan (center) and Brando (right) on location during the filming—and James Dean [2] as Cal Trask, a troubled teenager, in *East of Eden* (1955).

James Dean's three movie roles—Cal Trask in Elia Kazan's *East of Eden* (1955), Jim Stark in Nicholas Ray's *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), and Jett Rink in George Stevens's *Giant* (1956). Marlon Brando gave equally legendary performances as Stanley Kowalski in Elia Kazan's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), reprising the stage role that made him famous, and as Terry Malloy in Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954). Other notable performances, out of many, include those by Paul Newman as Eddie Felson in Robert Rossen's *The Hustler* (1961), Shelley Winters as Charlotte Haze Humbert in Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita* (1962), and Faye Dunaway as Evelyn Cross Mulwray in Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974). Each of these performances exhibits the major characteristics of method acting: intense concentration

and internalization (sometimes mistaken for discomfort) on the actor's part; low-key, almost laid-back delivery of lines (sometimes described as mumbling); and an edginess (sometimes highly neurotic) that suggests dissatisfaction, unhappiness, and alienation. In directing *The Misfits* (1961), with a script by playwright Arthur Miller, John Huston (not a method director) must have been bewildered by the range of acting talent in front of his camera: Clark Gable, a traditional Hollywood star in any sense of the word, who always could be counted on to deliver a reliable performance; Thelma Ritter, an equally seasoned supporting player who invariably played the role of a wisecracking sidekick; and several method actors (Eli Wallach, Montgomery Clift, and Marilyn Monroe), whose performances, by contrast with the rest of the cast, seem out of touch and clumsy. Absent here is the ensemble method acting obvious in Elia Kazan's movies.

No matter what school or style of acting is involved, it is clear that memorable acting results from hard work, skill, imagination, and discipline.

Screen Acting Today

From the earliest years, the development of movie acting has relied on synthesizing various approaches, including those already discussed. Contemporary actors employ a range of physically or psychologically based approaches. Some action stars, like Arnold Schwarzenegger or Jamie Foxx, rely entirely on physical effect; others, like Bruce Willis, rely both on physical prowess and a distinct persona that has evolved from his early wise-guy days to a more world-weary one. Directors also take different approaches toward actors. Robert Altman, for example, who was particularly good at capturing the mood of an ensemble of actors within a narrative, encouraged improvisation and the exploration of individual styles. Joel Coen, in contrast, tends to regard acting as a critical component of the highly stylized *mise-en-scène* within the often cartoonlike movies that he creates with his brother, Ethan.

In Altman's *The Player* (1992), Tim Robbins plays Griffin Mill, a Hollywood producer, at once emotively and satirically. He uses his big, open face and charming manner to draw us into Mill's professional and existential crises, then turns edgy enough to distance us as Mill becomes a murderer and ruthless careerist. In Altman's *Kansas City* (1996), Jennifer Jason Leigh delivers



Contemporary star power

Unlike some actors who become movie stars almost overnight, Robert Downey Jr. began appearing in avant-garde movies directed by his father at the age of five. Working in the independent era, he was able to choose a range of roles that revealed his extraordinary talent. Downey's breakthrough as a major performer came with Richard Attenborough's *Chaplin* (1992), for which he received an Oscar nomination as Best Actor. He continued to demonstrate his remarkable versatility in serious roles in Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993), Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994), Richard Loncraine's *Richard III* (1995), and Michael Hoffman's *Restoration* (1995). Between 1996 and 2001, his acting career faltered because of his drug abuse. Except for his role in Curtis Hanson's *Wonder Boys* (2000), he was cast in relatively unimportant projects. He returned to serious roles, deserving serious attention, in such movies as George Clooney's *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005), Dito Montiel's *A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints* (2006), Steven Shainberg's *Fur: An Imaginary Portrait of Diane Arbus* (2006), and David Fincher's *Zodiac* (2007). Downey played completely different characters in two successful, ongoing franchises: Tony Stark in the Iron Man and The Avengers series, and Sherlock Holmes in the series of that name. He also worked in two comedies: *Chef* (2014; director Jon Favreau) and *The Judge* (2014; director David Dobkin). In this image, we see Downey as the brilliant, cool, arrogant, and intense Tony Stark, aka Iron Man.

an emotional hurricane of a performance as the cheap, brassy, tough Blondie O'Hara, a Jean Harlow wannabe. Her scowl, furrowed brow, rotten teeth under big red lips, and screeching-cat voice leave no room for the kind of gently ironic distance that Robbins creates in *The Player*.

In Coen's *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1994), however, both Robbins and Leigh tailor their performances to fit the madcap mood and mannered decor of an Art Deco screwball comedy. Indeed, part of the movie's appeal lies in watching an ensemble of actors working in this style. Channeling Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell in Howard Hawks's *His Girl Friday* (1940) and Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn in Walter Lang's *Desk Set* (1957), Robbins plays Norville Barnes, a goofy mailroom clerk

who becomes company president, and Leigh plays Amy Archer, a hard-boiled, wisecracking newspaper reporter. Robbins and Leigh's zany comic interaction fits perfectly in Coen's jigsaw puzzle, which lovingly pays tribute to an era when movie style often transcended substance.

Today, actors struggle to get parts and to create convincing performances, and like their earlier counterparts, seldom have the chance to prove themselves across a range of roles. Once **typecast**—chosen for particular kinds of roles because of their looks or “type” rather than for their acting talent or experience—they continue to be awarded such parts as long they bring in good box-office receipts. No star system exists to sustain careers and images, but now, as in earlier periods of movie history, some individuals use films to promote themselves. Think of the music stars, sports stars, or other celebrities who sometimes appear in a movie or two but leave no mark on the history of film acting.

The transition from studio production to independent production has markedly affected the livelihood of actors and the art of acting. The shape of the average career has fundamentally changed. Fewer major movies appear each year, so actors supplement film work with appearances on television shows, in advertisements, and in theater. (Salaries and contractual benefits, such as residual payments for television reruns, provide excellent financial security.) Moreover, actors are finding fewer quality roles because today's average movies are comedies that target the under-thirty audience (and such comedies rely on physical and often scatological humor rather than verbal wit).

Some extremely versatile actors—Chris Cooper, Russell Crowe, Benicio Del Toro, Johnny Depp, Leonardo DiCaprio, Samuel L. Jackson, Nicole Kidman, John Malkovich, Julianne Moore, Kevin Spacey, and Hilary Swank, to name a few—have, after two or three successful films, become stars quickly. The greater their drawing power at the box office, the greater the urgency to promote them to top rank and cast them in more films. As independent agents, however, they can contract for one film at a time and thus hold out for good roles rather than having to make a specific number of films for a given studio. In addition, these newcomers can negotiate a new salary for each film, and they routinely make more money from a single picture than some of the greatest stars of classical Hollywood made in their entire careers. Furthermore, they usually work under their own names. But because they maintain their status by audience



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Stardom: then and now

Bette Davis, an actress who became a legend for playing strong-willed and often neurotic female characters, was in top form as Leslie Crosbie in *The Letter* (1940). In the movie's electric opening scene, she pumps five bullets into her lover [1], then pleads self-defense in court. It represents another successful collaboration between Davis and director William Wyler, who she also worked with on *Jezebel* (1938) and *The Little Foxes* (1941). Nicole Kidman, like Davis, is famous for her professionalism and versatility. Unlike Davis, however, she has almost totally controlled her career. Thus she has been far more adventurous in the roles she chooses to play, and the result is a filmography of considerable depth and range. She is well known for her willingness to take risks in highly individual movies, such as Robert Benton's *The Human Stain* (2003), Noah Baumbach's *Margot at the Wedding* (2007), and Steven Shainberg's *Fur: An Imaginary Portrait of Diane Arbus* (2006; a fictional account of the famous photographer's life). At a turning point in her career—she was forty-three, an age when most actresses have trouble securing good roles—she costarred with Aaron Eckhart in John Cameron Mitchell's *Rabbit Hole* (2010), an important drama about an upper-middle-class suburban couple trying to deal with the death of their two-year-old son in a car accident. The movie avoids the tragedy itself and focuses on the couple's very different attempts to put their marriage back together. In [2], Kidman's distinctive “blank face” allows the audience to “write” whatever it wants on her conflicting day-to-day responses to her personal grief and to a marriage going somewhat recklessly to pieces. She wants to move on, while her husband wants to keep everything that reminds him of the boy. For this moving performance, she received an Oscar nomination as Best Actress.

reaction and not a studio's publicity office, such actors often face highly unpredictable futures.

Let's look more closely at the careers and earnings of two of the most important and popular movie stars in history: Bette Davis, who was at the top during the studio era, and Nicole Kidman, who is at the top today. Although they are both well regarded for their professional approach to performances in a range of film genres—melodrama, comedy, historical and period films, and romantic dramas—their careers exhibit significant differences that result from the different production systems in which each star worked (see Chapter 11, “Filmmaking Technologies and Production Systems”).

Bette Davis (1908–1989), who began her movie career on Broadway, went to Hollywood at the age of twenty-two. Over a career that spanned fifty-two years, she appeared in eighty-nine movies, fifty-nine of them under contract to Warner Bros. Her breakthrough role was in John Cromwell's *Of Human Bondage* (1934); she won

her first Oscar as Best Actress in a Leading Role in 1936 and again in 1939, when she reached the peak of her career in William Wyler's *Jezebel* (1938). She sued Warner Bros. in an attempt to get better roles in better pictures (she was forced, by contract, to make a lot of mediocre films) but lost her case. (In essence, Davis had to fight for what actors of Kidman's generation take for granted: the right to pick the roles they want to play.) However, Davis did get better roles (and unwisely rejected some juicy ones, including *Mildred Pierce* [1945] and *The African Queen* [1951]). She was so well paid in the 1940s that she was known around Hollywood as the fourth Warner brother. The years between 1939 and 1945 were marked by major successes—Edmund Goulding's *Dark Victory* (1939), Michael Curtiz's *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939), William Wyler's *The Letter* (1940) and *The Little Foxes* (1941), Irving Rapper's *Now, Voyager* (1942) and *The Corn Is Green* (1945)—but by 1950, her studio career was over. As one of the first freelancers

in the independent system, she revived her career with her greatest performance in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *All about Eve* (1950). However, she was then forty-one, the “barrier” year that usually relegates women actors to character parts. She had her share of them, including Robert Aldrich's *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962). Her career went downhill, although there were still a few good movies and loyal fans; her penultimate role was a moving performance in Lindsay Anderson's *The Whales of August* (1987). A demanding perfectionist to the end, she walked off the set of her final film just before she died. Bette Davis, a name synonymous with Hollywood stardom, ranked second (after Katharine Hepburn) on the American Film Institute's poll of the greatest female actors.

Bette Davis is an icon of movies past, and Nicole Kidman is a screen legend for today. Unconstrained by a studio contract, she is free to choose her roles. She has worked with a variety of directors, including Gus Van Sant, Jane Campion, Stanley Kubrick, Baz Luhrmann, and Stephen Daldry. Where Davis had some say over her directors (all of whom were studio employees), Kidman has worked with outsiders, insiders, kings of the megaplexes, and avant-garde experimenters. Kidman (b. 1967) began her movie career in Australia at the age of fifteen and has since made 38 films (as of 2009), all independently produced. Her breakthrough movie was Tony Scott's *Days of Thunder* (1990), after which her career took off in such films as Gus Van Sant's *To Die For* and Joel Schumacher's *Batman Forever* (1995), Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996), Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), and Stephen Daldry's *The Hours* (2002), for which she won the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role for her portrayal of Virginia Woolf. Another turning point came in 2003, when she made three different movies with three very different directors: Lars von Trier's *Dogville*, Robert Benton's *The Human Stain*, and Anthony Minghella's *Cold Mountain*. Kidman is willing to tackle serious melodrama (Sydney Pollack's *The Interpreter*, 2005), light comedy (Nora Ephron's *Bewitched*, 2005), edgy, experimental concepts (Steven Shainberg's *Fur: An Imaginary Portrait of*

Diane Arbus, 2006), and comic drama (Noah Baumbach's *Margot at the Wedding*, 2007) as well as a serious domestic drama (*Rabbit Hole*, 2007; director John Cameron Mitchell), a psychological thriller (*Stoker*, 2013; director Chan-wook Park), and a romantic biopic (*Grace of Monaco*, 2014; director Olivier Dahan). When Bette Davis turned forty-one, her career (despite her success that year with *All about Eve*) began its downward spiral. Ironically, Kidman, now forty-seven, remains at the peak of her career and continues to get roles worthy of her experience and talent.

Let's consider their earning power. In her career, we estimate that Bette Davis earned around \$6 million, which in today's money is about \$10 million.²⁵ Until 1949, her salary was set by contract; her highest studio earnings were \$208,000 for the years 1941–43. Her highest poststudio earnings came with her last movie, for which she was paid \$250,000. Kidman made \$100,000 on her first movie and today receives \$17 million per picture. During the first twenty-five years of her ongoing movie career, Kidman has earned \$230 million. That's twenty-three times what Davis earned over an entire fifty-two-year career! Davis worked under a Warner Bros. contract, and the studio kept the lion's share of profits from her films. Kidman is free to negotiate the terms of her salary and her share of the profits for her movies, terms that are determined by a far more complicated equation than a studio contract. These estimates do not include fees for television acting, advertising work, DVD sales, and so on. Stars of Davis's era made far less money from advertisements than, say, Kidman, who is the face in Chanel's print and television campaigns, for which she earns millions each year. The most revealing indicator separating the “old” from the “new” Hollywood, as far as actors are concerned, is clearly the freedom to choose roles and negotiate earnings.

Earnings are keyed to an actor's popularity with audiences. There are two basic ways of measuring this popularity: box-office receipts and popularity polls. Among the popularity polls, the Harris Poll, conducted by a leading market-research company, is probably as reliable as any poll of America's favorite movie stars. The 2013 Harris Poll results²⁶ are as follows:

25. The figures cited here are based, in part, on information provided by newspaper and magazine articles and by the online database pro.imdb.com and do not include fees for television acting, advertising work, DVD sales, etc.

26. www.harrisinteractive.com/NewsRoom/HarrisPolls/tabid/447/ctl/ReadCustom%20Default/mid/1508/ArticleId/1141/Default.aspx.

1. Denzel Washington
2. Clint Eastwood
3. Tom Hanks
4. Johnny Depp
5. Brad Pitt
6. John Wayne
7. George Clooney
8. Harrison Ford
9. Meryl Streep
10. Matt Damon

Two problems are obvious here. First, even though women constitute the bulk of the movie audience, this list includes only one woman. And considering that John Wayne died in 1979, his current popularity is amazing.

Indeed, John Wayne has been on Harris's top-ten list every year since he died. An actor of many parts, he is as durable a Hollywood legend as has ever existed. Wayne is a far better actor than many people give him credit for. He was indelibly linked to the Western and, in private life, to right-wing politics. On-screen, he represented a kind of American male virtue that many people admire. Wayne is an acting icon who has a solid place in American cultural ideology.²⁷ The people who were polled here neglected to vote for many fine and popular actors, but the results represent the unpredictability of Hollywood fame. When an actor who made his last movie—Don Siegel's excellent *The Shootist*—in 1974 gets sixth place today, that's stardom!

In another poll, the Vulture entertainment blog released its 2013 ranking of "the most valuable" stars, those mostly likely to positively affect a movie's gross.²⁸ Here are the top ten stars on its 2013 list:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Robert Downey Jr. | 6. Will Smith |
| 2. Leonardo DiCaprio | 7. Christian Bale |
| 3. Jennifer Lawrence | 8. Denzel Washington |
| 4. Sandra Bullock | 9. Tom Hanks |
| 5. Brad Pitt | 10. Johnny Depp |



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A durable Hollywood legend

In a career spanning forty-six years and 180 movies, John Wayne starred in war movies, romantic comedies, and historical epics, but he is best known for his roles as the hero in great Westerns, particularly those directed by John Ford and Howard Hawks. His first starring role, at age twenty-three, was as a winsome young scout in Raoul Walsh's *The Big Trail* (1930) [1], a spectacular epic of a wagon train going west. Wayne's last film, at sixty-seven, was Don Siegel's *The Shootist* (1976). In it he plays an aging gunslinger ("shootist"), dying of cancer, out to settle some old scores [2]. Wayne himself died of cancer three years after completing the film.

27. See Garry Willis, *John Wayne's America: The Politics of Celebrity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

28. www.vulture.com/2013/10/most-valuable-movie-stars.html#3/all/vulture-rankings.



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An icon of the new Hollywood

Working wholly within today's independent system of movie production, an actor like Jeff Bridges does not have the security of a studio contract or the opportunity of developing and perpetuating a legendary character, such as John Wayne did. Nonetheless, Bridges has earned universal respect as one of Hollywood's most talented, resilient actors. His characters have become legendary: Ernie in John Huston's *Fat City* (1972), Nick Kegan in William Richert's *Winter Kills* (1979), [1] Starman/Scott Hayden in John Carpenter's *Starman* (1984), Jeffrey "The Dude" Lebowski in Joel Coen's *The Big Lebowski* (1998), and Obadiah Stone in Jon Favreau's *Iron Man* (2008). [2] In Joel and Ethan Coen's *True Grit* (2010), he played a character first developed by John Wayne in the 1969 film of the same name. To date, Bridges has made sixty-five films, earned six Oscar nominations (three for supporting and three for leading roles), and won Best Actor as Bad Blake in Scott Cooper's *Crazy Heart* (2009).

An interesting list, to be sure, and you'll find these same names on other lists, if not in the same order. You'll notice that except for Tom Hanks, it's a younger group that includes two women. And while Denzel Washington is America's most popular actor, he's eighth on the list of stars likely to bring in the most money at the box office.

Technology and Acting

As discussed in Chapter 6, "Cinematography," for every advance in the world of special effects, the narrative and the acting that propels it lose some of their importance. Movies such as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Steven Spielberg's *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) made us familiar, even comfortable, with nonhuman creatures that had human voices and characteristics; John Lasseter, Ash Brannon, and Lee Unkrich's *Toy Story 2* (1999), with its shiny, computer-generated graphics, took this process another step forward.

Although digital technology is now affecting all aspects of filmmaking, we don't have to worry about it replacing actors entirely. Audiences say they choose movies that include their favorite actors. But alongside real actors, CGI can create convincing characters such as the avatars digitally created to interact with the Na'vi, the blue-skinned humanoids in James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) and its sequels. Its mix of real and computer-generated actors did not stop *Avatar* from becoming the highest-grossing movie of all time. We moviegoers accept digital characters who do not represent recognizable human beings and enjoy them for the imaginative creatures that they are. The same applies to computer-generated characters in Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* series, although audiences have objected to such characters in other movies along the way. Whatever developments take place when creating "actors" through technology, one thing seems clear: CGI characters are perfectly at home in movies where fantasy is more important than reality, as in Matt Reeves's *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014), where actors are convincingly transformed into apes.

Let's also note the distinction between whole characters created entirely by digital technology and real actors transformed by digital makeup (see "Makeup and hair-styling" in Chapter 5). Director David Fincher used both procedures when faced with the challenge of casting actors to play the real-life, identical Winklevoss twins in *The Social Network* (2010). Since Aaron Sorkin's screenplay is a fictional account of a true incident, it would have been acceptable to alter the story and cast actors as fraternal rather than identical twins. Instead, Fincher cast Armie Hammer and Josh Pence, respectively, in the roles of the identical Winklevoss twins, Cameron and Tyler. Throughout their scenes, Hammer acted alongside Pence, and through the postproduction



Movie technology produces identical twins

It's not a tabloid headline but a fact. With the help of an ingenious use of technology, two different actors appear on-screen as identical twins in *The Social Network*. (You can study the process used to achieve this effect by watching *The Lot* on Disc 2 of "The Supplements," included in the DVD release of the movie.)

use of motion-capture technology and digital grafting of Hammer's face onto Pence's, they appear on the screen as identical twins, as you can see in the image above (*left to right*: Hammer as Cameron, Pence as Tyler). Using two different actors in these roles allows the actors to develop characters with different personalities; using digital grafting ensures the facial similarity necessary for depicting identical twins. While the result is totally convincing in this specific situation, there aren't many movies about identical twins.

Computer-generated characters might have the same fate as some of the other innovations that Hollywood has periodically employed to keep the world on edge, such as the short-lived Sensurround, which relied on a sound track to trigger waves of high-decibel sound in the movie theater that made viewers feel "tremors" during Mark Robson's *Earthquake* (1974); or the even shorter-lived Odorama process, involving scratch-and-sniff cards, for John Waters's *Polyester* (1981). Indeed, the use of computer technology to replace actors is one side effect of our current fascination with virtual reality. Although the evolving film technology may enable filmmakers to realize their most fantastic visions, we should

remember, as film theorist André Bazin has so persuasively argued, that such developments may extend and enrich the illusions that the movies create at the expense of the film artists themselves, including directors, designers, cinematographers, editors, *and* actors.²⁹

Casting Actors

Casting is the process of choosing and hiring actors for both leading and supporting roles. In the studio system of Hollywood's golden years, casting was done in several ways, but the overall process was supervised by a central casting office.³⁰ Often a director, producer, writer, or studio head already had his or her own idea of an actor for a particular role. That choice could be solely based on the actors' looks, screen presence, or overall charisma. Actors were under contract (typically required to appear in seven films over five years), and studio heads, mindful of this, often based casting decisions on availability rather than suitability for the role. The "bad" movies of those years are full of such mechanical casting decisions. Studios also announced the availability of a role with

29. André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–71), I, pp. 17–22.

30. A comprehensive, insightful look into the casting process can be seen in the documentary *Casting By* (2012; director Tom Donahue).

an “open call” that could produce crowds of applicants, many of whom were dismissed after cursory consideration. Between 1930 and 1950, hundreds of movies were produced each year, so thousands of would-be actors were living in Hollywood, hoping for the big break that would make them a movie star. Unknown actors were often given **screen tests** (filmed auditions) to see how they looked under studio lighting and how they sounded in recordings. Predatory and unscrupulous studio heads, producers, and directors also used the “casting couch” to determine which actors (both male and female) were willing to trade sex for work.

Today, casting has moved into the front office and become more professional. Independent casting directors (CDs) work under contract to independent producers or directors on a film-by-film basis. For example, Juliet Taylor, who has worked with a long list of major directors, has cast more than thirty of Woody Allen’s films. The CD typically scouts talent wherever actors are working, whether it’s movies, theater, or commercials, and maintains regular contact with a variety of actors. They are represented by their own professional association, the Casting Society of America (CSA), and will soon be eligible for Oscar nominations and awards.

Actors learn about casting through direct contact by CDs, producers, directors, or screenwriters, as well as through trade papers such as *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, or *Back Stage*. After initial interviews, they may be asked to read for parts, either alone or with other actors, or to take screen tests. If they are chosen for the part, negotiations in most cases are handled by their agents. But if they belong to one of the actors’ unions—the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) or the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA)—the conditions of their participation are governed by union contract.

Factors Involved in Casting

Although casting takes many factors into account, in theory the most important is how the prospective actors’ strengths and weaknesses relate to the roles they are being considered for. In reality, casting—like every other aspect of movie production—depends heavily on the movie’s budget and expected revenues. An actor’s popularity in one film often leads to casting in other films. As we’ve seen, the polls that rate actors are based on very different criteria. Still, the key factor in casting is who brings in the most money, which after all other

considerations is what the movie business is all about. Just as Hollywood traditionally has repeatedly made movies in popular genres (such as action films or romantic comedies), so too has the industry repeatedly cast the same popular actors in order to sell tickets. A director may think that Robert Downey Jr. is the right person for the lead in his new film, but if the producer does not have the \$50 million that Downey currently makes per film, some further thinking is needed. Yet valuable actors like Downey frequently have waived all or part of their salaries because they believe in a particular film project. In such cases, an actor might agree to accept a percentage of the profits should the movie be successful. Other general factors considered in casting include the actors’ reputation and popularity; prior experience on screen or stage; chemistry with other actors, particularly if ensemble acting scenes are part of the script; results of a screen test or reading, often required for newcomers or those about whom the director and others are uncertain; and, equally important, the actor’s reputation for professionalism, reliability, ability to withstand the physical challenges of filming certain productions, and personal behavior on the set.

A good CD must have a strong artistic sense of which actors are right for the roles in question, a comprehensive knowledge of all the acting talent available at a particular time for a particular movie, a memory capable of remembering an actor’s achievements on-screen, and the ability to avoid playing favorites and keep the process as professional as possible. He or she must be able to coordinate a liaison between directors, producers, writers, and actors in reaching casting decisions while working with everyone from nervous newcomers to the egomaniacs among acting royalty. Although the CD can make or break an actor’s career, the final decision rests with the director and/or producer. Once that decision has been made, the CD must handle the deals that determine the terms of the contract. The role and the actor’s suitability for it are what count, not factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, or age, which complicated casting in earlier years. Happily, Hollywood has been able to shed a great many customs of casting that contradicted social reality. Gone are practices such as casting actors who are not of a certain race or ethnicity to portray that race or ethnicity and discriminating against older actors, especially women. Today the pool of available actors is as diverse and rich as the population itself.

Just as with African American actors, it is now possible to cast Hispanic, Latino, or Asian actors to play

ethnic characters. And casting directors have large pools of talent to choose from. Across the span of film history, Hispanic and Latino actors (both living and dead) appearing primarily in American movies include, among others, Jessica Alba, Antonio Banderas, Javier Bardem, Adriana Barraza, Benjamin Bratt, Aimee Garcia, Gael García Bernal, Demian Bichir, Alexis Bledel, Sônia Braga, Mark Consuelos, Penelope Cruz, Rosario Dawson, Dolores del Río, Benicio Del Toro, Cameron Diaz, Hector Elizondo, Gloria Estafan, Eric Estrada, José Ferrer, Andy Garcia, Luis Guzmán, Selma Hayek, Rita Hayworth, Raul Julia, Katy Jurado, Susan Kohner, Fernando Lamas, John Leguizamo, Eva Longoria, George Lopez, Jennifer Lopez, Mario Lopez, Eva Mendes, Carmen Miranda, Alfred Molino, Ricardo Montalban, Maria Montez, Catalina Sandino Moreno, Rita Moreno, Ramon Novarro, Edward James Olmos, Rosie Perez, Joaquin Phoenix, Freddie Prinze Jr., Anthony Quinn, Michelle Rodriguez, Cesar Romero, Zoe Saldana, Charlie Sheen, Martin Sheen, Jimmy Smits, Oscar Torre, Lupe Velez, and Sophie Vergara.

Hispanic and Latino directors include some of the most visionary and creative film artists of our time: Alfonso Cuarón (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, 2001; *Children of Men*, 2006; and *Gravity*, 2013); Alejandro González Iñárritu (*Amores perros*, 2000; and *Babel*, 2006, which was nominated for Best Picture and Best Director Oscars); Guillermo del Toro (*Pan's Labyrinth*, 2006, for which he was nominated for the Best Original Screenplay Oscar; and three *Hobbit* movies, 2012–13–14); Robert Rodriguez (*Sin City*, 2005, and *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For*, 2014, both codirected with Frank Miller; and *Spy Kids: All the Time in the World*, 2011). Pedro Almodóvar has directed nearly twenty feature films, including *Talk to Her* (2002), *Volver* (2006), *The Skin I Live In* (2011), and won the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar for *All about My Mother* (1999). Cuarón, Iñárritu, and Del Toro were born in Mexico; Rodriguez in Texas; and Almodóvar in Spain. Hispanic and Latino film artists have won twenty-one Oscars in a variety of categories.

Asian and Southeast Asian actors familiar to American audiences include Jackie Chan, Michael Paul Chan, Joan Chen, John Cho, Margaret Cho, Kenneth Choi, Sessue Hayakawa, Ken Jeong, Nancy Kwan, James Hong, Shin Koyamada, Rex Lee, Gong Li, Jet Li, Lucy Liu, Daniel Dae Kim, Keye Luke, Toshirô Mifune, Haing S. Ngor, Sandra Oh, Dev Patel, Kal Penn, Lou Diamond Phillips, Frieda Pinto, Miyoshi Umeki, Ken Watanabe, Anna May

Wong, BD Wong, Joan Wong, and Yun-Fat Chow. Asian directors working in the American film industry include Gregg Araki, Cary Fukunaga, So-yong Kim, Ang Lee, Justin Lin, Mira Nair, M. Night Shyamalan, and Wayne Wang. In the Oscars competition, Asians have won thirty-eight Oscars in a variety of categories.

Aspects of Performance

Types of Roles

Actors may play major roles, minor roles, character roles, cameo roles, and walk-ons. In addition, roles may be written specifically for bit players, extras, stuntpersons, and even animal performers. Actors who play **major roles** (also called *main*, *featured*, or *leading roles*) become principal agents in helping to move the plot forward. Whether stars or newcomers, they appear in many scenes and ordinarily, but not always, receive screen credit above the title.

In the Hollywood studio system, major roles were traditionally played by stars such as John Wayne, whose studios counted on them to draw audiences regardless of the parts they played. Their steadfastness was often more important than their versatility as actors, although Wayne surprises us more often than we may admit. One strength of the studio system was its grooming of professionals in all its creative departments, including actors who ranged from leads such as Henry Fonda and Katharine Hepburn to character actors such as Andy Devine and Thelma Ritter. Devine is best remembered as, respectively, the wisecracking commentator on “Jeff’s” (James Stewart) actions in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954) and the Ringo Kid’s (John Wayne) loyal friend in John Ford’s *Stagecoach* (1939). Indeed, one of the joys of looking at movies from this period comes from those character actors whose faces, if not names, we always recognize: Mary Boland, Walter Brennan, Harry Carey Jr., Ray Collins, Laura Hope Crews, Gladys George, Marjorie Main, Butterfly McQueen, Una O’Connor, Franklin Pangborn, Erskine Sanford, and Ernest Thesiger, to name a distinctive few out of hundreds.

Stars may be so valuable to productions that they have **stand-ins**, actors who look reasonably like them in height, weight, coloring, and so on and who substitute for them during the tedious process of preparing setups or taking light readings. Because actors in major roles are ordinarily not hired for their physical or athletic



Character actors

Although Franklin Pangborn was never a household name, his face was instantly recognizable in the more than 200 movies he made over a career that spanned four decades. With his intimidating voice and fastidious manners, he was best known for playing suspicious hotel clerks, imperious department-store floorwalkers, and sour-puss restaurant managers. Here he's the threatening bank examiner J. Pinkerton Snoopington in the W. C. Fields classic *The Bank Dick* (1940; director Edward F. Cline).

prowess, **stuntpersons** double for them in scenes requiring special skills or involving hazardous actions, such as crashing cars, jumping from high places, swimming, and riding (or falling off) horses. Through special effects, however, filmmakers may now augment actors' physical exertions so that they appear to do their own stunts, as in Andy and Larry Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999) and McG's *Charlie's Angels* (2000). In effect, the computer becomes the stunt double. Nonetheless, ten stunt boxers were cast for Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), indicating, at least, that some activities cannot be faked on the screen, particularly activities that could damage an actor's looks or cause other serious injuries.

Actors who play **minor roles** (or *supporting roles*) rank second in the hierarchy. They also help move the plot forward (and thus may be as important as actors in major roles), but they generally do not appear in as many scenes as the featured players. **Bit players** hold small speaking parts, and **extras** usually appear in nonspeaking or crowd roles and receive no screen credit. **Cameos** are small but significant roles often taken by famous actors, as in Robert Altman's Hollywood satire *The Player* (1992), which features appearances by sixty-five well-known actors and personalities. **Walk-ons** are even



The importance of minor roles

In John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), Humphrey Bogart stars as the hard-boiled private eye Sam Spade. Gladys George has a small part as Iva Archer, Spade's former lover and the widow of his business partner, Miles Archer (Jerome Cowan). In this scene, George delivers a strongly emotional performance, against which Bogart displays a relative lack of feeling that fills us in on relations between the characters. Stars' performances often depend on the solid and even exceptional work of their fellow actors. The unusually fine supporting cast in this movie includes Hollywood greats Mary Astor, Peter Lorre, and Sydney Greenstreet, who received an Oscar nomination for Best Actor in a Supporting Role.

smaller roles, reserved for highly recognizable actors or personalities. As a favor to his friend Orson Welles, with whom he'd worked several times before, Joseph Cotten played such a role in Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958), where he had a few words of dialogue and literally walked on and off the set.

Animal actors, too, play major, minor, cameo, and walk-on roles. For many years, Hollywood made pictures built on the appeal of such animals as the dogs Lassie, Rin Tin Tin, Asta, and Benji; the cat Rhubarb; the parakeets Bill and Co; the chimp Cheeta; the mule Francis; the lion Elsa; the dolphin Flipper; and the killer whale Willy. Most of these animals were specially trained to work in front of the camera, and many were sufficiently valuable that they, like other stars, had stand-ins for setups and stunt doubles for hazardous work. Working with animal performers often proves more complicated than working with human actors. For example, six Jack Russell terriers, including three puppies, played the title character in Jay Russell's *My Dog Skip* (2000), a tribute to that indomitable breed.

Preparing for Roles

In creating characters, screen actors begin by synthesizing basic sources, including the script, their own experiences and observations, and the influences of other actors. They also shape their understanding of a role by working closely with their director. This collaboration can be mutually agreeable and highly productive, or it can involve constant, even tempestuous arguments that may or may not produce what either artist wants. Ideally, both director and actor should understand each other's concept of the role and, where differences exist, try to agree on an approach that is acceptable to both. Director Sidney Lumet, known for his keen understanding of how actors work, recognizes that acting is a very personal thing. He writes:

The *talent* of acting is one in which the actor's thoughts and feelings are instantly communicated to the audience. In other words, the "instrument" that the actor is using is himself. It is *his* feelings, *his* physiognomy, *his* sexuality, *his* tears, *his* laughter, *his* anger, *his* romanticism, *his* tenderness, *his* viciousness, that are up there on the screen for all to see.³¹

He emphasizes that the difference between the actor who merely duplicates a life that he or she has observed and the actor who *creates* something unique on the screen depends on how much the actor is able to reveal of himself.

Different roles have different demands, and all actors have their own approaches, whether they get inside their characters, get inside themselves, or do further research. Bette Davis, whose roles were often assigned to her by studios, said, "It depends entirely on what the assignment happens to be. . . . [But] I have never played a part which I did not feel was a person very different from

myself."³² Jack Lemmon, a method actor who generally chose his own roles, explained, "It's like laying bricks. You start at the bottom and work up; actually I guess you start in the middle and work to the outside."³³

Building a character "brick by brick" is an approach also used by Harvey Keitel and John Malkovich, who might have varied this approach slightly when he played himself in Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* (1999). Liv Ullmann and Jack Nicholson believe that the actor draws on the subconscious mind. Ullmann says, "Emotionally, I don't prepare. I think about what I would like to show, but I don't prepare, because I feel that most of the emotions I have to show I know about. By drawing on real experience, I can show them."³⁴ In describing his work with director Roman Polanski on *Chinatown* (1974), Nicholson says that the director "pushes us farther than we are conscious of being able to go; he forces us down into the subconscious—in order to see if there's something better there."³⁵ Jodie Foster works from instinct, doing what she feels is right for the character.³⁶ To create The Tramp, Charlie Chaplin started with the character's costume: "I had no idea of the character. But the moment I was dressed, the clothes and the make-up made me feel the person he was."³⁷ Alec Guinness said that he was never happy with his preparation until he knew how the character walked; Laurence Olivier believed that he would not be any good as a character unless he "loved" him³⁸; and Morgan Freeman says that some of his preparation depends on the clothes he is to wear.³⁹

If you are familiar with Alec Guinness only through his role as Obi-Wan Kenobi in the Star Wars films, looking at a range of his movies will provide you with a master class in the art and craft of acting. A short list would include *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949), *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *Our Man in Havana*

31. Sidney Lumet, *Making Movies* (New York: Knopf, 1995), pp. 59–60.

32. Bette Davis, "The Actress Plays Her Part," in *Playing to the Camera: Film Actors Discuss Their Craft*, ed. Bert Cardullo, Harry Geduld, Ronald Gottesman, and Leigh Woods (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 177–185, quotation on p. 179.

33. Jack Lemmon, "Conversation with the Actor," *ibid.*, pp. 267–275, quotation on p. 267.

34. Liv Ullmann, "Conversation with the Actress," *ibid.*, pp. 157–165, quotation on p. 160.

35. See the entry on Jack Nicholson, in *Actors on Acting for the Screen*, ed. Tomlinson, pp. 404–407, quotation on p. 405.

36. See the entry on Jodie Foster, *ibid.*, pp. 196–197.

37. Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964), p. 260.

38. See the entry on Alec Guinness in *Actors on Acting for the Screen*, ed. Tomlinson, pp. 232–233; and Laurence Olivier, *Confessions of an Actor: An Autobiography* (1982; repr., New York: Penguin, 1984), pp. 136–137.

39. From an interview with James Lipton, *James Lipton Takes on Three* on Disc 2 of "Special Features" in the widescreen DVD release of *Million Dollar Baby* (2004).



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Actors with many faces

Alec Guinness seems to have no predictable persona, playing characters as diverse as Lawrence of Arabia and Adolf Hitler. He is also famous for playing characters who first appear to be meek and indecisive, but surprisingly turn out to have inner strength. As George Smiley in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1979) [1], a British master spy who has all the answers, Guinness is calm and professorial with horn-rimmed glasses and a scarf to protect against a chill. He fools his smug colleagues into believing he is simply a tailor and doesn't have a clue, but in the end, he proves that appearances can indeed be misleading. Gary Oldman is another British actor noted for the wide range of different characters he plays, including two doomed celebrities (rock star Sid Vicious and playwright Joe Orton); assassin Lee Harvey Oswald; Count Dracula, a killer of another kind; Ludwig von Beethoven; and George Smiley, in the recent movie version of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2011) [2], where he's as cool and cerebral as Guinness, but with a characterization all his own.

(1959), *Tunes of Glory* (1960), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962; perhaps his finest performance), and *Hitler: The Last Ten Days* (1973). You might also study his performance as George Smiley in the TV series *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and then compare and contrast it with Gary Oldman's in the movie version (2011). Guinness never defined acting per se; he didn't need to, for his acting says it all.

Olivier, one of the greatest stage and screen actors of the twentieth century, defined acting in various ways, including as “convincing lying.”⁴⁰ Although Olivier stands out for the extraordinary range of the roles he undertook on both stage and screen, and for his meticulous preparation in creating them, this remark suggests that he had little patience with theories of acting. Indeed, when asked how he created his film performance as the king in *Henry V* (1944; directed by Olivier), he replied simply, “I don't know—I'm England, that's all.”⁴¹ Olivier had made this film to bolster British morale during the last days of World War II, and thus he wanted *Henry V* to embody traditional British values.

The great silent-era director F. W. Murnau emphasized intellect and counseled actors to restrain their feelings, to *think* rather than *act*. He believed actors to be capable of conveying the intensity of their thoughts so that audiences would understand. Director Rouben Mamoulian gave Greta Garbo much the same advice when she played the leading role in his *Queen Christina* (1933). The film ends with the powerful and passionate Swedish queen sailing to Spain with the body of her lover, a Spanish nobleman killed in a duel. In preparing for the final close-up, in which the queen stares out to sea, Garbo asked Mamoulian, “What should I be thinking of? What should I be doing?” His reply: “Have you heard of *tabula rasa*? I want your face to be a blank sheet of paper. I want the writing to be done by every member of the audience. I'd like it if you could avoid even blinking your eyes, so that you're nothing but a beautiful mask.”⁴² Is she remembering the past? Imagining the future? With the camera serving as an apparently neutral mediator between actress and audience, Garbo's blank face asks us to transform it into what we hope or want to see: sadness, courage, inspiration, whatever we choose. Mamoulian's influence can be seen in *The Man from London* (2007; codirectors Bela Tarr and Ágnes Hranitzky), where the

40. Olivier, *Confessions of an Actor*, p. 20.

41. Laurence Olivier, qtd. in Donald Spoto, *Laurence Olivier: A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 111–112.

42. Rouben Mamoulian, qtd. in Tom Milne, *Rouben Mamoulian* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 74.



Laurence Olivier's *Henry V*

Laurence Olivier in the first screen adaptation of *Henry V* (1944); this very popular film, produced during a troubled time (World War II), was uniformly praised for the quality of its acting. The many previous screen adaptations of Shakespeare's plays had been mainly faithful records of stage productions, but Olivier's film, his first as a director, benefited from his understanding of cinema's potential as a narrative art, his extensive acting experience, his deep knowledge of Shakespeare's language, and his sharp instincts about the national moods in Great Britain and the United States. *Henry V* received an Oscar nomination for Best Picture, and Olivier received a nomination for Best Actor in a Leading Role as well as an Oscar for his outstanding achievement as actor, producer, and director for bringing *Henry V* to the screen.



How to read a face

In directing *The Man from London*, Béla Tarr uses many of the film noir traits: black-and-white imagery, slow-motion cinematography, long takes, and haunting close-ups. This image marks the film's ending, where Tarr holds the expression of Mrs. Brown (Agi Szirtes)—a woman who just learned of her husband's murder—for a mesmerizing length of time. What is she feeling? Despair, grief, disbelief are all possibilities. But her face holds many secrets, and we bring our own experiences watching the entire film to bear on our interpretations.

long final close-up, in high-contrast black-and-white, is of a grieving widow's expressionless face. As in the shot of Garbo, this is a face that says everything and nothing. It brings the full force of a single shot to make us think and interpret what we see.

Naturalistic and Nonnaturalistic Styles

We have all seen at least one movie in which a character, perhaps a whole cast of characters, is like no one we have ever met or ever *could* meet. Either because the world they inhabit functions according to rules that don't apply in our world or because their behaviors are extreme, such characters aren't realistic in any colloquial sense of the word. But if the actors perform skillfully, we are likely to accept the characters as believable within the context of the story. For example, consider Kathy Bates's work on such films as *Misery* (1990; director Rob Reiner), *Dolores Claiborne* (1995; director Taylor Hackford), *Midnight in Paris* (2011; director Woody Allen), *Tammy* (2014; director Stephen Herek), and *Boychoir* (2015; director François Girard). We might be tempted to call such portrayals *realistic*, but Kathy Bates is the personification of the naturalistic actor. In fact, her "acting" is so natural that it is difficult to see.

Actors who strive for appropriate, expressive, coherent, and unified characterizations can render their performances naturalistically as well as nonnaturalistically. Screen acting appears naturalistic when actors re-create recognizable or plausible human behavior for the camera. The actors not only look like the characters should (in their costume, makeup, and hairstyle) but also think, speak, and move the way people would offscreen. By contrast, nonnaturalistic performances seem excessive, exaggerated, even overacted; they may employ strange or outlandish costumes, makeup, or hairstyles; they might aim for effects beyond the normal range of human experience; and they often intend to distance or estrange audiences from characters. Frequently, they are found in horror, fantasy, and action films.

What Konstantin Stanislavsky was to naturalistic acting, German playwright Bertolt Brecht was to nonnaturalistic performance. Brecht allied his theatrical ideas with Marxist political principles to create a nonnaturalistic theater. Whereas Stanislavsky strove for realism, Brecht believed that audience members should not think they're watching something actually happening

before them. Instead, he wanted every aspect of a theatrical production to limit the audience's identification with characters and events, thereby creating a psychological distance (called the **alienation effect** or **distancing effect**) between them and the stage. The intent of this approach is to remind the audience of the artificiality of the theatrical performance.

Overall, this theory has had little influence on mainstream filmmaking. After all, unlike theater, cinema can change—as often as it wants—the relationship between spectators and the screen, alternately alienating them from or plunging them into the action. However, we do see this approach when actors step out of character, face the camera, and directly address the audience (a maneuver, more common in theater than cinema, known as *breaking the fourth wall*—the imaginary, invisible wall that separates the audience from the stage). Although the distancing effect can destroy a movie if used inappropriately, breaking the fourth wall works effectively when audience members are experiencing things like the character does *and* the character has the self-confidence to exploit that empathy.

In the late 1920s in Berlin, Brecht discovered Peter Lorre, who later became one of the most distinctively stylized actors on the American screen. They worked closely together on several stage productions at the same time that Lorre was preparing the lead role of Hans Beckert, a child murderer, in Fritz Lang's *M* (1931). Lorre's magnificent performance—particularly in the final scene, which is one of the most emotional in movie history—reflects the influence of Brecht's theories and directing. Lorre creates a duality—Beckert and the actor detached from the character who comments on his actions—and while it is not pure direct address (he is addressing a “jury” in a kangaroo court), we are absolutely riveted by the power and strangeness of Lorre's conception of the role.

Tom Edison (Paul Bettany) frequently addresses his idealistic views directly to the viewer in Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003), which in overall style owes much to Bertolt Brecht's influence. In Max Ophüls's *Lola Montès* (1955), the Circus Master (Peter Ustinov) addresses the circus audience, of which, we understand, we are members. For comic effect, Tom Jones (Albert Finney) breaks the fourth wall in Tony Richardson's *Tom Jones* (1963), as does Alfie (Michael Caine) in Lewis Gilbert's *Alfie* (1966) and (played by Jude Law) in Charles Shyer's 2004 remake. Various characters speak directly to the viewer



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Naturalistic versus nonnaturalistic performances

Naturalistic and nonnaturalistic performances sometimes overlap, but these categories help us relate actors' contributions to a filmmaker's overall vision. In *Knocked Up* (2007), Seth Rogen's naturalistic performance as a reformed slacker becomes part of director Judd Apatow's clear-eyed depiction of the consequences of unprotected sex. Here [1], Rogen tells his pregnant girlfriend, who has decided to keep their baby, that he's ready to do whatever it takes to support her. He then congratulates himself by saying “awesome” in recognition of his newfound maturity. Johnny Depp's nonnaturalistic performance as the title character in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) [2] enables director Tim Burton to draw us into the exaggerated, downright weird world of this story. Burton's film is about fantasy, the way things might be in that world. Rogen's and Depp's performances differ widely, but they suit their respective movies. Imagine how out of place either character would be in the other's world!

in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989). There is a much more solid tradition of direct address in the European theatrical cinema of such directors as Jean-Luc Godard, Chantal Akerman, Eric Rohmer, Ingmar Bergman, and Michael Haneke, among others.

In Buddy Giovinazzo's *No Way Home* (1996), Tim Roth gives a naturalistic performance as Joey, a slow but principled young man who is just out of prison. He has taken the rap for an assault he did not commit and

returns to Staten Island to find that the people who framed him and circumstances in the community are just as rotten as they were when he left. Determined not to associate with his low-life brother and former friends or return to a life of crime, he boards a bus and heads for undiscovered country. In Boaz Yakin's *Fresh* (1994), Sean Nelson naturalistically plays the title character—a young, black Brooklynite working as a courier for a dope dealer between going to school and looking out for his older sister. In Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), Johnny Depp gives a nonnaturalistic performance as the title character, a kind of Frankenstein's monster—scary, but benevolent—created by a mad inventor who died before his work was finished. Edward lives in a deteriorating Gothic castle on a mountaintop that overlooks a nightmarishly pastel suburb, to which he eventually moves. The decor and costumes identify him immediately as a metaphor for the ultimate outsider. But the challenge to Depp as an actor is not only to acknowledge just how different he appears to others (“hands,” scars, makeup, hairstyle), which he does in a very self-conscious and often comic manner (e.g., using his hands to shred cabbage for cole slaw). He also has to humanize this character so that he can be accepted as a member of the community.

Improvisational Acting

Improvisation can mean extemporizing—delivering lines based only loosely on the written script or without the preparation that comes with studying a script before rehearsing it. It can also mean playing through a moment, making up lines to keep scenes going when actors forget their written lines, stumble on lines, or have some other mishap. Of these two senses, the former is most important in movie acting, particularly in the poststudio world; the latter is an example of professional grace under pressure.

Improvisation can be seen as an extension of Stanislavsky's emphasis that the actor striving for a naturalistic performance should avoid any mannerisms that call attention to technique. Occupying a place somewhere between his call for actors to bring their own ex-

periences to roles and Brecht's call for actors to distance themselves from roles, improvisation often involves collaboration between actors and directors in creating stories, characters, and dialogue, which may then be incorporated into scripts. According to film scholar Virginia Wright Wexman, what improvisers

seem to be striving for is the sense of discovery that comes from the unexpected and unpredictable in human behavior. If we think of art as a means of giving form to life, improvisation can be looked at as one way of adding to our sense of the liveliness of art, a means of avoiding the sterility that results from rote recitations of abstract conventional forms.⁴³

For years, improvisation has played a major part in actors' training. But it was anathema in the studio system, where practically everything was preprogrammed, and it remains comparatively rare in narrative movie-making. Actors commonly confer with directors about altering or omitting written lines, but this form of improvisation is so limited in scope that we can better understand it as the sort of fertile suggestion making that is intrinsic to collaboration. Although certain directors encourage actors not only to discover the characters within themselves but also to imagine what those characters might say (and how they might act) in any given situation, James Naremore, an authority on film acting, explains that even great actors, when they improvise, “tend to lapse into monologue, playing from relatively static, frontal positions with a second actor nearby who nods or makes short interjections.”⁴⁴

Among the director-actor collaborations that have made improvisation work effectively are Bernardo Bertolucci and Marlon Brando (*Last Tango in Paris*, 1972); Robert Altman and a large company of actors (*Nashville*, 1975; *Short Cuts*, 1993; *Gosford Park*, 2001); Mike Leigh and various actors (*Another Year*, 2010); and John Cassavetes and Gena Rowlands (*Faces*, 1968; *A Woman under the Influence*, 1974; *Gloria*, 1980).

The Cassavetes-Rowlands collaboration is particularly important and impressive, not only for what it accomplished but also for the respect it received as an

43. Virginia Wright Wexman, “The Rhetoric of Cinematic Improvisation,” *Cinema Journal* 20, no. 1 (Fall 1980): 29. See also Maurice Yacowar, “An Aesthetic Defense of the Star System in Films,” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1979): 48–50.

44. James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 45.



Improvisation

"You talkin' to me? . . . You talkin' to me?" Screenwriter Paul Schrader wrote no dialogue for the scene in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976) in which Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) rehearses his dreams of vigilantism before a mirror. Before filming, De Niro improvised the lines that now accompany this well-known moment in film history, a disturbing, darkly comic portrait of an unhinged mind talking to itself.

experimental approach within the largely conventional film industry. "John's theory," Rowlands explains,

is that if there's something wrong, it's wrong in the writing. If you take actors who can act in other things and they get to a scene they've honestly tried to do, and if they still can't get it, then there's something wrong with the writing. Then you stop, you improvise, you talk about it. Then he'll go and rewrite it—it's not just straight improvisation. I'm asked a lot about this, and it's true, when I look at the films and I see that they look improvised in a lot of different places where I know they weren't.⁴⁵

Improvised acting requires directors to play even more active roles than if they were working with prepared scripts, because they must elicit actors' ideas for characters and dialogue as well as orchestrate those contributions within overall cinematic visions. Ultimately, directors help form all contributions, including those of actors. Nearly all directors who employ improvisation have the actors work it out in rehearsal and then lock it

down for filming, perhaps radically changing their plans for how such scenes will be shot. This is how, for example, Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro worked out the originally silent "You talkin' to me?" scene in *Taxi Driver* (1976).

Unless directors and actors have talked publicly about their work, we seldom know when and to what extent improvisation has been used in a film. Because we know that Cassavetes prepared his actors with precise scripts that they refined with extensive improvisational exercises, by studying the original script we can prepare to look for the improvisation, to judge its usefulness, and to determine whether improvised performances seem convincing or, ironically, less convincing than scripted ones. Other directors who use improvisation in their films include Lynn Shelton (*Your Sister's Sister*, 2011), Wes Anderson (*Moonrise Kingdom*, 2012), Ulrich Seidl (the *Paradise* trilogy, 2012), and Noah Baumbach (*Frances Ha*, 2013).

Directors and Actors

Directors and actors have collaborated closely since the days when D. W. Griffith established the art of screen acting with Lillian Gish. Inevitably, such relationships depend on the individuals: what each brings to his or her work, what each can do alone, and what each needs from a collaborator. Such different approaches taken by different directors in working with actors are as necessary, common, and useful as the different approaches taken by different actors as they prepare for roles.

Some veterans of the studio system, such as William Wyler and George Cukor, are known as "actors' directors," meaning that the directors inspire such confidence they can actively shape actors' performances. Although Wyler may have enjoyed the trust of Bette Davis, Fredric March, Myrna Loy, Barbra Streisand, and other notable actors, the atmosphere on the set was considerably tenser when Laurence Olivier arrived in Hollywood for his first screen role, as Heathcliff in Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* (1939). Olivier had already earned a considerable reputation on the London stage and was frankly contemptuous of screen acting, which he thought serious actors did only for the money. Wyler, on the other

45. Gena Rowlands in *Actors on Acting for the Screen*, ed. Tomlinson, p. 482.

hand, was one of Hollywood's great stylists, a perfectionist who drove actors crazy with his keen sense of acting and love of multiple takes. Everyone on the set perceived the tension between them. Wyler encouraged Olivier to be patient in responding to the challenges involved in acting for the camera, and eventually Olivier overcame his attitude of condescension to give one of his greatest film performances.

In developing his relationships with actors, director John Ford encouraged them to create their characters to serve the narrative. He preferred to work with the same actors over and over, and his working method never changed. John Wayne, who acted in many of Ford's films and has been described as the director's alter ego, said Ford gave direction "with his entire personality—his facial expressions, bending his eye. He didn't verbalize. He wasn't articulate, he couldn't really finish a sentence. . . . He'd give you a clue, just an opening. If you didn't produce what he wanted, he would pick you apart."⁴⁶ Newcomers faced a challenge in getting it right the first time. Similarly, Otto Preminger, the director of *Laura* (1944), was so predictably cruel to his actors that he was known as Otto the Ogre.

However rigid Ford's approach may at first seem, we find it in similarly fruitful collaborations between Rouben Mamoulian and Greta Garbo, Josef von Sternberg and Marlene Dietrich, John Huston and Humphrey Bogart, William Wyler and Bette Davis, François Truffaut and Jean-Pierre Léaud, Akira Kurosawa and Toshirô Mifune, Satyajit Ray and Soumitra Chatterjee, Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro, Spike Lee and Denzel Washington, and Tim Burton and Johnny Depp. These directors know what they want, explain it clearly, select actors with whom they work well, and then collaborate with them to create movies that are characterized in part by the seamless line between directing and acting. Alexander Mackendrick, director of the classic *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), was once asked how to get an actor to do what he needed him to do. "You don't," he said. "What you do is try to get him to *want* what you need" [emphasis added].

By contrast, the line that *can* exist between directing and acting is evident in the work of director Alfred Hitchcock, who tends to place *mise-en-scène* above narrative,

and both *mise-en-scène* and narrative above acting. Hitchcock's movies were so carefully planned and rehearsed in advance that actors were expected to follow his direction closely, so that even those with limited talent (e.g., Tippi Hedren in *The Birds*, 1963; and Kim Novak in *Vertigo*, 1958) gave performances that satisfied the director.

On the other hand, Stanley Kubrick, who controlled his films as rigidly as Hitchcock, was more flexible. When directing *Barry Lyndon* (1975), a film in which fate drove the plot, Kubrick gave his principal actors, Ryan O'Neal and Marisa Berenson, almost nothing to say and then moved them about his sumptuous *mise-en-scène* like pawns on a chessboard. When working with a more open story, however, he encouraged actors to improvise in rehearsal or on the set. The results included such memorable moments as Peter Sellers's final monologue as Dr. Strangelove (and the film's last line, "*Mein Führer, I can walk!*") and Jack Nicholson's manic "Heeeeere's Johnny!" before the climax of *The Shining* (1980). Malcolm McDowell in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman in *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) are also said to have worked out their performances in improvisations with the director. Perhaps the most extreme example is director Werner Herzog, who, in directing *Heart of Glass* (1976), hypnotized the entire cast each day on the set to create what he called "an atmosphere of hallucination, prophecy, visionary and collective madness."

How Filmmaking Affects Acting

Actors must understand how a film is made, because every aspect of the filmmaking process can affect performances and the actors' contributions to the creation of meaning. At the same time, audiences should understand what a movie actor goes through to deliver a performance that, to their eyes, seems effortless and spontaneous. Here are some of the challenges an actor faces.

With some exceptions, most production budgets and schedules do not have the funds or the time to give movie actors much in the way of rehearsal. Thus actors almost always perform a character's progression entirely out of

46. John Wayne, qtd. in Joseph McBride, *Searching for John Ford: A Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), p. 299.

sequence, and this out-of-continuity shooting can also force those who are being filmed in isolation to perform their parts as though they were interacting with other people. When these shots are edited together, the illusion of togetherness is there, but the actors must make it convincing. Actors must time their movements and precisely hit predetermined marks on the floor so that a moving camera and a focus puller know where they will be at every moment; they must often direct their gaze and position their body and/or face in unnatural-feeling poses to allow for lighting, camera position, and composition. These postures usually appear natural on-screen but don't feel natural to the actors performing them on the set.

Movie actors must repeat the same action/line/emotion more than once, not just for multiple takes from a single setup but also for multiple setups. This means that they may perform the close-up of a particular scene an hour after they performed the same moment for a different camera position. Everything about their performance is fragmented, and thus they must struggle to stay in character. Finally, actors are sometimes required to work with acting and dialogue coaches, physical trainers, and stunt personnel. For all the reasons listed here, delivering a convincing screen performance is very challenging.

In the following chapters we will examine editing and sound and the ways they relate to acting and meaning. Here we'll look briefly at how acting is affected by framing, composition, lighting, and the types and lengths of shots.

Framing, Composition, Lighting, and the Long Take

Framing and composition can bring actors together in a shot or keep them apart. Such inclusion and exclusion create relationships between characters, and these in turn create meaning. The physical relation of the actors to each other and to the overall frame (height, width, and depth) can significantly affect how we see and interpret a shot.

The inciting moment of the plot of Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) and one of the principal keys to understanding the movie—for many viewers, its most unforgettable moment—occurs when Charles Foster Kane's (Welles) mother, Mary Kane (Agnes Moorehead), signs the contract that determines her son's future. It consists of only six shots, two of which are long takes. Relying on design, lighting, cinematography, and acting, Welles creates a scene of almost perfect ambiguity.

In designing the scene, Welles puts the four principal characters involved in the incident in the same frame for the two long takes but, significantly, divides the space within this frame into exterior and interior spaces: a young Charles (Buddy Swan) is outside playing with the Rosebud sled in the snow (image [1]), oblivious to how his life is being changed forever; meanwhile, Mary, her husband Jim (Harry Shannon), and Walter Parks Thatcher (George Coulouris) are in Mrs. Kane's boardinghouse (image [2]) for shots 1 through 3 (images [1] to [5]) and outside for shot 4 (image [6]). In shot 3 (image [4]), this division of the overall space into two separate physical and emotional components is dramatically emphasized after Mary signs the contract and Jim walks to the background of the frame and shuts the window, symbolically shutting Charles out of his life and also cutting us off from the sound of his voice. Mary immediately walks to the same window and opens it, asserting her control over the boy by sharply calling "Charles!" before going out to explain the situation to him.

The two long takes carry the weight of the scene and thus require the adult actors to work closely together in shot 3 (image [4]) and with the boy in shot 4 (image [6]). They begin inside the house as a tightly framed ensemble confronting one another across a small table—their bodies composed and their faces lighted to draw attention to the gravity of the decision they are making—and continue outdoors, where these tensions break into the open as young Charles learns of his fate.

The lighting also helps create the meaning. Lamps remain unlit inside the house, where the atmosphere is as emotionally cold as the snowy landscape is physically cold. Outside, the light is flat and bright; inside, this same bright light, reflected from the snow, produces deep shadows. This effect appears most clearly after the opening of shot 3 (image [4]), when Mary Kane turns from the window and walks from the background to the foreground. As she does, lighting divides her face, the dark and light halves emphasizing how torn she feels as a mother in sending Charles away.

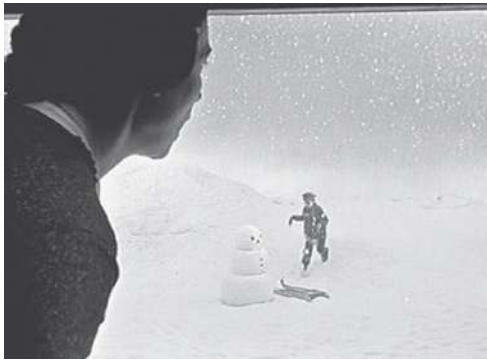
To prepare for the long take, Welles drilled his actors to the point of perfection in rehearsals, giving them amazing things to do (such as requiring Moorehead to pace up and down the narrow room) and then letting this preparation pay off in moments of great theatrical vitality. Look closely, for example, at the performance of Agnes Moorehead, with whom Welles had worked in



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radio productions.⁴⁷ Moorehead knew exactly how to use the tempo, pitch, and rhythm of her voice to give unexpected depth to the familiar melodramatic type she plays here. In the carefully designed and controlled setting—the long room, dividing window, and snowy exterior—Mrs. Kane, whose makeup, hairstyle, and costume are those of a seemingly simple pioneer woman, reveals herself to be something quite different. She is both unforgettably humane as she opens the window and calls her son sharply to the destiny she has decreed and, given that her only business experience has been in running a boardinghouse, surprisingly shrewd in obviously having retained Thatcher to prepare the contract that seals this moment. In fact, this is one of the few scenes in the movie in which a female character totally dominates the action—not surprising, for it is a scene of maternal rejection.

As Mary Kane throws open the window, she cries out, “Charles!” in a strained, even shrill, voice that reveals her anxiety about what she is doing; yet a moment later, sounding both tender and guilty, she tells Thatcher that she has had Charles’s trunk packed for a week. Should we read the cold mask of her face (image [7]) as the implacable look of a woman resigned to her decision or as a cover for maternal feelings? Does it reflect the doubt, indecision, and dread any person would feel in such a situation? Is it the face of sacrifice? Is it all of these possibilities and more? And how should we read Charles, who, in the span of a moment, goes from playful to wary to angry to antagonistic (image [8])?

Although the downtrodden Jim Kane protests his wife’s actions, when Thatcher coolly informs him that he and his wife will receive \$50,000 per year, he feebly gives in, saying, “Well, let’s hope it’s all for the best”—a remark that invariably, as it should, provokes laughter from viewers. And Thatcher, wearing a top hat and dressed in the formal clothes of a big-city banker, sends contradictory signals. He’s precise in overseeing Mrs. Kane’s signature, dismissive of Mr. Kane, fawning as he meets Charles, and angry when Charles knocks

him to the ground. In encouraging this kind of richly nuanced acting and its resulting ambiguity, Welles shifts the challenge of interpretation to us.

As this scene shows, the long take, used in conjunction with deep-focus cinematography, gives directors and actors the opportunity to create scenes of unusual length as well as a broader and deeper field of composition. In addition, the long take encourages ensemble acting that calls attention to acting, not editing between shots. Although we tend to think of actors and their performances as acts of individual creativity, we should keep in mind that one actor’s performance often very much depends on another’s. Indeed, it may rely on an ensemble, or group, of actors.⁴⁸

Ensemble acting—which emphasizes the collaborative interaction of a group of actors, not the work of an individual actor—evolved as a further step in creating a verisimilar *mise-en-scène* for both the stage and the screen. Typically experienced in the theater, ensemble acting is used less in the movies because it requires the provision of rehearsal time that is usually denied to screen actors. However, when a movie director such as Richard Linklater (*Boyhood*, 2014) chooses to use long takes and has the time to rehearse the actors, the result is a group of actors working together continuously in a single shot. Depending on the story and plot situation, this technique can intensify the emotional impact of a specific plot situation by having all of the involved characters on the screen at the same time.

As with so many other innovations, Orson Welles pioneered ensemble acting in *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), and its influence was quickly seen in the work of other directors, notably William Wyler in *The Little Foxes* (1941) and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). More recent examples of excellent ensemble acting can be found in *The Anniversary Party* (2001; directors Alan Cummings and Jennifer Jason Leigh), *The Paperboy* (2012; director Lee Daniels), and *The We and the I* (2012; director Michel Gondry). A particularly challenging assignment for a group of

47. Welles reportedly called Agnes Moorehead “the best actor I’ve ever known”; qtd. in Simon Callow, *Orson Welles: The Road to Xanadu* (New York: Viking, 1995), p. 512.

48. Further study of the long take should consider the work of the great Japanese director Kenji Mizoguchi and notably the Lake Biwa episode in *Ugetsu* (1953). Other notable uses of the technique can be seen in Jean-Pierre Melville’s *Le Doulos* (1962), which includes a virtuoso eight-minute single shot; Werner Herzog’s *Woyzeck* (1979); Lisandro Alonso’s *Los Muertos* (2004), where most of the movie is divided into very long takes; and Pedro Costa’s *Colossal Youth* (2006), where real time and very long takes are the norm. *Avalanche* (1937), a work by Japanese director Mikio Naruse, includes a sequence of very brief shots that are edited together so seamlessly that they provide the visual equivalent of a single long take.



Boyhood's ensemble of actors celebrates a milestone

Here, we see members of the cast celebrate the principal character's (Mason Evans Jr.) high school graduation. *Left to right*: Mason Evans Sr. (Ethan Hawke), Mason Evans Jr. (Ellar Coltrane), his mother Olivia (Patricia Arquette), Olivia's mother (Libby Villari), and his sister Samantha (Lorelei Linklater). It's a milestone for them all, young and old, near the conclusion of twelve years of intermittent filming during which they all grew up together and developed as characters.

actors was Richard Linklater's *Boyhood* (2014). The film focuses on newcomer Ellar Coltrane, who's six when the movie begins and eighteen when it ends. Filmed in four-day sections over that twelve-year span, it shows what movies usually manipulate through editing: the passage of time. Coltrane's passage from a boy to a teenager is played out on the movie screen. It requires the actors, including Ethan Hawke and Patricia Arquette, to stay in character over that period as well as to be comfortable with showing their natural aging, unaltered by makeup or digital effects. It's a unique achievement in movie-making, in a minor way comparable to Michael Apted's *7 Up* series of documentaries (1964–2012), which followed the lives of a group of real British seven-year-olds and recorded their progress every seven years until they reached age fifty-six.

The Camera and the Close-Up

The camera creates a greater naturalism and intimacy between actors and audience than would ever be possible on the stage, and thus it serves as screen actors' most

important collaborator. Nowhere is the camera's effect on the actor's role more evident than in a close-up. The true close-up isolates an actor, concentrating on the face; it can be active (commenting on something just said or done, reminding us who is the focus of a scene) or passive (revealing an actor's beauty). Thus actors' most basic skill is understanding how to reveal themselves to the camera during the close-up.

All great movie actors understand, instinctively or from experience, what to do and not do with their faces when the camera moves in. They must temporarily forget their bodies' expressive possibilities, stand as close to the camera as they would to a person in real life, smoothly balance their voices because the microphone is so close, and focus on the communicative power of even the slightest facial gesture.

Close-ups can shift interpretation to the viewer, as in the two-minute-long close-up of Anna (Nicole Kidman) in Jonathan Glazer's *Birth* (2004; see Chapter 6, p. 260), or they can leave little room for independent interpretation, as in Marlene Dietrich's opening scene as Amy Jolly in Josef von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930; cinematographer Lee Garmes). On the deck of a ship bound for Morocco, the mysterious and beautiful Amy drops her handbag. A sophisticated, older Frenchman—Monsieur La Bessiere (Adolphe Menjou)—kneels at her feet to retrieve her things and then offers to assist her in any way he can when she arrives at her destination. In a relatively quick close-up, Amy looks off into space and tells him she will not need any help. Design elements further distance us from the actress and the character: Dietrich wears a hat with a veil, and thus the shot is “veiled by the ‘Rembrandt’ light, by the fog, by the lens, and by the diaphanous fabric.”⁴⁹ Although we do not yet know who Amy is, what she does, or why she's going to Morocco, we certainly understand La Bessiere's interest.

Close-ups can also reveal both the process of thinking and the thoughts at its end. In a close-up during the climactic moment of John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) transforms from a hateful to a loving man as he halts his premeditated attempt to murder his niece, Debbie (Natalie Wood) and instead lifts her to the safety of his arms. The shot gives us no time to analyze why he has changed his mind—we see only the results of that change.

49. Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, p. 141.



Acting and the close-up

Carl Theodor Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) vividly and unforgettably illustrates the power of the close-up. Most of this silent movie's running time is taken up with contrasting close-ups of Joan (played by Maria Falconetti, a French stage actress who never again appeared on film) and of her many interrogators during the course of her trial. As Joan is questioned, mocked, tortured, and finally burned at the stake, we witness an entire, deeply moving story in her face. Thus we respond to a single character's expressions as they are shaped by the drama and the camera.

In a bar scene in Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954), Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando), playing the tough guy, tells Edie Doyle (Eva Marie Saint) his philosophy: "Do it to him before he does it to you." Up to this point, he has remained aloof after witnessing the mob's murder of Edie's brother, an attitude he continues to display until Edie, who is trying to do something about the corruption on the waterfront, asks for his help. Stopped in his tracks, Terry sits down, and a series of close-ups reveals the shakiness of his unfeeling posture. In a soft, caring, but slightly nervous voice (in this bar setting, surrounded by other tough guys, he's a little self-conscious of being tender with a woman), he tells her, "I'd like to help" and so reveals to her, the camera, and the audience a more sensitive man under the macho mannerisms.

Acting and Editing

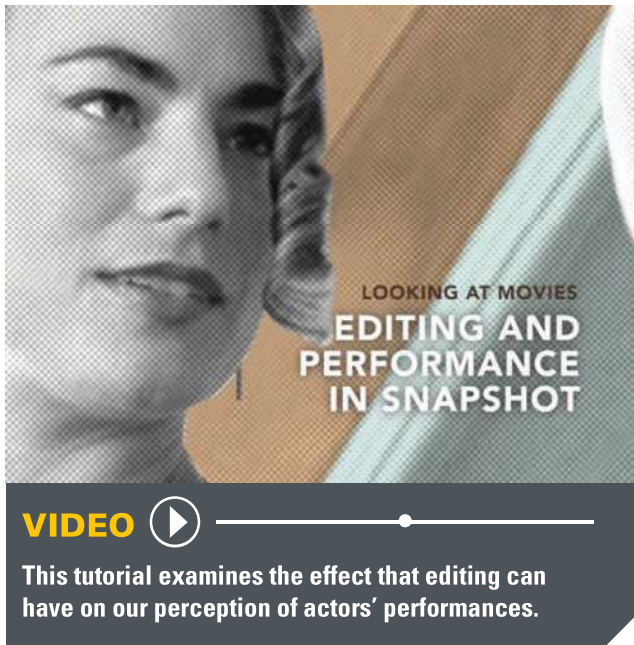
Because a screen actor's performance is fragmented, the editor has considerable power in shaping it. We've already emphasized that the actor is responsible for maintaining the emotional continuity of a performance,



Artistic collaboration and the close-up

In *Morocco* (1930), Marlene Dietrich's beautiful face is made to appear even more haunting and enigmatic by director Josef von Sternberg's mise-en-scène and Lee Garmes's black-and-white cinematography. Dietrich, too, instinctively understood the kind of lighting and camera placement that was right for her role and the narrative as well as for the glamorous image she cultivated in all her movies. In this MCU, she stands on the deck of a ship at night and appears distant, almost otherworldly, as she is bathed in soft, misty "Rembrandt lighting." One half of her face is bright, part of the other half is in shadow. Her face is further framed and softened by her hat and veil and by shooting her against a background that is out of focus. In all likelihood, Garmes also placed thin gauze fabric over the lens to further soften the image. This is the first appearance of Dietrich's character in the movie, so we know little about her but can already discern that she is not only alluring but mysterious. But one thing we know for sure: the Dietrich face, as it appeared on the screen, was the conscious creation of the actress, director, and cinematographer.

but even the most consistent actor delivers slightly different performances on each take. Editors can patch up mistakes by selecting, arranging, or juxtaposing shots to cover these differences. They control the duration of an actor's appearance on the screen and how that time is used. When aspects of an actor's performance that originally were deemed acceptable appear in the editing stage to interrupt the flow of the narrative, the development of the character, or the tone of the movie, the editor, in consultation with the director, can dispense with it completely by leaving that footage on the cutting-room floor. In short, the editor has the power to mold a performance with more control than most directors and even the actors themselves can.



Looking at Acting

Given all the elements and aspects in our discussion of an actor's performance, how do we focus our attention on analyzing acting? Before looking at some recognized criteria, let's discuss how we can bring our own experiences to the task. An actor's performance on the screen goes beyond what we see and hear; it also includes many intangibles and subtleties. That alone makes the analysis of acting much more challenging. Breaking down and cataloging other elements of cinematic language—whether narrative, mise-en-scène, production design, or cinematography—and using that information to analyze their usefulness and effectiveness is much easier than analyzing acting. Yet acting (perhaps second only to narrative) is the component most people use to assess movies. We feel an effective, natural, moving performance in a more direct way than we respond to other cinematic aspects of most films, and we feel both qualified and compelled to judge films by their performances.

What accounts for this sense of entitlement? Why are we so fixated on actors? Why do we so frequently judge the quality of the movie by the (often intangible) quality of the actors' performances? There are several reasons. First, although cinematic language has a considerable effect on the way we look at a movie, we also

identify with characters and, of course, with the actors who inhabit those characters. Second, we identify with characters who pursue a goal. We get involved with this pursuit, which is driven by and embodied by the actors who inhabit the characters, because a movie narrative is constructed to exploit what most involves us. We don't even have to like the characters as long as we believe them. Third, we identify with characters because of our own behavior as people. Although cinematic language draws from our instinctive responses to everyday visual and audio information, we don't consciously notice and process it as much as we do human behavior. We are people watchers by nature, necessity, and desire. We are constantly analyzing behavior. When you say hello to a friend or ask a professor a question or order a cup of coffee from a waiter, you are noticing and processing and reacting to human behavior. Is the friend happy? Does the professor think you're stupid? Is the waiter paying attention?

Finally, our identification with characters and the actors who play them has something to do with our own personality. We too behave in a way that is consistent with our general character or state of mind, and beyond that, we are also engaged in role-playing. You present yourself differently, depending on where you are, what's going on, and who you're with. You behave differently with a police officer than you do with your mother or your professor, differently with a new friend than with an old one.

Now that we've looked at some of the reasons for our reactions to actors and acting, how do we analyze their performances? What are the criteria of a good performance? In their everyday moviegoing, people tend to appreciate acting subjectively. They like an actor's performance when he or she looks, speaks, and moves in ways that confirm their expectations for the character (or type of character). Conversely, they dislike a performance that baffles those expectations.

This approach, though understandable, can also be limiting. How many of us have sufficient life experiences to fully comprehend the range of characters that appear on the screen? What background do we bring to an analysis of the performance of the following actors? Humphrey Bogart as a cold-blooded private eye in John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941); Carlo Battisti as a retired, impoverished bureaucrat in Vittorio De Sica's *Umberto D.* (1952); Giulietta Masina as a childlike circus performer in Federico Fellini's *La Strada* (1954); Toshirô



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Assessing acting performances

[1] Toshiro Mifune in the death scene of Lord Washizu in Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) and [2] Holly Hunter in Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), a performance for which she won the Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role. To analyze an actor's performance, we need to consider its context—the particular movie in which it appears. Kurosawa's film draws on a specific genre—the *jidai-geki*, or historical drama—that is traditionally full of action; Campion's film draws on history but focuses more on psychology than on action. Thus Mifune uses ritualized, nonnaturalistic facial expressions and body language; and Hunter, who speaks only in voice-over, appears more naturalistic, inner directed, subdued.

Mifune as a Japanese warlord (based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*) in Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957); Marlon Brando as a Mafia don in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972); Holly Hunter as a mute Victorian relocated from Scotland to New Zealand in Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993); Sissy Spacek as the mother of a murdered son in Todd Field's *In the Bedroom* (2001);

Brad Pitt as the leader of a male aggression movement in David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999); or Philip Seymour Hoffman as author Truman Capote in Bennett Miller's *Capote* (2005).

Movie acting may be, as legendary actor Laurence Olivier once said, the “art of persuasion.”⁵⁰ Yet it is also a formal cinematic element, one as complex as design or cinematography. To get a sense of how movie acting works on its own and ultimately in relation to the other formal elements, we need to establish a set of criteria more substantial than our subjective feelings and reactions.

Because every actor, character, and performance in a movie is different, it is impossible to devise standards that would apply equally well to all of them. Furthermore, different actors, working with different directors, often take very different approaches to the same material, as you can judge for yourself by comparing the many remakes in movie history. Within the world of a particular story, your goal should be to determine the quality of the actor's achievement in creating the character and how that performance helps tell the story. Thus you should discuss an actor's specific performance in a specific film, for example, by discussing how Michael Fassbender's acting in Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* (2013) serves to create the character of Edwin Epps, the alcoholic, sadist plantation owner. In your analysis, tell the story of that film without being influenced by expectations possibly raised by your having seen Fassbender in other movies, including those directed by McQueen: *Hunger* (2008) and *Shame* (2011).

In analyzing any actor's performance, you might consider the following:

- **Appropriateness.** Does the actor look and act naturally like the character he or she portrays, as expressed in physical appearance, facial expression, speech, movement, and gesture? If the performance is nonnaturalistic, does the actor look, walk, and talk the way that character might or should?

Paradoxically, we expect an actor to behave as if he or she were *not* acting but were simply living the illusion of a character we can accept within the context of the movie's narrative. Such appropriateness in acting is also called *transparency*, meaning that the character is so clearly recognizable—in speech, movement, and

50. Olivier, *Confessions of an Actor*, p. 51.



Evil, pure evil

In *12 Years a Slave*, Michael Fassbender plays Edwin Epps, as evil a character that ever appeared on screen. He's a racist, a liar, an alcoholic, and a sadist, traits that manifest themselves in his actions than in his appearance. He may not "look" evil, but his treatment of his slaves is almost unbearable to watch. Movies like these should convince us not to confuse the actor with the part.

gesture—for what he or she is supposed to be that the actor becomes, in a sense, invisible. Most actors agree that the more successfully they create characters, the more we will see those characters and not them.

- *Inherent thoughtfulness or emotionality.* Does the actor convey the character's thought process or feelings behind the character's actions or reactions? In addition to a credible appearance, does the character have a credible inner life?

An actor can find the motivations behind a character's actions and reactions at any time before or during a movie's production. They may come to light in the script (as well as in any source on which it is based, such as a novel or play), in discussions with the director or with other cast members, and in spontaneous elements of inspiration and improvisation that the actor discovers while the camera is rolling. No matter which of these aspects or combinations of them reveal the character's motivation, we expect to see the actor reflect them within the character's consciousness or as part of the illusion-making process by which the character appears. To put it another way, the characters must seem vulnerable to forces in the narrative. They must be able to think about them and, if necessary, change their mind or feelings about them.

- *Expressive coherence.* Has the actor used these first two qualities (appropriateness and inherent thoughtfulness/emotionality) to create a characterization that holds together?

Whatever behavior an actor uses to convey character, it must be intrinsic, not extraneous to the character, "maintaining not only a coherence of manner, but also a fit between setting, costume, and behavior."⁵¹ When an actor achieves such a fit, he or she is playing in character. Maintaining expressive coherence enables the actor to create a complex characterization and performance, to express thoughts and reveal emotions of a recognizable individual without veering off into mere quirks or distracting details.

- *Wholeness and unity.* Despite the challenges inherent in most film productions, has the actor maintained the illusion of a seamless character, even if that character is purposely riddled with contradictions?

Whereas expressive coherence relies on the logic inherent in an actor's performance, wholeness and unity are achieved through the actor's ability to achieve aesthetic consistency while working with the director, crew, and other cast members; enduring multiple takes; and projecting to the camera rather than to an audience. However, wholeness and unity need not mean uniformity. The point is this: as audience members we want to feel we're in good hands; when we're confused or asked to make sense of seemingly incoherent elements, we want to know that the apparent incoherence happened intentionally, for an aesthetic reason, as part of the filmmakers' overall vision. For example, if a given character suddenly breaks down or reveals himself to be pretending to be somebody he isn't, the actor must sufficiently prepare for this change in the preceding scenes, however he chooses, so that we can accept it.

Looking at Acting: Michelle Williams

To begin applying these criteria, we'll take a look at the work of Michelle Williams in Derek Cianfrance's *Blue Valentine* (2010) for which she earned an Oscar nomination for Best Actress in a Leading Role. She is part of a long tradition of actors who play strong female characters in a man's world. A short list would include Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Faye Dunaway, Jane Fonda, Jodie Foster, Lillian Gish, Diane Keaton, Frances McDormand, Ellen Page, Julia Roberts, Barbara Stanwyck, and Uma Thurman. Many of them—including Crawford, Davis, and Stanwyck—worked primarily in the studio system. As discussed earlier in this chapter, these actors worked

51. Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, p. 69.

under contractual obligations that severely limited their opportunities.

Michelle Williams is one of a younger generation of actors—including Carey Mulligan, Jennifer Lawrence, Lupita Nyong'o, and Jessica Chastain—who are enriching the art of acting. They work in today's independent production system and are almost completely free to choose their movies, roles, and sometimes even their directors, costars, and other collaborators. They work as often as they want, taking time off to meet the challenges of acting on the stage, to enjoy lucrative promotional opportunities, usually for luxury goods and services, and to enjoy private life.

Williams was born in Montana and raised in California, where, after completing the ninth grade, she quit school to pursue an acting career. With her gamine-like features, she began her movie career with comedies—Andrew Fleming's *Dick* and Jamie Babbitt's *But I'm a Cheerleader*, both 1999—before moving on to serious drama with Erik Skjoldbjærg's *Prozac Nation* (2001). Between 1999 and 2014, she'd completed over thirty movies. She is best known for her portrayals of intelligent, determined women, including Emily in Thomas McCarthy's *The Station Agent* (2003); Alma in Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), for which she earned an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actress; Wendy in Kelly Reichardt's *Wendy and Lucy* (2008); and Emily in Reichardt's *Meek's Cutoff* (2010). Her other movies include *Deception* (2008; director Marcel Langenegger), *Synecdoche, New York* (2008; director Charlie Kaufman), *Shutter Island* (2010; director Martin Scorsese). After *Brokeback Mountain*, another turning point in Williams's career was her portrayal of Marilyn Monroe in Simon Curtis's *My Week with Marilyn* (2011), for which she garnered an Oscar nomination for Best Actress. Other movies include *Oz the Great and Powerful* (2013; director Sam Raimi) and *Suite Française* (2014; director Saul Dibb). In 2014, taking time off from her movie career, she costarred as Sally Bowles in a Broadway revival of the musical *Cabaret*. Her work in *Blue Valentine* is the subject of the following discussion.

Blue Valentine is a story about a marriage that was off course from the beginning, a union of Cindy (Michelle Williams), a talented, promising young woman, and Dean (Ryan Gosling), a romantic who is contented with only being her husband, not striving for more. His love for her is genuine, hers isn't, and it's clear from almost the beginning that she is not committed. It is basically



My Week with Marilyn is a week to remember

Eddie Redmayne plays Colin Clark, a young film school graduate who lands a job as an assistant to Marilyn Monroe (Michelle Williams), who is making a movie in London. Williams gives an outstanding performance as the screen goddess, in all her fragility and craziness, as well as vulnerability in falling for Eddie, a naïve, love-sick puppy. The week they spend together, much of it alone, may be something many men dream about, but it's based on a true story. When Monroe's movie work is finished, she returns to Hollywood and her new husband, Arthur Miller. Although she leaves Colin with a broken heart, Michelle Williams's versatile portrayal of Monroe provides some level of understanding.

a two-person story that requires two superb actors to handle the characters' development from needy teenagers to disillusioned parents. She's a pre-med student living at home and looking after her aging grandmother; he works for a moving company. He may be a high school dropout, but he doesn't lack intelligence, sensitivity, or a desire to be a good husband and father. But it doesn't help their situation that she's running away from her unhappy parents, that he hasn't seen his parents in some time, that their child was fathered by Cindy's high school boyfriend, or that she attempted to abort it before agreeing to start a family with Dean.

They move to rural Pennsylvania, where Cindy works as an aide in a doctor's office and Dean as a house painter, a job that he jokingly says allows him to start drinking at eight in the morning. She soon becomes disillusioned with him and their life together. From the marriage to the ultimate breakup, their situation changes dramatically, and the movie charts those changes through frequent flashbacks that show her falling for his boyish charm and promise of a life together to the nasty fight that ends it all. Their happy memories of the time before they were married are contrasted to a climactic weekend spent in the "Future Room" of a theme motel, an arrangement that Dean hopes will rekindle their love. When it doesn't, he provokes an ugly argument at the



Cindy and Dean are married

Cindy and Dean's wedding takes place in the office of a justice of the peace. She wears a white lace dress and cries tears of joy as she looks up at Dean and repeats the vows. The couple has taken a great risk in getting married, but they are happy as they begin their life together. The director chose to shoot all scenes of the couple's past on film stock, and the bright light flooding the office fades the colors of her face and Dean's jacket (*right*), making the image look old, as was intended.

doctor's office where she works; consequently, she is fired, and he walks off into the distance, with their young daughter begging him to come back, as the movie ends.

Such a story—so unlike *Stella Dallas* and so recognizable in our time—requires two actors who can truthfully convince us of the characters' range of intellect and emotions as they watch their marriage crumble. Williams and Gosling were so committed to bringing the story to the screen that they served as the film's executive producers. Thus they helped to formulate the process by which the movie would be shot. Indeed, this is an excellent example of how filmmaking affects acting, especially in a low-budget, independent movie such as *Blue Valentine*. The actors and director agreed that the film would be made in three stages. As we've already noted, the movie relies heavily on continual flashbacks that contrast the first part of this couple's relationship, which was happy, with the last part, which was not. So the first stage was to shoot those happy scenes, all together, with seldom more than one take for each. There were no rehearsals. And the director, Derek Cianfrance, chose to shoot on traditional film stock because it lends a romantic quality to the footage. The second stage began when the two principal actors—joined by Faith Wladyka, who plays Frankie, their daughter—spent a month “liv-



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The marriage falls apart

Two incidents, among others, indicate that Cindy and Dean's marriage is falling apart. In [1], Cindy, upset when their pet dog is killed by a passing car, watches stoically as Dean buries the body in their yard. It's an omen of what's to come, just as Dean's attempt to rekindle their marriage in the “Future Room” of a motel backfires. Soon, looking haggard [2], Cindy has one last fight with Dean. She's determined not to give in to his pleas for another chance and, within minutes, he walks out of her life. The use of digital cinematography for these scenes gives them the real-life look of a documentary film.

ing” their parts in the house used for the actual shooting. (They simulated this marriage here only during the day, returning to their real-life homes at night.) In this unusual mode of working, they ripped apart the happy years, determining what they would have been like in the subsequent years, and then improvised much of the dialogue for the next stage of shooting. The third stage was to shoot the marriage as it dissolves, this time on digital media, which is bright and clinical in its look, contrasting markedly from the film footage. Here, the director shot many takes. Intercutting both kinds of footage gives the

movie a discernible texture that helps the viewer separate past from present. Also, to emphasize the status of the marriage, you'll notice that in the first part of the film, the cinematographer almost always uses two-shots with the couple together in the frame, and in the second part, shoots them in separate frames.

Blue Valentine is the director's second feature film—Cianfrance's previous experience was mostly with television documentaries—and while he uses a unique method of creating the film, he also intuitively understands how to let Williams and Gosling work together to create their characters. They built on mutual trust and spent eight hours a day living together in a fully functional house where Gosling and Williams, like Dean and Cindy, did nothing but bicker with each other. After a month, they were all ready to shoot "the present" and were so fully prepared in their parts that they didn't have to act. (Cianfrance also directed Gosling in *The Place Beyond the Pines* [2013], an ambitious, complex story about fathers and sons.)

In her role as Cindy in *Blue Valentine*, Williams uses her intelligence and insight to create a character who is determined to make the best of her life, but whose stoic acceptance of reality prevails until she can stand it no longer. The director takes this strong story, of which he is a co-screenwriter, and lets it run an emotional course that is clearly established by the spontaneous interaction of the two principal actors. Its measured pace builds slowly to the ultimate blowup. Of the two characters, many viewers will find Gosling to be the more sympathetic. He emphasizes Dean's loyalty, sense of humor, kind heart, and genuine but failed efforts to understand his wife's unhappiness. He makes it clear that Dean is incapable of evolving or changing. Like the cigarette that is perpetually dangling from his lower lip, he's predictable. But while Cindy is the more determined of the two to reverse her discontent, she does it at the cost of destroying Dean. It's a grim story, hard to watch in the rawness of its emotions and in its ambiguous ending. Shattered, Dean walks off; Cindy is now a single mother with no job and an uncertain future. But she has not been defeated.

Using those characteristics that we have just defined as the key to analyzing an actor's performance, we can see that Williams looks and acts naturally, as we would expect of the character that she defines. Cindy keeps a messy house and takes little notice of her appearance, but she is engaged in something more important: balancing her tender empathy for Dean with her strong resolve to change her life. At first, their sexual life together seems satisfactory, but she soon regards it mechanically and then with resentment. They're both caring parents, but Dean works harder at it than she does. She's initially and passively resentful of Dean's lack of ambition, and then, in despair, challenges him to be more than he is (or could be). Williams conveys the thought process and feelings behind Cindy's actions and reactions primarily through gesture and physical movement: you can feel her physical resentment for her husband when he tries to make love to her. And the dialogue, which was improvised, has the honest rawness to be convincing. The frequent flashbacks to happier times require the actors to break the unity of their performances to accommodate the changes that have occurred between them then and now. Because Dean doesn't change, Cindy most clearly registers these changes. We see them in her appearance, voice, and mannerisms. In high school she's a sweet, passive kid, foolishly in love with the wrong man. Williams finds great joy in Cindy's singing and dancing in the street with Dean and dressing up for their wedding. But in later life, there is little joy, and she makes Cindy into a hard, resentful, unforgiving woman. Shooting as they did, Williams (and Gosling) faced difficult challenges in maintaining expressive coherence. Ultimately, she creates a characterization that has the wholeness of its contradictory parts.

Finally, there's a truthfulness that comes with her seemingly effortless performance, a naturalness that only a born actor can create. Williams not only looks and acts like such a character in physical appearance, facial expression, speech, movement, and gesture but also understands—and can make us understand—all kinds of feelings, ranging from vulnerability to strength.

ANALYZING ACTING

Our responses to actors' performances on-screen are perhaps our most automatic and intuitive responses to any formal aspect of film. Thus it is easy to forget that acting is as much a formal component of movies—something made—as *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, and editing are. And yet, acting is clearly something that must be planned and shaped in some manner; the very fact that films are shot out of continuity demands that actors approach their performances with a rigor and consciousness that mirrors the director's work on the film as a whole. This chapter has presented several different things to think about as you watch film acting in other movies. Using the criteria described in the previous section, remaining sensitive to the context of the performances, and keeping the following checklist in mind as you watch, you should be able to incorporate an intelligent analysis of acting into your discussion and writing about the movies you screen for class.

SCREENING CHECKLIST: ACTING

- ☐ Why was this actor, and not another, cast for the role?
- ☐ Does the actor's performance create a coherent, unified character? If so, how?
- ☐ Does the actor look the part? Is it necessary for the actor to look the part?
- ☐ Does the actor's performance convey the actions, thoughts, and internal complexities that we associate with natural or recognizable characters? Or does it exhibit the excessive approach we associate with nonnaturalistic characters?
- ☐ What elements are most distinctive in how the actor conveys the character's actions, thoughts, and internal complexities: body language, gestures, facial expressions, language?
- ☐ What special talents of imagination or intelligence has the actor brought to the role?
- ☐ How important is the filmmaking process in creating the character? Is the actor's performance overshadowed by the filmmaking process?
- ☐ Does the actor work well with fellow actors in this film? Do any of the other actors detract from the lead actor's performance?
- ☐ How, if at all, is the actor's conception of the character based on logic? How does the performance demonstrate expressive coherence?
- ☐ Does the actor's performance have the expressive power to make us forget that he or she is acting? If it does, how do you think the actor achieved this effect?

Questions for Review

1. How does movie acting today differ from movie acting in the 1930s through the 1960s?
2. Why is the relationship between the actor and the camera so important in making and looking at movies?
3. How did the coming of sound influence movie acting and actors?
4. What's the difference between movie stars and movie actors? Why do some critics emphasize that movie stars are a commodity created by the movie industry?
5. What factors influence the casting of actors in a movie?
6. How are naturalistic and nonnaturalistic movie acting different?
7. What is improvisational acting?
8. How do framing, composition, lighting, and the long take affect the acting in a movie?
9. Given the range of techniques available to movie actors, why do we say that their most basic skill is understanding how to reveal themselves to the camera during the close-up?
10. What do you regard as the most important criteria in analyzing acting?

STUDENT RESOURCES ONLINE

digital.wwnorton.com/movies5

**VIDEO**

The tutorials for this chapter examine two influences on both actors' performances and our perception of those performances: persona and film editing.

