3 Film acting

Paul McDonald

Acting is the form of performance specifically involved with the construction of dramatic character. Actors construct characters by using their voices and bodies. For an audience, the activity of reading a performance involves the bringing together of actor and character, and the interpretation and evaluation of acting has tended to assess whether or not the actor has 'become' the character. This has produced a familiar language of interpretation, in which judgements about acting are articulated in terms of whether a performance is more or less 'believable', 'truthful', or 'realistic'.

Although acting remains a major component of narrative cinema, film studies has yet to provide any sustained inquiry into film acting. If it is to examine acting further, it should not discard such terms as 'believable', 'truthful', and 'realistic', but rather question what they mean and how those meanings are constructed as the effects of film acting. Part of the agenda of film studies has been to develop critical frameworks for analysing and contesting how film reproduces ideological beliefs and 'truths'. Questions of the believable, the truthful, and the realistic in film acting may therefore provide the basis for assessing how, and with what effect, screen performance is a socially meaningful act.

Any study of film acting needs first and foremost to be aware of the medium. Film acting is as much a product of camera angles, camera movements, lighting, editing, and music as it is of the actor's voice and body. Barry King (1985: 28) has discussed how, for actors working both on stage and screen, film presents a problem of professional power, for the actor loses part of his or her creative control to the camera and the cutting-room. Conversely, in a labour market where work is scarce, some actors criticize film and television because camera-work and editing can made 'bad' actors appear 'good' (1985: 33). What is at stake in this conflict between the film actor and film technology is a debate concerning whether it is the actor or the film technology which is the primary source of meaning. In a famous case of experimentation, the Soviet film-maker Lev Kuleshov took shots of an open prison door and a bowl of soup, along with two reaction shots of an actor longing for freedom and feeling hunger. Although the reaction shots showed different expressions on the actor's face, Kuleshov (1929: 54) reported that, when the shots were juxtaposed, their meaning changed, and concluded that it was the editing and not the actor that determined the meaning of the performance.

Walter Benjamin (1936) saw the impact of film technology on the actor as part of a wider cultural change. For Benjamin, reproduction defined a new phase in cultural production, as the technology of reproduction had the effect of separating the art object from its creator. Benjamin believed this diminished the 'aura' attached to works of art, as the object no longer carried with it the mystical 'presence' of the person who made them. In this context 'presence' should be taken to

mean both that the creator was present at the making of the object and that this original contact with the creator left the object with a special 'charisma'. It was this effect of reproduction which led Benjamin to argue that, in contrast to acting for the stage, film acting loses the presence of the performer and, in doing so, diminishes the aura, or charisma, of the individual.

In John Ellis's (1982) view, the overall effect of film reproduction lies in how it forms an illusion of presence in absence. In other words, film constructs the illusion that there is something or somebody present, when that spectacle is in fact recorded, reproduced, and absent. The separation of actor and image is then part of this effect. Using psychoanalytic concepts, Ellis argues that the film actor is placed in relation to the narcissistic, voyeuristic, and fetishistic looks of moviegoers. Through the construction of point of view, moviegoers will adopt various narcissistic identifications with the actors playing characters who control the narrative. By the convention of not looking at the camera, actors become part of the voyeuristic spectacle which the audience spies on. And, as the presence in absence of the film actor divides the moviegoer between relief and disbelief, actors also become part of the fetishistic attraction of cinema (see Creed, Part 1, Chapter 9).

Benjamin and Ellis emphasize the film apparatus as more meaningful than the work of the actor. Both discuss what film does, and what film does to actors, but they do not address what film actors are doing. This type of approach has led to the tendency for film studies to discuss 'performance' as the performance of the medium rather than of the actor (e.g. Heath 1977). This neglect of actors in film studies has left them, instead of a presence in absence, simply absent. Any critical study of film acting would benefit from not merely dismissing 'aura' or 'presence' as metaphysical and mystical qualities, but from asking how such effects are constructed from the material elements of the film actor's voice and body. Benjamin's conclusion that reproduction removes the aura of presence from film acting is debatable, not just because the film image still makes the actor appear to be present, but also because the work and signification of acting may at one level be read as constructing the performer as a special focus of attention. While it is always the case that the film actor is absent, it should not be ignored that the use of camera, lighting, and editing, but more importantly the actor's voice and body, also work at trying to construct a charismatic spectacle. Rather, it should be asked how film acting constructs presence to compensate for the actual absence of the actor?

One way of understanding the film actor's position in the play of presence and absence is suggested by what James Naremore (1988) calls the 'performance frame'. At one level, this frame is to be understood as the limits of the film frame. When projected in the cinema, this frame is equivalent to the proscenium arch in theatre, marking the boundary between the world of the audience and the dramatic world of the actors. As any observation of film acting makes immediately clear, the realistic in acting does not arise from exact imitation of everyday behaviour. This difference between film acting and the everyday world is further distinguished by the performance frame. Whatever appears in the frame may be more or less similar to everyday life, but simply by appearing on screen the actor is immediately framed as apart from the everyday. When turned into public spectacle, the contents of the frame become more significant and meaningful than the experiences of everyday life. At this further level, the frame therefore constructs a context for meaning. Although the film actor only appears as a recorded image, that actor may still have a presence entirely because his or her actions are contextualized as meaningful. This effect is described by Barry King (1985: 41) as the 'hypersemiotisation' of the film actor. The film actor obtains an aura because the frame invests every action of the voice and body with meaning.

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The performance frame only provides a context for the meaning of film acting; it does not account for how the acting voice and body actually construct meanings. Stephen Heath (1979: 179–82) proposes that film acting combines different sources or forms of meaning. The role played by the actor can be divided between the 'agent', or narrative function, and the 'character' formed from a set of individuating traits and peculi-

arities. The 'person' or actor may already be a source of meanings known from previous performances. Each of these sources is visualized in the 'image', but at some points the image may also stand apart from these other forms to present the performer only as spectacle. For Heath, these sources are never integrated to form a closed, coherent construction, but are various points of meaning which remain in continuous circulation to form what he calls a 'figure'.

Heath's model would suggest that the actor never 'disappears' into a role. From this view, believability in film acting is never the effect of how an actor has 'become' a role, but is the effect of how the actor is involved with becoming the role. Therefore, believable acting can in part be understood as the effect of making something which is absent and does not exist, i.e. the dramatic role, into something which is present and which appears to exist. The separation of actor and role makes the voice and body of the actor particularly significant, for these are the means for bringing together agent, character, actor, and image in a believable configuration. The actor's voice and body provide hypersemiotized fragments burdened with meaning. Heath's description of such fragments as 'intensities' (1979: 183) usefully identifies that it is through the small details of the actor's speech and movement that interpretations and judgements about film acting are formed.

Different effects are produced in acting depending on the extent to which the actor or the role is foregrounded. Barry King (1985: 41) describes as 'impersonation' acting in which the actor undergoes significant transformations to 'become' his or her role. Where actors do not impersonate their role but appear across a series of performances always to 'be themselves', acting is described by King as 'personification' (42). Impersonation, constructed through significant transformations, is based on difference, while personification connects similarities between performances. While some actors will produce performances that are more different than similar, and some the reverse, the two categories are not exclusive, and any performance should be seen for how it combines impersonation and personification.

Critical judgements about 'good' or 'bad' film acting can also be understood in terms of impersonation versus personification. Respected performers are often evaluated for what is read as their ability to transform themselves into different roles. This critical judgement is premissed on a realist aesthetic which values the actor's skills employed in attempting to close the gap between actor and role in order to form a figure integrated into the narrative fiction. Personfication disrupts this closure, emphasizing the actor's identity against the single role. The importance given to the actor's identity carries distinctive meanings between films, and personification has tended to be integral to the acting of film stars. It is because star acting is usually based on personification rather than impersonation that stars are so often criticized for not 'really' acting but for always 'playing themselves'.

While Heath and King offer terms for understanding the levels at which the relationship of actor to role is formed, they do not provide the means for understanding the detail in how the voices and bodies of film actors construct characters. Richard Dyer (1979: 121) identifies the appearance, speech, gestures, and actions of actors as elements in the construction of character in film. By their physical appearance, actors already represent a set of meanings. The use of costume, make-up, hairstyle, or posture becomes the means for impersonatory transformations. With speech, it is necessary to distinguish what is said from how it is said. Apart from cases where actors improvise, dialogue is usually produced by the writer. It is in how the writer's dialogue is spoken that the work of the actor is identified. The 'paralinguistic' features of volume, tone, and rhythm are the elements by which the actor's voice inflects the script. Dyer divides the signification of the body between gestures, which indicate the personality and temperament of the character, and actions, which are movements produced for the purpose of effecting a change in the narrative (1979: 126–8). In their various ways, it is these 'bits' of voices and bodies from which the relationship between actor, agent, character, and image is constructed.

Both the vocal and bodily significations of acting present a difficulty for the detailed analysis of film acting. Despite references to body language, physical movements and the paralinguistic dimensions of speech do not divide up into units similar to the letters and words of written and spoken language. It is difficult therefore to break down film acting performances into component signs. For this reason, Roberta Pearson (1992) employs the semiotic concept of 'code' as an alternative to the study of discrete acting signs. A code is formed when a set of signs, or signifying features, are deployed in familiar ways to signify a conventionalized set of meanings. Using codes, the analysis of acting

Towards verisimilitude— Blanche Sweet in an early Griffith film for Biograph/ *The Lonedale Operator* (1911)

shifts from the sign to questions of style. In her analysis of film acting in the early Biograph films of D. W. Griffith, Pearson traces a transformation between 1907 and 1912 from what she calls the 'histrionic code' to the 'verisimilar code'. In the former, the actor represented emotions through large gestures, and Pearson refers to this style as 'histrionic' because of the way in which it used conventions which did not imitate a sense of the everyday but belonged to the stage or screen drama only. In contrast, the verisimilar code was judged to be more 'realistic' because it was not so clearly conventionalized and gave more of a sense of everyday behaviour.

Despite the dominance of the verisimilar in screen acting, it should be noted that the histrionic component of screen acting never entirely disappears. Film acting remains distinguishable from everyday behaviour and so is always to a degree obviously acting. This difference between acting and everyday behaviour indicates that the 'realistic' in film acting has to be examined as a set of coded conventions. Where film acting is closer to approximating to the everyday, then a critical difficulty arises as it becomes less obvious that the actor is acting. This is an important problem, for it is precisely in this 'invisible' acting that the construction of believability, truthfulness, or the realistic is most active. Judgements about 'bad' acting are often formed on the basis that the performer 'was obviously acting' and was therefore unbelievable. Analysis of film acting therefore has to make acting obvious if it is to examine the basis on which such judgements are made.

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One way of making acting obvious is suggested by John O. Thompson's (1978) use of the semiotic exercise the 'commutation test'. This test works by substituting actors to see what effect the substitution has on the meaning of a performance. Changes in meaning

can then be analysed for the significant features which produced that difference. While the problems of breaking acting down into its constitutive signs prevent this method of analysis from being scientifically precise, it can draw attention to how a change of meaning is read from impressions formed about the colour of the eyes, the length of the nose, or the angle of the fingers, for example. Additionally, the test does not need to work just by substituting actors but can substitute ways of acting, so that the movement of the body becomes evident from substituting fast for slow, or the tone of the voice by changing high for low.

While Pearson's category of the verisimilar is useful, because the realistic in acting has taken several forms it is necessary to appreciate the many styles that the verisimilar has taken. Readings of acting style can be directed at different levels, looking at changes in style across historical periods, the relation of genre to performance style (de Cordova 1986), schools of acting such as the Method (Vineburg 1991), and how actors combine codes to form a personal style, or idiolect. As different ways of acting have served to define at particular times what is believable, truthful, or realistic in film acting, readings of film performances have to be seen in their historical contexts. Grahame F. Thompson (1985) has suggested that acting performances form a discourse which is only meaningful in a context of other discourses. From such a perspective, it is necessary to see how other forms of knowledge will influence what will be regarded as believable or truthful in acting. At the same time, it should be recognized that acting does not just reflect those other discourses, but that it is necessary to examine how an actor's voice and body construct believability and truth in their own terms.

The question of believability in acting is only at issue where film performers are placed in the formal conventions of realist narrative cinema. Alternative or oppositional cinema cultures have often developed through the transformation or rejection of realist and narrative conventions. In such movements the role of the film actor has been used in various ways to counter the illusion of narrative cinema, precisely in order that the actor's work will cease to be believable. The influence of Brechtian theories of acting (Brecht 1940) on film-makers such as Jean-Luc Godard has resulted in some acting strategies where the film actor works at signifying their distance from a character (Higson 1986). Acting in this way attempts to make the fiction unbelievable as a means of questioning how believability in representation reproduces familiar and accepted truths. The distance between actor and character therefore opens up a perspective on how meaning is constructed. Other experimentations in film acting occurred as part of the post-revolution Soviet avant-garde. Vsevolod Meyerhold developed a system of training actors called 'bio-mechanics', in which actors used the body in ways which imitated the regular and repetitious actions of machines. Lez Cooke (1986) reads the use of this technique by the director Dziga Vertov as constructing, not a believable character, but a metaphor between the machine and the human body, which, in its historical context, produced a symbol of hope for the future. As these counter-strategies begin to problematize or depart from the actor–character relationship which is fundamental to acting, it could be questioned whether 'acting' is a suitable way of describing these ways of performing.

A considerable amount of current work in film studies is concerned with how cinematic forms produce and reproduce social categories of gender, race, and sexuality. As yet, these critical concerns have not significantly influenced the study of film acting. The concept of 'masquerade' is a useful point from which to establish such connections (see White, Part 1, Chapter 13). According to this concept, social identities such as 'masculinity' or 'femininity' are not the effect of internal and ahistorical essences. Instead, these categories have to be continually constructed and reproduced, so that gender categories are understood as ways of 'acting' or 'performance'. In film studies, some uses of this concept (e.g. Holmlund 1993) have discussed how costuming and narrative situations construct gender. There is a problem with this view though, for it suspends the performance at the level of an artificial 'surface' behind which a 'real' identity is hidden. The fuller implications of the concept of masquerade will only become apparent when gendered, racial, and sexual meanings are seen to be acted in the uses of speaking voices and moving bodies.

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4

Film costume

Pamela Church Gibson

Most students of film and media will probably complete their course without having studied film costume in any detail, if at all. Why this should be the case, when it is arguably such an important component of the way in which a film or television programme functions, needs consideration. It is, after all, one of the aspects of film most frequently mentioned by 'the audience', particularly by women, as is evident from *Star Gazing*, Jackie Stacey's (1994) work on the female spectator. Costume is undeniably an important site of filmic pleasure, and why this source should be so often disregarded as an area of serious academic study must be addressed. This is not to say that there is no literature on the subject—in fact there are a number of books and articles, anecdotal, factual, descriptive, and sometimes lavishly illustrated. What has been missing until quite recently is a body of work which attempts to provide some theoretical framework for the study of film costume. However, things are changing, and it is to be hoped that in five years time an overview such as this will begin by acknowledging the existence of a large number of significant texts and a plurality of critical approaches.

Here some contextualization might seem appropriate. Film costume—and for the purposes of this chapter, 'costume' will be used to mean, quite simply, the clothes worn in films, whether period or contemporary dress—has been slighted in the same way as fashion itself. Only in the last decade or so has fashion really established itself as a serious academic discipline and as an important area of theoretical debate. The reasons, of course, are well documented: the centuries-old belief in the inherent frivolity of fashion, reinforced by the puritanism of many on the left, for whom fashion is the most obvious and the most objectionable form of commodity fetishism, and the conviction of the majority of second-wave feminists that fashion is an arena in which women present and display themselves in order to gratify male desire. As anyone following the progress of Anglo-American feminism over the past thirty years will know, opposition to fashion in the 1970s was both a rallying-point and a seeming consensus. This intransigent attitude to personal adornment persisted until sustained critical interest in consumer culture, particularly within cultural studies, opened up different perspectives. The publication of Elizabeth Wilson's radical text *Adorned in Dreams* (1985) was perhaps the most significant move in a feminist reclamation of fashion. Now, with recent developments in third-wave feminism, all this hostility might yet become history. As Valerie Steele writes in her introduction to the first issue of *Fashion Theory*:

> Several years ago I wrote an article entitled 'The F-Word', which described the place of fashion within academia. It was not a pretty picture: Fashion was regarded as frivolous, sexist, bourgeois, 'material' [not intellectual] and, therefore, beneath contempt. Today, it is said, fashion is no longer the 'F-word' in intellectual circles. Certainly, scholars across

the disciplines have begun to explore the relationship between body, clothing and cultural identity. . . . The trend began, as many fashions do, in Paris. Thanks to the influence of French theorists, intellectuals around the world recognized the importance of studying the body as a site for the deployment of discourses. Eventually, the subject of clothing also began to receive attention from artists and intellectuals alike. (1997: 1)

If fashion is now a legitimate area of study, what are the implications, if any, for the student of film? Students of fashion design have been denied until recently a body of informing theory other than that specifically concerned with their area of expertise, such as the work of Veblen, Flugel, and Laver (which, unfortunately, *can* be utilized to reinforce the notion of fashion as the provenance of the feeble-minded) and that of later fashion historians, such as Hollander and McDowell. Now there is a proliferation of cultural studies work focused on the field and, following Elizabeth Wilson, concerted efforts to open up specifically feminist studies of fashion (Ash, Craik, Thornton, and Evans, to cite but a few).

It is students of fashion who have traditionally been most interested in, and enthusiastic about, film costume. Many of them can write with authority on the designs of Adrian and Edith Head, can list and describe each outfit worn by Audrey Hepburn in *Sabrina Fair* (1954) (and most, if not all, of her other films) and can make informed observations about mass market spin-offs and tie-ins from the 1930s onwards. Does this devalue costume in the eyes of some 'film scholars'? Is there some sort of élitism at work which suggests that this sort of interest is, indeed, the proper concern of the fashion student or historian? The fact that fashion journalists frequently fill their pages with photographs of their favourite cinematic icons, often accompanied by text that verges on the hagiographic, does not help to establish the study of film costume as a legitimate field of academic discourse.

Charles Eckert's seminal article on the close links between cinema and merchandising in the late 1920s and 1930s, 'The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window' (1978), provoked much debate. Eckert concludes 'Hollywood gave consumerism a distinctive bent . . .'. It 'did as much or more than any other force in capitalist culture to smooth the operation of the production-consumption cycle' (1978/1990: 120–1). Further investigations of the processes he described followed, including articles by Jane Gaines and Mary Ann Doane in a special issue of the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* (1989) on 'Female Representation and Consumer Culture'. Gaines's article is a fascinating account of the way in which *Queen Christina* (1933)—of all films—was used by retailers across the United States to promote everything from hostess gowns to flatware. However, mass market response to, and use of, cinematic influence is perceived by many involved within the field of film study as of little interest, and more suited to those involved in retail studies, marketing, and visual merchandising.

A final barrier to the study of film costume is the lack of homogeneity within the subject-area itself. It is difficult to write about film costume as a unified subject in the way that acting and music are discussed elsewhere in this volume, given the variety of ways in which costuming is effected within different categories of film. There is, for example, the classic Hollywood film with its studio designer. There are those films where a designer from the world of *haute couture* is involved—an increasingly complex phenomenon in recent years with the on- and off-screen involvement of designers such as Cerruti. There are films set in period—and latterly the European heritage film—where the clothes are of paramount importance in establishing visual style and overall effect. There are European independent, low-budget films where the clothes will probably be sourced, rather than designed and made, so that they do not obtrude and have the appearance of 'authenticity'. There are films, *Orlando* (1992) and *The Sheltering Sky* (1990) for example, where the clothes *do* obtrude, to the extent that they not only dominate the film but interfere in some way with its operation. There are, finally, non-Western cinemas where the semiotics of dress may be impenetrable to Western critics and where costume, in consequence, has not been given the attention it merits. After this contextualization and these observations, it is now time to look at the literature that does exist to date, to attempt some categorization of the texts available, and to ask, where there are omissions, what directions future studies might take.

References to costume are found, firstly, within discussions of mise-en-scène—the visual organization or composition of what is in front of the camera (the 'profilmic' event). Traditionally a concern with mise-en-scène has focused upon a film's use of setting, props, lighting, colour, positioning of figures, and, of course, costume. Mise-en-scène analysis has conventionally been associated with the study of the narrative film and how mise-en-scène may be seen to reinforce,

Updated gangster chic—*Reservoir Dogs* (1993)

complement, or, in some cases, subvert the meanings suggested by plot, dialogue, and character. Costume, in this respect, is read as a signifying element which carries meanings or creates emotional effects, particularly in relation to character. However, although traditional mise-en-scène analysis encourages attention to costume, it is not interested in dress or costume *per se*. Costume is seen as the vehicle for meanings about narrative or character and thus simply as one of a number of signifying elements within a film. Thus, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson link the analysis of costume to that of props and argue that 'In cinema any portion of a costume may become a prop; a pince-nez (*Battleship Potemkin*), a pair of shoes (*Strangers on a Train, The Wizard of Oz*), a cross pendant (*Ivan the Terrible*), a jacket (*Le Million*)' (1980: 81). Similarly, in his article 'Costuming and the Color System of *Leave her to Heaven*', Marshall Deutelbaum provides an intricate analysis of the way in which 'the film constructs a system of relational meaning through consistent oppositions encoded in the colors of the characters' costumes' (1987: 17). The colours of the women's clothes in the film, he argues, are selected in order to structure and segment the complexities of the narrative. This is in contrast to the more usual narrative readings of colour in costume where the colours are seen to possess symbolic functions seemingly drawn from those that operate within a dominant Western cultural tradition and, in particular, from the language of painting (e.g. Victor Perkins on *Elmer Gantry*, 1960).

An interest in costume as a part of mise-en-scène analysis may be linked to an interest in genres where costuming is often regarded as a defining element. In the 1960s genre theorists turned to the idea of iconography as a way of distinguishing different genres in visual terms. Iconography—recurring patterns of images associated with different genres—is usually subdivided into settings, objects, and dress (McArthur 1972). Thus, in the case of the gangster film, specific settings (the city, saloons), specific objects (cars, machine-guns), and specific kinds of dress (the dark

topcoat, the sharp suit, the white shirt and obtrusive tie, the fedora and gloves) have become characteristic icons of the genre, which are used to cue many of the audience's responses. Conventional genre analysis has examined dress in the western, the gangster film, and the horror film; but it is seen only as one of a number of defining elements together with plot, characterization, and setting. The relevant clothes—or 'costume props', to quote again from Bordwell and Thompson (1980)—are nevertheless a vital part of genre recognition.

However, in the case of costume drama, it is costume and setting which are the key generic features. 'Costume drama' is not, of course, an entirely straightforward term, but here it is used to refer to films set in a perceived 'historical' past and includes 'heritage' films. The particular interest of this genre is the emphasis it gives to costume and the way it is linked to traditional 'feminine' genres, such as the 'woman's film'. Thus, whereas feminist film criticism has often read costume in classical cinema, if at all, in terms of a reinforcement of the 'male gaze', feminist analysis of costume drama focuses upon the pleasures of dress for a female audience (and the different kinds of pleasure, other than voyeurism, which it provides). Thus, Richard Dyer identifies the particular appeal of the heritage film for a female audience in terms of the 'sensuousness' of the 'fixtures and fittings', which, he argues, require 'the skilled reading of the female spectator' (1995: 205). Sue Harper, in her comprehensive book *Picturing the Past*, adopts a similar position with regard to costuming in the Gainsborough melodramas: 'The Gainsborough film-makers and their publicists clearly intended that their films would usher women into a realm of pleasure where the female stars would function as the source of the female gaze, and where the males, gorgeously arrayed, would be the unabashed objects of female desire' (1994: 122). She suggests that Elizabeth Haffenden, the costume designer, created in these films a 'costume narrative' working against the moralistic drives within the main narrative 'whose provenance was sexual desire' (30), and she describes in some detail the clothes worn by Margaret Lockwood in *The Wicked Lady* (1944), with the 'vulval symbolism' of some. She contrasts the sumptuous garments Lockwood wears throughout the film with the 'severe tailored blouse, similar to severe 1940s fashion' (like those doubtless worn by many sitting in the audience) seen in her adulterous tryst with James Mason on the moonlit riverbank. This suggests quite graphically the way in which these films give free rein to female desires.

Harper also discusses the way in which Haffenden's designs can be seen as prefiguring the New Look; her costumes, she argues, 'could be seen as a debate, on a symbolic level, on female sexuality and the contemporary crisis of permission'. Pam Cook continues the scrutiny of Gainsborough films—and of their contribution to discourses on national identity—in *Fashioning the Nation* (1996). In the third chapter she explicitly addresses the 'marginalisation of costume design by film theorists', which she argues is 'marked enough to be diagnosed as a symptom' (1996: 41). She examines the links between fashion and fetishism, and the place of fetishism in feminist film theory following the debates initiated by Laura Mulvey's (1975) article 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema' (see Creed, Part 1, Chapter 9, and White, Part 1, Chapter 13). She continues: 'the concept of fetishism . . . traditionally used to condemn fashion and costume for their impurity . . . can instead be employed to illuminate the ways in which our erotic obsessions with clothes are also transgressive in their play with identity and identification. Identification is another area which has been perceived in a limiting manner by film theory, with consequences for discussion of screen costume' (Cook 1996: 46).

Three of the essays discussed by Cook in this chapter are to be found in *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, edited by Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog. Published in 1990, this book arguably made it possible for film costume finally to be recognized as an area for serious and sustained feminist analysis. It includes an account of the conditions under which those clothes were made and another of the ways in which similar garments, and other products featured in films, were widely and successfully marketed. The main thrust of the book, however, is to examine—and reassess—the function of costume in classical Hollywood narrative, and its place within theories of voyeurism, fetishism, and masquerade. These theories, again, are discussed elsewhere in this book, but it is important to understand the way in which they are dependent upon dress. Gaylyn Studlar points out in her article 'Masochism, Masquerade, and the Erotic Metamorphoses of Marlene Dietrich' that 'the role of costuming in forming the pleasures of viewing remain undertheorised within current psychoanalytic discourse on film' (1990: 229). Jane Gaines's essay 'Costume and Narrative: How Dress Tells the Woman's Story' suggests that within melodrama, where 'the work on costume . . . lags behind the work on musical scoring', the 'vestural code' and costume plot can organize an 'idiolect with

Copies of this fringed dress designed by Givenchy for Audrey Hepburn (*Breakfast at Tiffany's*, 1961) soon appeared in the high street

its own motifs . . . which unfold in a temporality which does not correspond with key developments' (1990: 205).

She also mentions costume design and its use in the creation of the 'star persona'—which is where this survey of costume might have started. The collaborations between top Hollywood designers and certain female stars have been extensively documented, as have their visual solutions to the perceived physical shortcomings of these stars. The famous full-sleeved dress that Adrian designed for Joan Crawford in *Letty Lynton* (1932) was his first obvious gambit to shift the viewer's gaze upwards, and so away from her wide hips. (Later he was to use the padded shoulders and the narrow skirts now synonymous with 1980s power-dressing to create a similar illusion—that of an inverted triangle.) Gaines and Herzog, in their article 'Puffed Sleeves before Tea-Time', show how the Letty Lynton dress acqired 'far more significance than the film in which it was showcased', introducing 'a fashion that lingered until the end of the Thirties' (1985: 25).

Perhaps there is a tendency to devalue the contribution of the stars themselves. Mae West's control over her own image is well known—but other stars were not

merely passive mannequins, to be draped, disguised, and accoutred. Edith Head describes her work, throughout her career, as involving close collaboration between designer and star. For instance, when starting to work with Dietrich on *Witness for the Prosecution* (1957), she found that the actress had already decided that, for a particular flashback scene, the character should have 'some platform shoes with ankle straps, very hussy, red'. Since no such shoes were to be found in any studio wardrobe in her size, Dietrich arranged a shopping-trip to Main Street the following morning: 'Tomorrow, Edith, you and I will go into town early . . . we'll wear scarfs over our heads' (Head and Ardmore 1959/1960: 15). In the same book, *The Dress Doctor*, Head tells how Cary Grant planned the colour scheme for his clothes in *To Catch a Thief* (1955), asking her exactly what Grace Kelly would be wearing in each scene and then selecting his own outfits in order to complement hers (156).

This might remind the reader of this piece that, so far, men have not been discussed, except by implication as directors, designers, and potential voyeurs. Men as consumers of their own, masculine, dress are not included in the texts discussed—nor are films that have a contemporary setting, or, indeed, a woman director. These last two categories form the basis of an article by Renée Béart, 'Skirting the Issue' (1994), where she examines three films by feminist directors and the ways in which they use clothing. She wishes 'to draw attention to a further approach to costume in women's film, one which also shifts the denotative dimensions of feminine dress onto a second register, doubled over the first', thus establishing 'two interacting positions, feminine and feminist' (1994: 360).

But what of the masculine? Some male film stars are now involved within the world of high fashion in a way reminiscent of the female stars in the heyday of Hollywood. They feature in fashion spreads and designer advertising, they sit in privileged positions at couture shows—some even make it onto the catwalk—and they consort with supermodels. Couturiers fight to dress them, on screen, off screen, and on the night of the Oscars. But critical studies have largely ignored the contemporary and the masculine. Stella Bruzzi's book *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identities in the Movies* (1997) seeks to address this particular omission, among others; her intention is 'to reassess and challenge some of the assumptions and truisms that have dominated the study of dress, gender and sexuality, and to recontextualise others by applying them to cinema'. She discusses not only masculine attire but subcultural style, usually ignored, and argues that in all cinema 'clothing can be seen to construct an independent discursive strategy'. Finally, and significantly, she refutes the assumption that 'fashion is produced for consumption by the opposite sex'. This suggests a programme for the study of film costume which attends to the specificities of the 'language' of dress and the variety of pleasures which costuming affords.

This indicates the way forward, and should widen the debates around costume still further. More interdisciplinary approaches of the type here deployed by Stella Bruzzi are needed, as is more investigation of the relationship between costume, fashion, and industry. Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann have provided a bibliography of texts on 'Women and Consumer Culture' taken, as they explain, 'from what have traditionally been disparate academic fields and interests in order to facilitate research into areas relatively unexplored by film studies' (1989: 85). More in-depth case-studies of fashion 'spin-offs' from film—rather than the intentional tie-ins—would be helpful. Lastly, it is to be hoped that this work will not remain forever focused on Western cultural production. Given critical interest in the re-creation of a recognizable and supposedly 'authentic' past in the heritage film, an interesting comparison could potentially be made with Indian historical films, where the costumes are used to create an ahistorical past, a conglomeration of periods and consequently a mythological realm. A close scrutiny of dress in non-Western cinemas is long overdue.

To conclude: clothing is a part of our daily discourse—and a source of personal pleasures—in a way that, say, camera angles and cinematography are not. Yet, for too long film costume has been granted only grudging attention and there has been little informed discussion. While it is pleasant to think that things are finally changing, a current news item seems ominous. In January 1997, exactly fifty years after the unveiling of Dior's New Look and the outraged response it provoked from members of the British government, Labour MP Tony Banks sponsored a motion in the House of Commons to deplore the publicity given to two Paris couture collections. Both were created by British designers—John Galliano for the house of Dior, though Banks seemed unaware of the irony, and Alexander McQueen for Givenchy. 'It is vulgar and obscene', the motion proposed, 'that so much significance should be attached to overpriced and grotesque

flights of fancy for hanging on the limbs of the super-rich.' *Plus ça change . . .*

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5

Film music

Claudia Gorbman

Any attentive filmgoer is aware of the enormous power music holds in shaping the film experience, manipulating emotions and point of view, and guiding perceptions of characters, moods, and narrative events. It therefore comes as something of a surprise that, aside from a smattering of isolated writings since the 1940s, the serious, theoretically informed study of film music has come of age only in the last ten years. Film scholars, hailing chiefly from literature and communications backgrounds, have lacked the training and/or interest, while music departments inherit a high-art prejudice; although the latter may have incorporated ethnomusicology and even popular music, they apparently relegate film music to the ranks of the middle-brow, that least worthy category of all. Even now that disciplinary brakes to the academic study of film music have eased, members of the two fields have come to film music with such widely divergent training and scholarly goals that substantial dialogue between them has proven rare. For those trained as musicologists, the music itself, with the film as its context, invariably emerges as the focus of attention. Film scholars tend to examine film music and the conditions of its production primarily in order to understand films and the economic and psychic institution of cinema.

Some framing questions in the current study of film music are as follows. Why do films have music? What constitutes good film music? How should the evolution of film music be historicized, and what can a theoretically informed history of film music reveal? What are the narrative functions of music in films? To what extent is music in films explicitly heard by the moviegoer, and what are the implications of the spectator attending or not attending to a film's music? What formal and aesthetic relations obtain between film and music? What are the aesthetic and ideological consequences of the foregrounding of popular music on film soundtracks of the last twenty years? How does music work in television, and in film genres such as animated, documentary, and experimental film? How have musical idioms other than those of the European orchestral tradition functioned in Hollywood cinema and other cinemas?

Aesthetics

Auteurism

Within the general field of film studies, the study of film music might well represent the last bastion of film aesthetics. A number of factors help to explain why discussion of film music remains immersed in aesthetic discourses, even when, in film studies at large, aesthetics has been jettisoned in the tidal waves of psychoanalysis, Marxism, and cultural studies over the last twenty years. What might be considered a felt lack of musical competency among many film scholars has created a vacuum; and this vacuum has been filled

not only by musicologists, influenced to a much lesser extent by post-structuralism, but also by film music fans and by composers themselves.

Since movie music is now routinely marketed as a commodity apart from the films for which it is composed or compiled, it has its own thriving ancillary audience. Film scores have taken on a musical life of their own especially since the proliferation of the compact disc in the early 1980s. Concerned relatively little with the narrative, visual, or ideological intricacies of the films from which favourite soundtrack discs come, fans and collectors focus rather on canon-formation for film composers. Serious fans have held an unusually prominent place in discussions of film music, often contributing insightful criticism, original research, and analysis.

Another unusually strong presence is the composers themselves. Successful film composers spend their lives analysing the dramatic workings of films in order to score them, and their special knowledge of music and dramatic structure gives them a well-deserved authority. Such articulate individuals as David Raskin and Elmer Bernstein have provided bridges from the classical Hollywood era to the present for students and scholars of film. A number of composers have written important texts on film music, of which Hanns Eisler's book *Composing for the Films* is a classic. More recently Fred Karlin has written two illuminating volumes: *On the Track* (1989), co-authored with Rayburn Wright, for aspiring film composers; and *Listening to Movies* (1994), for film music appreciation. George Burt, both a composer and an academic, offers an insightful examination of the practical and aesthetic aspects of film scoring in his book *The Art of Film Music* (1994).

One conspicuous result of these developments is an auteurism of the Romantic sort. Post-structuralism's dethronement of the individual artist has simply not occurred for film composers, since much academic discussion of film music occurs in contexts such as film music festivals of the Society for the Preservation of Film Music in Los Angeles, where there is a certain pressure to see and appreciate the music through the composer's eye and ear. The canon of film composers is a subject of lively debate. There has developed a virtual industry of Bernard Herrmann criticisms, for example, in the form of a stream of books and articles, and passionate partisanship in Internet forums, fed by new CD releases of Herrmann scores, new concert editions and performances, and an hour-long documentary film about Herrmann (directed by Joshua Waletzky, 1994) shown on public television across the United States.

Aesthetic theory

Among the newest in a long tradition of theorizing relations among the arts and 'compound' arts, scholars of cinema have examined the marriage between the representational art of cinema and the generally non-representational art of music (see e.g. Brown 1994: 12–37; Gorbman 1987: 11–33; Kassabian 1993: 1–23). Thus far they have shown a predilection for studying non-diegetic orchestral film music in its interaction with images and narrative structures in narrative feature films. (Diegetic music, or source music, is music whose apparent source is the narrative world of the film. Non-diegetic music, or 'scoring', is music on the soundtrack which could presumably not be heard by characters in the film.) Areas of concern are the ways in which music inflects scenes with emotional and dramatic resonance, suggests character, setting, and mood, influences perceptions of narrative time and space, creates formal unity and a sense of continuity, interacts with human speech and other sounds, and compensates for the loss of 'liveness' and spatial depth that characterize the cinema's elder sibling, the theatre.

Most recently, Royal Brown (1994) has attempted to elucidate the effects of music as a non-iconic and non-representational medium when it is co-present with the narrative, iconic, representational system of feature films. He argues that music can *generalize* a film event—that is, it encourages the spectator to receive the event not in its particularity but on a mythic level. Thus, when the Western hero rides over a ridge and looks out on the vast landscape before him, or when the heroine of a melodrama embraces her child for the last time, the almost certain presence of orchestral music on the soundtrack in each case—music that is virtually assured to channel a certain field of readings—helps to foster emotional identification.

Brown attempts to account for the very marriage of film and music—why they got together at all. He suggests that because of the cinema's iconicity and its essentially prosaic realism, it 'needed something . . . to justify its very existence as an art form . . . to escape from the trap of referentiality in order to impose perception of its artistic structure and content' (1994: 19–20). Though he cites such artists as Abel Gance and Sergei Eisenstein for support, this position curiously endows the cinema with intention, and hardly

explains the ubiquity of pianos in the nickelodeons, where music and the movies enjoyed their mass audience from the beginning.

Brown offers another formulation that is indisputable: music provides a foundation in affect for narrative cinema. To describe how music provides affect, he cites Suzanne Langer to claim that a given piece of music carries no *specific* inherent emotional signification; it is rather that the dialectical interaction of music and images–sounds produces a specific affect (Brown 1994: 26–7). (Philip Tagg (1989) provides an important counterpoint to this idea. Drawing on years of empirical research on musical connotation, he demonstrates that aspects of musical style and melody, as deployed in television and film, carry a surprising degree of semantic precision even when heard outside their audiovisual context.)

An issue central to film music aesthetics is the question of the music's place in the hierarchy of the spectator's attention. Critics and composers in the classical studio era maintained that film music should be unobtrusive. The French composer Maurice Jaubert's dictum that people do not go to the movies to hear music (with obvious exceptions for musical films) is emblematic of this aesthetic position, which dominated theory and practice of film music throughout the period. Kalinak (1992) and Gorbman (1987) cite numerous examples of the principle of inaudibility at work in classical scoring. Conventions of both composition and placement of non-diegetic music prioritize narrative exposition (Kalinak 1992: 79). The classical score features a high degree of synchronization between music and narrative action, and thus commonly relies on such devices as *ostinati*, 'stingers', and mickey-mousing. (An *ostinato* is a repeated melodic or rhythmic figure, to propel scenes which lack dynamic visual action; a stinger is a musical sforzando to emphasize dramatically an action or a character's sudden strong emotion; mickey-mousing is the musical 'imitation', through pitch and/or rhythm, of visual action.) Practices of composing, mixing, and editing privilege dialogue over music, and dictate the entrances and exits of musical cues so as not to distract attention from the narrative action. George Burt (1994) demonstrates that this aesthetic is alive and well in contemporary orchestral scoring.

The breakdown of the studio sytem began to modify the aesthetic (an aesthetic which, it must be said, was always flexible, for music routinely moved from background to foreground in the case of diegetic production numbers, narrative moments of spectacle, comedy, beginning and end credits, and so forth). Popular idioms such as jazz and rock 'n' roll, and occasionally even atonal and electronic experiments, joined film music's stylistic arsenal. Many of the newer composers were trained in television or popular music rather than in the European late Romantic tradition.

Now, two generations later, two developments demonstrate that unobtrusiveness is no longer the rule, but rather remains as one among a number of possibilities. Brown identifies the first development as 'postmodern' scoring. This is a tendency toward prominent and self-conscious use of music, such that the music seems to occupy a 'parallel universe' to the film's visual narrative rather than function illustratively and subordinately in the manner of the classical score (Brown 1994: 235–63). To be sure, one may find isolated examples of scoring techniques and effects of this kind in scores of decades past. But in such films as *Diva* (Jean-Jacques Beineix, 1982), *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983), and *Heavenly Creatures* (Peter Jackson, 1994), one senses that the focused deployment of music for irony and excess, using music to disturb rather than contain the hierarchies of subjectivity, high and low musical culture, and diegetic and non-diegetic narration, has resulted in a genuinely new paradigm of interaction between music and film.

The second development shattering the aesthetic of unobtrusiveness is pop scoring, the use of recorded popular songs on the non-diegetic soundtrack. As with 'postmodern' scoring, pop scoring has a considerable history. But the massive cross-marketing of recorded music and films which has become the rule since the 1980s has made at least some pop scoring commonplace in virtually all commercial feature films. Film music scholarship is beginning to address the aesthetic dimensions of non-diegetic songs accompanying film narrative. The stanzaic form of popular song, the presence of lyrics to 'compete' with the viewer's reception of film narrative and dialogue, and the cultural weight and significance of the stars performing the songs all work directly against classical Hollywood's conception of film music as an 'inaudible' accompaniment, relying on the anonymous yet familiar idioms of symphonic Romanticism, its elastic form dictated by the film's narrative form.

The new pop aesthetic scandalizes film music auteurists. Many critics point accusing fingers at the crass commercialism that drives decisions to insert pop songs into soundtracks and thereby spoil the integrity

'Focused deployment of music for irony and excess'—*Heavenly Creatures* (1994)

of composed scores. Others, primarily critics grounded in film and cultural studies, and also those in the growing field of popular music studies, are enthusiastically investigating the range of possibilities inherent in this new paradigm.

Critics have investigated to a lesser extent the forms and functions of music in animation, documentary, and experimental film—genres which often give music pre-eminence. Eliminating realist fictional narrative from the equation, however, allows one to focus more purely on certain relationships between music and the moving image. Serious study of the virtuousic cartoon music of Carl Stallings, and analyses of work by Virgil Thompson and Philip Glass for documentaries, for example, shed new light on music–film relationships.

Psychology

The psychological dimensions of film music have subtended much writing in the field. What effects does music have on the film's spectator-auditor? What psychological factors motivate the presence of music in movies?

In my book *Unheard Melodies* (1987), I begin to address these questions by summarizing historical, psychological, and aesthetic arguments explaining the presence of music to accompany the silent film. For one thing, music had accompanied a number of nineteenth-century theatrical forms, and it persisted for numerous practical reasons in the evolution of film exhibition. For another, music covered the distracting noise of the movie projector. It served to explicate and advance the narrative; it provided historical, geographical, and atmospheric setting; it identified characters and qualified actions. Along with intertitles, its semiotic functions compensated for the characters' lack of speech. It provided a rhythmic 'beat' to complement, or impel, the rhythms of editing and movement on the screen. It served as an antidote to the technologically derived 'ghostliness' of the images. And, as music, it bonded spectators together in the three-dimensional space of the theatre.

The book then explores reasons why music persisted in films after the coming of sound—when the movies' new realism would seem to make music an unwelcome guest. One compelling line of thought, which has elicited considerable elaboration and debate, draws on psychoanalytic theory to explain the psychic 'pay-off' of having music on the soundtrack. Psychoanalysis was a dominant discourse of film studies in the 1970s, providing a way to understand the cinema's mechanisms of pleasure and spectator identification (see

Creed, Part 1, Chapter 9). It was particularly well suited to describing the workings of classical Hollywood cinema; in film music studies a decade later, the primary testing ground for the psychoanalytic perspective has also been the classical cinema.

According to French psychoanalytic theorists Guy Rosolato (1974) and Didier Anzieu (1976), sound plays a crucial role in the constitution of the subject. The infant exists in a 'sonorous envelope' consisting of the sounds of the child's body and maternal environment; in this primordial sonic space the child is as yet unaware of distinctions between self and other, inside and outside the body. Rosolato suggests that the pleasure of listening to music—organized, wordless sound—inheres in its invocation of the subject's auditory imaginary in conjuntion with the pre-Oedipal language of sounds.

In applying this idea to cinema, critics argue that background music recaptures the pleasure of the sonorous envelope, evoking the psychic traces of the subject's bodily fusion with the mother. Classical cinema capitalizes on music's special relation to the spectator's psyche to lower the threshold of belief in the fiction. Thus film music works in the perceptual background to attack the subject's resistance to being absorbed in the narrative.

Like Muzak, which acts to make consumers into untroublesome social subjects (relieving anxiety in airports and medical waiting-rooms, greasing the wheels of consumer desire in shopping-malls), film music lulls the spectator into being an untroublesome (less critical, less wary) viewing subject. Music aids the process of turning enunciation into fiction. In doing so, film music helps fend off two potential displeasures which threaten the spectator's experience. The first is the threat of ambiguity: film music deploys its cultural codes to anchor the image in meaning. Second, film music fends off the potential displeasure of the spectator's awareness of the technological basis of cinematic discourse—the frame, editing, and so on. Like the sonorous envelope, music's bath of affect can smooth over discontinuities and rough spots, and mask the recognition of the apparatus through its own melodic and harmonic continuity. Film music thereby acts as a hypnotist inducing a trance: it focuses and binds the spectator into the narrative world.

Jeff Smith (1996) has challenged psychoanalytic film music theory by problematizing the basic premiss of film music's inaudibility. He quotes my formulation: 'were the subject to be aware (fully conscious) of [music's] presence as part of the film's discourse, the game would be all over' (Gorbman 1987: 64). Although many of the questions Smith raises about my writing on soundtrack audibility are already answered in my book, his critique points aptly to further areas of investigation. If music is crucial to the creation of a 'subject-effect' but also has more foregrounded functions of narrative cueing (such as establishing historical and geographical setting, and conveying information through leitmotifs), then the spectator must be aware of the music at least some of the time. The spectator must be slipping in and out of the trance created by the music-as-hypnotist. There must be a complex fluctuation between the state of unawareness crucial to the psychoanalytic account, and levels that permit cognition of musical cues.

Smith counters the psychoanalytic model with perspectives from cognitive theory, drawing from the work of David Bordwell (1985: 29–47) and Noël Carroll (1988: 213–25) as well as from psychologists of music such as McAdams (1987) and Sloboda (1985). He argues that, like other music, film music is apprehended through a variety of different listening modes and competencies. He calls for an account of film-musical cognition that directly addresses the spectator's mental activities in processing film music's narrative cues. This focus on the competencies of film spectator-auditors is promising.

Kassabian (1993) also emphasizes the issue of competence: 'like any other language, [music] is acquired, learned, in a specific sociohistorical context' (36). Focusing on such categories of filmgoers gender and ethnicity, she lays the groundwork for an understanding of ways in which individuals identify with films. Depending on 'differences in perceivers' relations to the music', they will 'interpret cues' differently in the cues' filmic settings (69).

History

The question of how film music is perceived eludes definitive answers because of its enormous historical variation. Not only is film music more explicitly foregrounded in many scores of the 1990s than it used to be, but today's filmgoers have different competencies and 'reading formations' than those of, say, 1950. Although it seems difficult *not* to notice pop scoring

At the foreground of perception: Max Steiner's score for *Gone with the Wind* (1939)

in contemporary soundtracks, we may imagine that for some moviegoers pop scoring has become so customary that it recedes into the background of perception. Likewise, Erich Korngold's score for *Robin Hood* (USA, 1939), or Max Steiner's for *Gone with the Wind* (USA, 1939), can hardly be termed unobtrusive to today's ears.

The theoretically informed writing of film music history is quite young. Martin Mark's revealing new book *Music in the Silent Film* (1996) documents practices of composing or fitting pre-existing music to films, as well as performance practices, at various stages from the early cinema into the 1920s. (The sheer variety of such practices suggests that the current pop compilation score may have more in common with silent film music than with its more immediate predecessor, the classical film score.) Another musicologist, David Neumeyer (1996), has elucidated scoring practices of Hollywood in the 1930s through often brilliant, methodical research and close readings of film scores. His study of diegetic tunes heard in a scene in *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1943) reveals the care with which popular music was chosen for the film, and the semantic richness made available to 'competent' listeners. The study of *Casablanca*'s score receives further treatment in an essay by Marks (1996), which demonstrates the wide range of variation in classical scoring by contrasting Max Steiner's scoring techniques in *Casablanca* with Adolph Deutsch's in *The Maltese Falcon*. Krin Gabbard (1996) draws on contemporary theories of culture not so much to outline a history of jazz in the movies as to gain a historical understanding of its significations.

Finally, Jeff Smith's pathfinding dissertation 'The Sounds of Commerce' (1995) brings careful musical analysis and archival research to a study of the economic and institutional factors that led to the pop sounds of such composers as Mancini and Morricone in the 1960s. Smith chronicles the studios' financial restructuring following the 1948 Paramount decree, focusing on the decision of several major studios to acquire recording companies and to cross-market films and film music. His work forcefully demonstrates the intimate relationships among finance, marketing, and ultimately film music style itself in a key historical period. The scholarship of these and other historians bodes well for the study of film music both as art and as mass culture.

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