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Masculinity in Crisis

Method Acting in Hollywood

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> The imagery of libidinal revolution and bodily transfiguration once again becomes a figure for the perfected community.
>
> –Fredric Jameson

> Masculinity is not something one is born with but something one gains . . . in American life, there is a certain built-in tendency to destroy masculinity in American men.
>
> –Norman Mailer

> Marlon was a tortured man in the early days, and he was great on screen.
>
> –Sam Spiegel

In an often-repeated story, Sir Laurence Olivier, playing opposite Dustin Hoffman in the 1976 *Marathon Man*, is said to have been astonished at the American actor's lengthy and exhausting Method-inspired preparation activities. Finally, Olivier decided to offer Hoffmann some advice. "Why don't you try acting?" he suggested. This story directs us to the Method's version of itself as so realistic that the term *acting* cannot properly be applied to it. In fact, however, the Method is not different from acting; it is simply a special style of acting. Method performances in such popular films from the 1950s as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and *Baby Doll* (1956) today seem as artificial as any other historically dated performance technique. When advocates of the Method argue that this style is more "real" than "acted," they are in fact adapting a rhetoric routinely applied to all acting styles in the realist tradition. Changes in courtship conventions entail changes in the fashions of Hollywood performance styles, which can then lay claim to superior status by virtue of their putative ability to achieve greater realism than the style that preceded them. The movies' appropriation of Method acting during the 1950s was yet another strategy by which Hollywood could lay claim to a "realist effect" because of the style's emphasis on a close fit between actor and character and because Method techniques were peculiarly suited to delineate a new type of male romantic hero.

Method acting and cinema

The special quality of Stanislavskian Method acting can be most readily understood by comparing it to the British tradition, the other school of performance best known to American film- and theatergoers. Where the British school focuses on external technique, emphasizing makeup, costume, and verbal dexterity, the Method relies on understatement and what it calls "inner truth," cultivating an aura of mood and emotion derived from the actor's own persona rather than stressing the interpretation of the language in the written script. The British system encourages audiences to appreciate the actor's craft from an intellectual distance. The Method, by contrast, seeks to maximize the audience's identification with the performer.

Inspired by realist playwrights like Chekhov and Ibsen, Stanislavsky developed his own interpretation of realism at the Moscow Art Theatre. His concept focused on the psychology of the actor rather than on the social milieu of the character. This he termed "living the part." In *An Actor Prepares* he wrote, "Always and forever, when you are on the stage, you must play yourself" (167). The audience identifies with Stanislavskian actors in part because these performers ignore the audience, even going so far, at times, as turning their backs to the front of the stage.[1] Instead of interacting with the spectators, actors merge their own psyches with those of the characters they play. Through what Stanislavsky termed "affective memory" the actors recreate their roles in relation to aspects of their own personal histories.[2] By emphasizing the subtle processes associated with the performer/character's inner life, such actors position themselves as creative forces who collaborate with the playwright. As Timothy Wiles has observed, "Stanislavsky was the first to sense . . . that what is essentially 'real' about theatrical realism lies as much in the reality of the performance itself as in the true-to-life quality of the play's details" (14). In this sense Stanislavsky's method foregrounds the actor in the same way that the nineteenth-century concept of the virtuoso foregrounded the musical performer. Like virtuosos, Stanislavsky's actors emphasize the difficulty of performance. The painful struggle that such actors subject themselves to in order to reach buried feelings is often manifest in the tortured quality identified with Method style.

As some critics have observed, such a performance strategy is analogous in many ways to the experience of psychoanalysis—not least because of its emphasis on releasing the power of the unconscious. "The fundamental objective of our psycho-technique," Stanislavsky wrote, "is to put us in a creative state in which our subconscious will function naturally" (266). This approach gave Stanislavsky's system affinities to modernism as much as to realism, for, like the stream-of-consciousness prose of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, the style of Stanislavskian actors is designed to allow glimpses of their characters' unconscious inner conflicts.

The specific techniques used in Method performance—improvisation, relaxation, the cultivation of psychologically meaningful pauses, and the use of emotionally charged objects—are designed to reveal psychic conflict. The first three of these techniques create characters who appear to be speaking as if from a psychoanalyst's couch. The use of objects is a device used in all realist performance. In his book on Hollywood cinema Gilles Deleuze comments on the significance of this technique for the creation of what he calls the action image: "[T]he emotional handling of an object, an act of emotion in relation to the object, can have more effect than a close-up in the action image. It simultaneously brings together,

in a strange way, the unconscious of the actor, the personal guilt of the director, the hysteria of the image" (159). Method actors are specifically trained to use objects as a means of revealing feelings that have been repressed by the character's conscious mind. In the words of Stanislavsky, "Only your subconscious can tell you why [a] particular object [comes] into the foreground of your mind" (292).

Although Stanislavsky's theories were developed for the theater, they are readily adaptable to film performance.[3] The absence of a live audience gives an obvious advantage to actors who are specifically trained to ignore spectators. Further, Stanislavsky's preoccupation with expressing inner conflict rather than cultivating external effects is well suited to the cinema's use of close-ups. Long takes allow for the expression of subtle changes in the character's feelings. The Method actor's concentration on the emotional texture of individual scenes ("pieces" or "units") is also readily adaptable to the moviemaking process, where individual scenes are shot separately and there is always ample time to prepare each one. Finally, the Method actor's reliance on emotional freshness rather than on outward technical mastery may in some ways be better served by a recorded medium than by the theater, where a role might have to be repeated more or less verbatim every night over a period of many months. Film can preserve the best, the freshest, of a varied series of performances of a single scene.

Despite its adaptability to film, however, Stanislavsky's Method failed to influence movie performance styles significantly until it was taken up by Hollywood in the 1950s. In the USSR film directors were wedded to a cinematic formalism that stressed the primacy of the director's editing function and thus had little interest in this new acting style. "The Moscow Art Theatre is my deadly enemy," Eisenstein wrote. "It is the exact antithesis of all I am trying to do. They string their emotions together to give a continuous illusion of reality. I take photographs of reality and then cut them up so as to produce emotions" (Wollen 65).

In his classic study of cinematic performance, *Film Acting*, V. I. Pudovkin attempted without success to negotiate a rapprochement between Stanislavskian technique and the reliance on editing that stood at the center of Soviet filmmaking.[4] His earlier *Film Technique* had advocated the Eisensteinian concept of actors as physical types ("typage") and had reported on the famous "Kuleshov effect," wherein the same close-up of an actor was read by different audiences as expressing widely divergent emotions depending on whether it was followed by a shot of a child playing, a bowl of soup, or a dead woman (168).[5] Both typage and the Kuleshov effect implicitly denigrated the contributions that Method-trained performers could make to the creation of complex and individuated filmic characters.

Kuleshov himself advocated a modified version of the older Delsarte method of performance in which emotions were conveyed through broad, conventionalized gestures. Such an approach, which communicated strong, simple emotions quickly, was much more in keeping with the aesthetics of Soviet montage than was Stanislavskian acting technique. Kuleshov specifically dismisses the expressive potential of Stanislavsky's Method when he states, "One must construct the work of film actors so that it comprises the sum of organized movement, with 'reliving' held to a minimum" (100). In *Film Acting*, however, Pudovkin denies the Kuleshov experiment's implicit valorization of the power of editing over the artistry of acting. He speaks of "the pseudo-theory of the *montage* (edited) image (a theory for which no single individual is responsible). This theory deduces, from the fact that an impression of acting can be composed mechanically by sticking pieces together, the illegitimate assumption that separate pieces, not connected inwardly within the actor, will necessarily give an optimum result" (273).

Pudovkin had begun his film career as an actor and continued to perform roles in his own films and those of others throughout his life. Because of his concern with actors, his work was sometimes labeled "theatrical" by other members of the Soviet film movement (Leyda 222). By advocating a collaboration between actor and director during the editing process Pudovkin's *Film Acting* attempts to retain the Soviet aesthetic of film as montage and at the same time rehabilitate the status of the actor as a center of creative expressivity rather than a passive tool of the director. Through their participation in editing, Pudovkin argues, actors could overcome the fragmentation brought about by having their scenes cut up into pieces and recreate their performances into a larger emotional unity. Tellingly, Pudovkin's single extended example of how this larger emotional unity could be created does not involve acting at all but instead focuses on the juxtaposition of music and image in the climactic sequence of his 1933 film *Deserter*. After describing the sequence, he concludes somewhat apologetically:

> Though the example we have dealt with here does not relate directly to the actor's work, it yet is important for him, for he is one of those who must understand particularly clearly the significance of the treatment of sound and image [in the editing process], not in their primitive *naturalistic* association, but in a more profound—I should term it *realistic*—association enabling the creative worker in the cinema to portray any given event, not merely simply in direct representation, but in its deepest degree of generalization (313–14). [Emphasis added.]

Despite Pudovkin's lavish praise of Stanislavsky and his repeated protests against the misapplication of the notion of typage to describe the characteristic Soviet approach to cinematic performance, the argument put forward in *Film Acting* cannot surmount the inconsistency that is apparent in the above passage, where "realism" is opposed to "naturalism" and signifies the utopian social vision that lay at the heart of Russian formalist film theory's concept of dialectical montage editing. Stanislavskian realism, focused as it is on the inner feelings of the actor and the development of subtle emotional states made possible by long takes, represents a radically different quality. Pudovkin's fundamental commitment to editing over acting is evident when he writes, "I must confess that during my work I have admitted actors to creative collaboration only grudgingly and to a miserly extent" (354–55).[6]

Hollywood's appropriation of the method

In Hollywood, Stanislavskian theory at first exercised a similarly negligible influence. Despite the immigration of members of the Moscow Art Theatre like Alla Nazimova, Richard Boleslavsky, and Maria Ouspenskaya during the 1920s and 1930s, the Hollywood studios' story-centered view of actors as script readers precluded the intense actor involvement in the creation of character advocated by the Method.[7] The emergence of Stanislavskian techniques as a major force in film performance was not to occur until historical conditions were propitious and the theories themselves had undergone considerable revision.

For Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre, as for the American Group Theatre of the 1930s which modeled itself on Stanislavsky's theories, the Method approach had political implications. Both the Moscow Art Theatre and the Group focused on contemporary social problems and used improvisation to build an ensemble performance that challenged the older, hierarchically organized "star-centered" theater. For example, a filmed rehearsal for a production of *The Three Sisters* staged by the Moscow Art Theatre includes a sequence in which Stanislavsky asks his players, "Did you try to adjust to each other, to feel each other out?" (Nash). In the American Group Theatre the ensemble ideal extended to the playwright as well; its most characteristic productions, such as *Waiting for Lefty* and *Awake and Sing*, were written by Clifford Odets, one of the Group's own members. Odets's plays for the Group were contemporary dramas of working-class frustration, conforming to Stanislavsky's ideal of an indigenous theater of social protest.

The early political and group-centered orientation of Stanislavskian practice, however, had eroded by the 1950s when Lee Strasberg promulgated his own version of the Method at the Actors Studio. As has frequently been noted, Strasberg emphasized the individuated psychoanalytic dimension of Stanislavsky's program by supplementing the Method's affective memory techniques with new exercises. The most famous of these required performers to stage reenactments of "private moments" using material from their own lives. Although these exercises enhanced the actor's ability to portray powerful emotional states, Strasberg's training techniques also encouraged his students to substitute their own feelings for those of the characters they played rather than to merge the two together as Stanislavsky had envisioned.[8]

Under Strasberg, Method acting became more confessional than communal.[9] Such an emphasis on the actor in isolation undermined the ensemble-oriented aspect of Stanislavsky's system, producing actors like James Dean, whose on-screen aura of alienation from those around him was enhanced by a solipsistic acting technique that could lead him to step on the speeches of his fellow performers with line readings of his own that were often inaudible. At the Actors Studio Stanislavsky's conception of improvisation as a way to develop a sense of community among actors was replaced by an approach to improvisation that largely celebrated the neurosis of the individual performer.[10]

Because of their tendency to substitute their personal feelings for those of the characters they were playing, Actors Studio performers were well suited to become Hollywood stars.[11] In Hollywood, star types were defined through their participation in specially tailored films ("star vehicles") and through publicity surrounding their offscreen activities. Thus, the closer the fit between the roles that actors could play and their "real" personalities, the more easily promotable they were as stars. In the case of performers from the Actors Studio, who were oriented toward submerging the characters they played into their own psyches, this fit was especially close. In short, Lee Strasberg transformed a socialistic, egalitarian theory of acting into a celebrity-making machine.

Movie stars spawned by Strasberg's Actors Studio were of a new type which is often labeled the rebel hero (Houston, Kael, Morella and Epstein, Spoto, and Zaratsky). The three actors who epitomized the new rebel type associated with the Method were Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Montgomery Clift. In fact, none of these stars was trained primarily at the Actors Studio. Clift never attended at all. Dean took only a few classes there, virtually abandoning his training after the first time that Strasberg criticized him. Brando was trained primarily by Stella Adler, a former member of the Group Theatre who had had a falling-out with Strasberg over his interpretation of Stanislavsky's ideas.[12] By contrast, other equally talented actors of the 1950s with far closer ties to the Studio, such as Julie Harris and Eli Wallach, did

not fit Hollywood's image of the male rebel hero and thus never achieved an appreciable degree of Hollywood success.

In part because of the confusion generated by these popular associations of Method acting with stars not trained at the Actors Studio, the two major studies of film acting published to date, Richard Dyer's *Stars* and James Naremore's *Acting in the Cinema*, both question the distinctiveness of Method performance (Dyer 154, Naremore 197–98). However, whether directly influenced by Strasberg or not, the new male stars all to some degree or other adapted Method techniques to support their identification as rebels, transforming Stanislavsky's emphasis on relaxation into the "Method slouch," his interest in improvisation into libidinous temper tantrums, and his concept of inwardness into mumbling, tortured pauses and sloppy grooming. Although these histrionic affectations quickly assumed the status of clichés, it is important to bear in mind that they represented a clear application of Stanislavsky's theories. Such strategies decisively shaped the kinds of characters that these actors portrayed and the manner in which they portrayed them.

[. . .]

The cinematic Method text: *On the Waterfront*

In the three films of the 1950s most often cited in connection with Method performance—*On the Waterfront* (1954), *East of Eden* (1955), and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955)—the central conflict concerns the rebel hero's difficulty defining himself in relation to a father figure. This conflict is depicted in each film by means of climactic, highly charged scenes in which a young man attempts to assert a model of virility different from that of his elder. Such scenes call forth the Method actor's ability to indulge in the kind of emotional outpouring traditionally associated with feminine behavior. James Dean's anguished cry in *Rebel Without a Cause*, "You're tearing me apart!" highlights the rebel hero's conflict over his masculine role. The most acclaimed of these films, *On the Waterfront*, is also the one that makes the most extensive use of Method techniques. Directed by Elia Kazan, a man with close ties to the Actors Studio, it features a performance by Marlon Brando that has come to be regarded as the preeminent example of Method acting in film (Hirsch 299; Kazan, Interview, 8).[13] When the film was made, Brando was not only a movie actor but also a Hollywood leading man, and his performance in Kazan's film won him not only an Academy Award but also a place on the list of the top ten Hollywood stars of 1954 and 1955, a place that he would not regain until the release of *The Godfather* in 1971 assured his rebirth as a preeminent character actor (Steinberg).

Brando's performance in *On the Waterfront* uses Method techniques to define a new type of male movie star and a new concept of romantic love. But the nature of his achievement was not consciously appreciated by those most intimately involved with creating this vehicle for him. In recalling the process of writing and selling the screenplay, both Kazan and writer Budd Schulberg have repeatedly referred to the film's romantic element as a concession to the commercialism of Hollywood. As they saw it, they had attempted to write a story of labor struggle, drawing on the experiences of Father John Corridan, the "Waterfront Priest," and on Malcolm Johnson's *New York Sun* series "Crime on the Labor Front." Terry Malloy, the film's protagonist, was based on Anthony De Vincenzo, a key witness in the New York State Crime Commission's investigation of the docks in 1952. "We had taken real characters and put them through a struggle that was still being waged," wrote Schulberg. "Was it too somber, too real for the Hollywood Dream Machine?" (145). Evidently it was, for Hollywood executives like Spiros Skouras and Daryl F. Zanuck, to whom the pair attempted to sell the screenplay, repeatedly urged them to "'make it a beautiful love story'" (147). The disdain for the boy-meets-girl formula evident in Schulberg's reminiscences has been echoed by critics, who for the most part treat *On the Waterfront* as a "social problem film" with a love story that is peripheral to its central concerns.[14] Such a conception of the film misses how essential the love story is to its articulation of the male hero. Kazan's and Schulberg's enterprise in fact takes its vocabulary from a commercial language in which the love story sets the terms by which manhood is understood and evaluated.

The hero's name, Terry, immediately presents him as a figure of ambiguous gender possibilities. These possibilities are articulated in relation to a class discourse that defines two different modes of masculinity. Terry's developing sense of himself eventually leads him to affirm his male identity in relation to a middle-class mode of social organization different from the working-class values with which he has grown up. This mode involves a companionate relation with a woman in the course of which the issues of gender confusion that he is struggling with are enacted.

Initially Terry sees himself as part of a society that the film codes as one constituted in terms of a residual discourse. This world is made up of competing constellations of male power held by localized groups of longshoremen and union officers who define their masculinity through the exclusion of women. Terry's primary loyalty is to the all-male gang of union officials led by the corrupt boss Johnny Friendly (Lee J. Cobb) and his dandified second-in-command, Terry's brother Charlie the Gent (Rod Steiger). Terry's unquestioning participation in this male-identified system begins to break down, however, when Friendly orders him to set up the murder of Joey Doyle, one of the dockers who is about to violate the accepted intergroup loyalties by giving information to a federal commission that is investigating corruption in Friendly's union. Prodded by Father Barry (Karl Malden) and by Edie Doyle (Eva Marie Saint), the sister of the man he has helped to kill, and despite Friendly's effort to dissuade him by killing his brother, Charlie, Terry cooperates with the federal investigation. He also falls in love with Edie. Terry decides to obey the impersonal law of the land rather than the tough-guy code of the docks, and he chooses the companionship of a potential marriage partner over that of his male cronies. His new roles, constituted in terms of the emerging discourses of bourgeois citizen and companionate husband require a radical change in his sense of himself as a man. Brando dramatizes this change by drawing on the classic techniques of Method performance: improvisation, pauses, the use of objects, and relaxation.

Brando's improvisations are delivered in the context of a rigid structure of oppositional languages that define self-enclosed and irreconcilable groups. The middle-class government officials speak in the most stilted manner, making statements that sound artificial and scripted, such as "You have the right to remain silent if that is what you choose to do." At the other extreme, the working-class dockers and union men speak more informally; yet, sensing their isolation from the more official forms of bourgeois utterance used to intimidate them, they have developed an ethic of silence in relation to outsiders. As Kayo Dugan (Pat Henning) says, "Down on the docks, we've always been D and D," betraying even by this locution an argot that must be translated for the benefit of those who are not initiates (Dugan must explain to Father Barry that D and D means "deaf and dumb").

If the speech of the officials conveys itself as an artificial script and that of the dockers as a muted vernacular code, the speech of the women in the film aspires to be a form of personal

expression that will bridge the communication impasse. Early in the film Edie Doyle and her female neighbor make strenuous efforts to "speak the truth" about the dockers' victimization and to encourage others to do so. To the men who surround them, however, their efforts appear naive and they are summarily silenced. The men are determined to keep their women mute—even if this involves sending them away. If meaningful communication is to occur, a more potent spokesperson is needed.

This role is assumed by Terry Malloy. His special position is signaled by his manner of speaking. Brando's improvisations set his dialogue apart from that of the other characters.[15] The unrehearsed quality of his speech is conspicuous to anyone watching the film in statements such as "Never's gonna be much too much too soon for me, Shorty," an utterance impossible to imagine as scripted in the form in which Brando delivers it.[16] Similarly, Terry's exchange with Edie during the much-praised scene in which he appropriates her glove contains statements that invite the spectator to construe the character's words as beyond the scriptwriter's control. When Edie tells him she is going to a college run by the Sisters of St. Anne, he asks, "Where's that?" When she responds, "Tarrytown," he says again, "Where's that . . . uh . . . where's that?" When this question, too, is answered, he goes on, "What do you do there, just . . . what . . .? Study?" Further, when Edie drops her glove, Brando mumbles, "Wait a second," suggesting a motivation having to do more with a command from an actor who has decided to depart from the script than with anything preplanned for the character of Terry.

As these last examples suggest, Terry's moments of improvised speech set him apart not only from the other characters but from the screenplay as well. It is worth noting that Budd Schulberg's script for *On the Waterfront* contains an extraordinary number of repeated phrases (for example—Father Barry: "Don't you see that? Now don't you see that?" Edie: "No wonder people call you a bum. No wonder."). In the taxicab scene, surely one of the best known in all cinema, Terry himself speaks many of his lines twice ("Before we get to where, Charlie? Before we get to where?"; "There's a lot more to this than I thought, Charlie; I'm telling you, there's a lot more"; and, in one of the most famous lines of all, "It was you, Charlie; it was you"). Such a use of language has a quality of obsessive return that presents the characters as part of an inflexible social and psychological milieu in which they feel trapped and helpless.[17]

When Brando improvises broken utterances against such a background, his clumsy syntax suggests a freewheeling actor's intermittent attempts at revolt against a constraining structure that relies on shrilly defensive patterns of repetition to assert its authority. In place of Stanislavsky's ideal of actors as *collaborators* in the process of creating a text, merging their psyches with the script that they are performing, *On the Waterfront* uses Stanislavskian improvisation to depict an actor who often appears to be *competing* with a text that sets itself against him by its adherence to rote patterns of repetition. The rebellion of Marlon Brando the star against a traditional cinema of overly scripted performances can thus be read as an analogue to that of Terry Malloy the character against traditional patterns of masculine behavior. Both actor and character appear as isolated figures, Terry in the context of the world depicted in the film and Brando in the context of the circumstances of its production. Each seeks to define his identity in opposition to rigid, empty systems of authority.

The view that sees *On the Waterfront* as a rationalization of Kazan and Schulberg's friendly testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee cannot account for the fact that it plays down its "great moment" of informing. Terry's explosive testimony is almost thrown away; Kazan even cuts away from it at a climactic moment to show "Mr. Upstairs"

switching off his television set. The courtroom scene cannot become the site where the film's issues are resolved because it focuses only on words; but *On the Waterfront* is at least as concerned with images, which are part of a visual texture that masks their psychological significance. The bleak black-and-white photography and gritty location shooting that give the film its distinctive visual feel identify it with a tradition of documentary realism. But many of the images, especially those of Brando's face and the objects that he interacts with, also convey the inward struggle that marks the character of Terry Malloy. Like its words, the images of the films are gender identified.

Brando's performance must define masculinity against a visual background that represents the male body as diminutive and vulnerable. Boris Kaufmann's bleak black-and-white photography overpowers the film's male groups with a superhumanly scaled and menacing urban landscape: great loading docks, tall iron fences, vast desolate tracts of rubble, and buildings with endless colonnades. In the film's first shot the figures of Johnny Friendly and his group are dwarfed by the looming shape of a docked freighter, and the whistle blast from another freighter obliterates Terry's first attempt to speak what he knows to Edie. The threatening quality of this landscape is emphasized by wide-angle shots in which people and things move backwards and forwards in the frame with disconcerting rapidity: a truck chasing Terry and Edie down an alley, Johnny Friendly's henchmen scurrying out of the bar when Father Barry momentarily distracts Terry's attention. Most ominously, this world of overscaled structures and precipitous movement involves the threat of falling. We see Joey Doyle fall off the roof of his apartment building and later watch a cargo of whiskey cartons drop on Kayo Doogan, another would-be informer.

As the film's primary representative of femininity, Edie thinks only of escaping from this environment back to the country where she goes to college or to the older way of living represented in her fantasy of a farm. Terry, in turn, tries to escape through his pigeons, with which he is more than once identified. He releases one of these pigeons into the air just before Joey Doyle's fatal fall. The bird's ability to counteract the gravitational pull that ensures Joey's destruction is underscored by Friendly's bodyguard Tillio (Tami Mauriello), who compares Joey to a bird who could sing, "but he couldn't fly."

As if in response to this threatening visual context, Brando's Method techniques depict a character who is cautious and uncertain. The anguished pauses that mark his performance are dramatized by high-key lighting and by Leonard Bernstein's overwrought musical score. At such moments the film's long close-ups of the character of Terry Malloy suggest a level of experience that is verbally inexpressible. Like the silences that occur on the psychoanalyst's couch, these pauses convey inner confusion and blockage. Terry cannot articulate what is going on inside of him because he does not consciously understand it.

Brando also draws on a Method-inspired use of objects to represent his character's repressed gender-related insecurities. As I have indicated, one of Brando's most celebrated scenes in this film involves his appropriation of a woman's glove. When Terry first meets Edie, he takes up a glove that she has accidentally dropped and refuses to return it to her, playing with it and eventually putting his hand into it as he engages her in conversation. As James Naremore has noted, "Few virile male leads before him . . . would so effortlessly have slipped on a woman's glove" (*Acting in the Cinema* 194). A further motif that brings out Terry's "feminine" side involves his pigeons. In a curious scene on the roof he tenderly holds a pigeon erroneously referred to as "she" by Edie, then clearly identified as a male by Tommy, the young Golden Warrior ("She's a he. His name is Swifty"). Immediately following Tommy's

statement, however, the pigeon lays an egg in Terry's hand. This hermaphroditic creature, to which Terry refers approvingly on more than one occasion, can be taken as a model for Terry's own confused identity, which effects a complicated mediation between masculinity and femininity.

In keeping with the Method's psychoanalytically oriented preoccupations, Brando also interacts with objects in such a way as to bring out psychologically coded meanings having to do with enclosure, which Freud identified with femininity, or thrusting and penetration, which he identified as male. Terry's habit of chewing gum, which involves the body's enclosing properties, has overtones of femininity. These overtones are further played upon when Terry offers gum to Edie to comfort her during the wedding scene. His gesture of exchange here contrasts to some of the film's instances of male bonding, which are marked by exchanges of cigarettes—objects with more phallic overtones. A cigarette is exchanged between Father Barry (Karl Malden) and one of the dockers as the priest is being hauled up out of the hold, for example. Women may also be included in this ritual of male bonding: the snatches of dialogue we overhear among members of the wedding party indicate that, like the men, the tough-talking bride smokes, a further sign of her accommodation to a traditional male world.

The film's major example of a male-coded object is the gun given to Terry by his older brother, Charlie. Despite the scenario implied by Charlie's decision to give him this gun, Terry cannot bring himself to use it to carry out the traditional role of the male who acts rather than speaks.[18] The gentleness with which Brando pushes this object away as Steiger begins to brandish it in front of him and the careless way that he holds it in the bar suggest the character's lack of traditional male authority. Terry soon abandons the gun and gives testimony at the hearing instead. When the hearing fails to clarify his sense of himself, Terry must find another strategy. At this point Brando engages with yet another object: Joey Doyle's jacket. The feminine associations of enclosure inherent in this jacket are called forth when Father Barry makes a show of zipping it up after Terry's beating. Yet the jacket is nonetheless clearly identified as male. It thus constitutes an appropriate image for the androgynous persona that Terry ultimately adopts. In wearing Joey's jacket, Terry affirms his commitment to a sexual identity that can encompass both masculine and feminine traits.

Terry's ambivalent gender identity increasingly centers on the representation of his body, and this representation is complicated by Brando's relaxed Method posture. In an essay entitled "Don't Look Now" Richard Dyer has explored the significance of the aura of hardness surrounding erotic representations of the male body. This aura is typically achieved by means of an emphasis on visible musculature and an association of the body with action, often through the use of an active, upright posture. By contrast, Brando's Method slouch depicts his body as limp rather than upright, and he plays the first love scenes with Eva Marie Saint in a passive position traditionally identified as feminine. At the same time, however, his broken nose and the cut eyebrow that he affects for this role announce the character's association with the prototypically male world of boxing. The body image of the character that emerges has conflicting associations with both pugnacity and weakness. If the film is to rehabilitate his image as a romantic male hero, these contradictions must be addressed. Like his pigeon Swifty, who sits on the highest perch and attacks all who try to displace him, Terry must establish his superiority to women and to other men.

The masculine side of Terry's persona begins to take precedence when he makes love to Edie. Here, in a sequence noteworthy for its eroticization of female surrender to a forced

sexual encounter, Terry asserts the traditional male right to dominate women.[19] Brando's rendering of this scene, however, differs from the performance strategy followed by prior male stars in that he exhibits an explosive rage that is perceived as passionate rather than merely controlling; it is the antithesis of the repressed state earlier expressed in his tortured pauses. The character appears to have "unblocked" himself through a brutally physical assertion of masculine privilege vis-à-vis women. Only after this dramatic assertion of male dominance is Terry willing to carry out the femininizing role of speaking out at the hearing.

Even though Terry's violent encounter with Edie has satisfied him regarding the superior capabilities of his body in relation to those of a woman, Friendly's attempt to assault him at the hearing serves as a reminder that he must assert this superiority in relation to the male world as well. Throughout the film his physique is contrasted with that of Friendly. Whereas Cobb's body is massive and his gestures aggressive, Brando's body is flaccid and his gestures indecisive. Although Terry's movements are identifiably those of a former boxer, he demurs when Friendly tries to involve him in a playful sparring match near the beginning of the film. Although he no longer identifies himself as part of an individualistic world of competitive male groups that define their dominance in terms of pure muscle, Terry must prove his masculinity by means of a test of physical prowess. He approaches this test as a bourgeois man who is ruled by the law. His new masculinity is purely symbolic, exemplified by his ability to stand up after being beaten and to thrust himself through the door of the leading dock. This action calls forth associations with a sexual act in which Terry's whole body is deployed as a phallus, and it incorporates him into the visual environment that has previously posed such a threat to the dominance of the male figure. His walk into the loading dock contrasts his body to Friendly's for the last time as the former union boss is dunked in the harbor by Pop Doyle (John Hamilton) in a comic inversion of Friendly's original crime of throwing Doyle's son Joey off the roof.[20]

Terry's stoic assertion of bodily supremacy speaks more eloquently to the dockers than any words; but it does move them to words. Here the pattern of repeated utterances that has heretofore prevailed is appropriated in the service of a new commitment to intergroup communication. Now the repetitions are combined with variations that emphasize the relationship between Terry and the other dockers. "If *Terry* don't work, *we* don't work . . . If *he* walks in, *we* walk in with him." This new sense of community, fragile and tentative, constitutes the film's ultimate resolution, a resolution centered on the battered but still identifiably male body of Terry Malloy.

This choric solidarity is made possible, both thematically and dramatically, by the strong vulnerability of the protagonist. Thematically, the resolution is classic and archetypal; the scapegoat purges and renews the society. But dramatically it is innovative, made possible by the particular ideological potency of the new man that Brando enacts. Brando's performance elaborates a model of male gender insecurity that recreates romance as a drama of male neuroticism. The Stanislavskian techniques that he employs not only lend themselves to the expression of this motif but also invest his characterization with an unprecedented aura of verisimilitude. Brando's acting in *On the Waterfront* is thus designed to persuade movie fans of the 1950s that Hollywood's newest love stories were not only pleasurable but also "realistic."

In recent years the influence of the Method on the creation of male star personas has been to some extent reformulated. In place of the anxiety-fraught romantic relationships suggested

by the neurotic male Method stars of the fifties, newer Method stars like Robert de Niro, Dustin Hoffman, and Al Pacino typically project a cold narcissism that suggests that they are beyond romance. These actors represent the self-absorption that Lee Strasberg brought to Method performance not by revealing an anguished inner torment as the stars of the fifties were inclined to do but rather by projecting a truculent incommunicativeness that pointedly excludes the audience.

Many of the most successful films made by these actors, such as *Raging Bull* (1980), *The Godfather* (1972 and 1974), and *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979), treat the failure of romantic coupling. By contrast, attempts to feature these stars in traditional romantic plots in films like *Bobby Deerfield* (1977), *John and Mary* (1969), and *Falling in Love* (1984) have for the most part been notably unsuccessful. For these performers the drama of identity does not necessarily involve a relationship with a woman. De Niro, for instance, is at his best playing psychotic characters like Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* (1976) or Johnny Boy in *Mean Streets* (1973). Pacino has been successful at portraying homosexuals in films like *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) and *Hustling* (1980). Hoffman plays at transvestitism in *Tootsie* (1982) and autism in *Rain Man* (1988). The identity issues raised by such roles and by these stars' offscreen personas as difficult loners suggest that a pre-Oedipal scenario may have replaced the Oedipally related crises of gender roles acted out by the Method stars of the 1950s. How this shift relates to the changing conventions of romance and marriage is as yet unclear. In the world of commercialized artistry that is Hollywood cinema, however, such changes are always meaningful.

Notes

1 In keeping with Stanislavsky's commitment to exploring the limits of realist representation, this manner of playing represented the furthest extension of the "fourth wall" convention first espoused by Diderot as a means of increasing drama's capacity for illusionism. For a discussion of Diderot's influence on the development of theatrical realism, see Arnold Hauser's essay "The Origins of Domestic Drama."

2 For an attack on the efficacy of the technique of affective memory, see Bentley.

3 Stanislavsky himself was not hospitable toward the idea of Method acting in film. As Jay Leyda reports, "Stanislavsky's personal feeling about cinema began in contempt, warmed into antagonism, and never went beyond tolerance in later years" (76).

4 In the films he made as a director, however, Pudovkin's primary identification is with the Soviet tradition. Jay Leyda reports that *Deserter*, for instance, contained 3,000 shots as compared to the average sound film's 800 to 1,000 (297). In such films character is delineated through editing much more than through acting. Pudovkin freely resorted to other nonperformance techniques to portray character as well. In *Mother*, for instance, high-angle shots of the mother designated in the title suggest her helplessness, and the father's self-indulgence is revealed by a close-up of his hand scratching his stomach. In both *Film Technique* and *Film Acting* Pudovkin also proudly recounted his ability to elicit desired reactions from nonperformers. In his 1928 *Storm Over Asia*, for example, he was able to draw an awed and fascinated response from a crowd of Mongolian peasants by presenting them with a show put on by a Chinese conjurer out of range of the camera (170). And in *The Story of a Simple Case* (1932) he evoked a smile from a young boy for a scene in the film through similarly deceptive means (339–41). In such a creative context the controlled and integrated acting techniques cultivated by Method performers are ill served.

5 It is doubtful that the Kuleshov experiment ever actually took place; if it did, it is unclear what form it took. However, the status it is accorded in the writings of various Soviet theorists attests to the significance that they attached to the concept of character depiction through editing rather than acting. For a recent discussion of the problematic status of this well-known experiment see Holland and Kepley.

6 Pudovkin equates realism with the theory of montage even more emphatically later in *Film Acting* when he writes,

> Naturalism, idealism and realism in art stand in the same relation to one another as do mechanism, idealism, and dialectical materialism in philosophy.
>
> Those of the naturalist school, in copying a phenomenon of actuality and not generalizing it, create a mere cold mechanism, without the inner links that exist in actuality within the phenomenon, and without the outer links that bind it to other phenomena as a part to the whole (330).

In a later essay, "Stanislavsky's System in the Cinema," Pudovkin avoided this inconsistency in his discussion of cinematic realism and called upon the director to create unity in the actor's performance. Even here, however, the paradox of how the actor could develop inward feeling in the context of a filmic practice that gave primacy to editing remained unanswered.

7 Hollywood's orientation toward well-crafted stories did not necessarily reflect a valorization of writers over actors. Scripts were often tailored to the talents of specific actors, and important stars could have scripts rewritten to suit their preferences. But the highly polished surfaces of most studio-made films of the period precluded the ragged effect of too much creative participation by actors on the set.

Richard Blum argues that *Theodora Goes Wild*, directed by Boleslavsky in 1936, shows the effects of Method-style improvisation (29). Yet the film plays far more like a polished 1930s comedy than it does like the emotion-charged realistic dramas most associated with the Method school.

8 Useful accounts of this process can be found in Blum, Hirsch, Garfield, Lewis, and Strasberg.

9 Jean Benedetti's recent biography of Stanislavsky blames Richard Boleslavsky for this shift. Boleslavsky was the person primarily responsible for introducing Americans to the principles of Method acting, and he emphasized affective memory. Meanwhile, Stanislavsky himself was developing his theories in another direction which stressed physical action (259).

10 The lack of commitment that Marlon Brando had to the communal ideals of Stanislavskian performance has been attested to by Rod Steiger, who has complained bitterly about Brando's predilection for leaving the set during the production of *On the Waterfront* after his speeches had been filmed so that Steiger was forced to deliver his own lines to an assistant director in scenes such as the famous taxicab tête-à-tête. (Kazan's autobiography excuses Brando's discourtesy by explaining that the star had to leave the set to attend his psychoanalytic sessions [525].)

Published accounts of the group improvisations that Brando participated in at the Actors Studio reveal him as having been competitive and hostile toward his fellow

performers, often expressing these feelings through the use of obscenities and physical violence. In part this behavior can be seen as a function of Strasberg's design of the exercises themselves, one of which was labeled "ineluctable force versus immovable object." An example of Brando's interpretation of this exercise is offered by David Garfield:

> Brando was supposed to be returning to his apartment where he had hidden some drugs. Eli Wallach was told he was an FBI agent who had been assigned to find the narcotics in Brando's apartment. He said to Brando, "Give me a minute to walk around the room, then you walk in." When Brando entered he looked at Wallach and said, "Who the fuck are you?" Wallach, shocked at the language—not usual on the stage at that time—said, "What?" Brando repeated the question. Wallach sputtered something about the super having let him in to look at the apartment, which he was interested in renting. Brando's language got cruder and cruder. Wallach said, "Just a minute." Brando pushed him and said, "Just get out." Wallach said, "Don't push, don't push." Brando continued the stream of threat and invective and kept pushing him. Wallach resisted and Brando picked him up and threw him out of the room, slamming the door behind him. Wallach opened the door to get back in; he was furious and really ready to kill Brando. But Marlon was laughing. So was the class—uncontrollably. In the post-scene discussion Wallach was criticized for not finding the narcotics (61–62).

Needless to say, such an approach has little to do with Stanislavsky's ideal of collaboration and ensemble playing.

11 The compatibility of the Method with the Hollywood star system has also been noted by Robert Brustein (*Culture Watch*) and Gordon Gow (*Hollywood in the Fifties*).

12 For Adler's interpretation of the Method, see her book *The Technique of Acting*, which has a foreword by Brando. In it she argues that Stanislavskian actors should attend to matters of style and craft—to the outer as well as the inner aspects of performance. Even in his early career, Brando followed this practice, taking on roles that emphasized accents, costume, and makeup in films like *Viva Zapata* (1952), *Julius Caesar* (1953), and *Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956). Nonetheless, Hollywood typed him as a rebel along with Clift and Dean.

Brando's ease with the techniques of self-exposure that the Method represents was later attested to by Bernardo Bertolucci, who commented on the star's bravura turn in *Last Tango in Paris* (1972). "Instead of entering the character, I asked him to superimpose himself on it," Bertolucci has recalled. "I didn't ask him to become anything but himself. It wasn't like doing a film. It was a kind of psychoanalytic adventure" (Morella and Epstein 139).

13 Kazan's reputation has suffered because of his identification as an actor's director. (See, for example, Robin Wood's essay "The Kazan Problem.") My own analysis of *On the Waterfront*, by contrast, implies that the integration of a strong performance style into a cinematic text is in itself a considerable directorial achievement.

14 See, for example, Biskind, Christiansen, Hey, Mellen, Murray, Neve, Roffman and Purdy, and Sayre. Most of these discussions see the film as a glorification of the act of informing, and thus as an apologia for Kazan's and Schulberg's friendly testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee. The fullest statement of this argument can be found in Navasky.

Although persuasive on its own terms, this line of argument has tended to obscure elements of the film that distinguish what happens to its hero from what happened to its authors. The federal investigation in *On the Waterfront* is in no way corrupt or ill advised; it is based on the Kefauver hearings of corruption on the docks, not on HUAC. Thus, Terry's decision to inform is of a different order from the decision made by the filmmakers regarding HUAC. Although this shift may be thought of as placing the actions of Kazan and the others in a more favorable light, its relationship to the central concerns of the film is quite another matter. (I am indebted to Robert Savage for bringing this point to my attention.)

Other readings of the film have argued that its complications are focused on an isolated individual divorced from society as well as from romance. See, for example, Michaels, Kitses ("Elia Kazan"), and Higson. An exhaustive history of the making of the film and the backgrounds of its various collaborators can be found in Hey.

15 In an analysis of performance in *East of Eden* Joanne LaRue and Carole Zucker have pointed out the way in which James Dean's Method style also functions to set his character apart from the others. However, LaRue and Zucker assert that this strategy is wholly attributable to Elia Kazan's direction rather than Dean's acting, claiming that the star's Method-derived style does not contribute to a sense of the character's alienation. My own discussion of Brando in *On the Waterfront* makes a case against such a view by emphasizing the way in which any performer's extensive use of Method techniques associated with inwardness will tend to produce a characterization in which alienation is a central feature.

16 The final shooting script, which was later published, gives this line as, "Never will be much too soon" (26). Almost all Brando's dialogue departs from the published script in a similar manner, although the speeches of the other characters tend to follow Schulberg's written dialogue quite closely.

17 The strategy of repeating lines was to become a central feature of Sanford Meisner's version of the Method. Meisner contends that this technique "is emotional and impulsive, and *gradually*, when the actors I train improvise, what they say—like what the composer writes—comes not from the head but truthfully from the impulses" (36–37). Meisner's very different view of the effect of repeated lines speaks to the usefulness of this strategy in training, not in actual performance.

18 Terry's decision not to stage a climactic shoot-out calls into question Robert Ray's characterization of *On the Waterfront* as a "disguised Western" (145).

19 Here, as in many Hollywood films, the woman's resistance is seen as a function of her misunderstanding of the situation, which the film's authors have constructed to validate the male point of view, and of her own emotions. It is only by subjecting woman to physical force that the man compels her to acknowledge her "true" feelings. Thus the film's rhetoric works to undermine the integrity of the female will and to sanction the use of force in heterosexual relations. For discussions of the conventions governing the cinematic representation of forced sexual encounters, see my *Roman Polanski*.

In an essay on *American Gigolo* Peter Lehman has argued that representations of male passivity during erotic interplay lead to "hysterical" overcompensations in other parts of the narrative. My own reading of *On the Waterfront* supports this view by reading the scene of sexual assault as a compensation for the male's earlier passivity.

20 In an influential article Lindsay Anderson argued that this scene reflects a fascistic world view, for the men who follow Terry behave like "leaderless sheep in search of a new master"

(130). By contrast, Michel Ciment and Kenneth Hey see the scene as a crucifixion, with Brando as a Messiah who suffers in order to lead the men into a better world (Ciment 112, Hey 690). But because neither of these positions considers the role played by sexuality in the film, they are unable to account for the scene's extreme emphasis on physicality and its relationship to Brando's distinctive performance style.

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Film Acting and Independent Cinema

11

ANDREW HIGSON

In September 1985, *Screen* published a special issue on acting and cinema, an issue which included my interview with Mark Nash and James Swinson, co-directors of Channel 4's *Acting Tapes*. The tapes and the special issue of *Screen* together seek ways of discussing the question of film acting within the theoretical frameworks developed over the last few years and in relationship to debates about independent cinema in Britain. More recently, the tapes were shown as part of a short season focusing on film acting on Channel 4's *Eleventh Hour* slot, and as part of a much longer season on the same topic at the National Film Theatre (NFT) in London. In addition, there have been various events organised around the tapes, including a *Screen* day school at the NFT, and a weekend of discussions, screenings and video/acting workshops at Phoenix Arts, Leicester. What follows is an attempt to develop in a relatively systematic way some of the ideas thrown up in these various contexts, and to relate them both to the writings of Meyerhold and Kuleshov, Bresson and Brecht, and to the context of British independent cinema in general.[1]

At the NFT event, John Caughie argued that it is important to distinguish between two ways of thinking about acting,[2] which we might loosely summarise as the difference between the *intentions* of specific traditions of acting, and the *effects* of acting in terms of the production meaning. My interest here is in the relationship between the two, and particularly the implications of such an approach for the development of appropriate acting strategies for independent cinema.

On the one hand, different traditions of acting involve specific forms of training, the development of particular skills and forms of concentration, and specific assumptions about the relationship between interiority/exteriority, and/or between the individual subject/social relations. This can perhaps be most easily characterised in terms of an example developed in the *Acting Tapes*. For Stanislavsky, we might have the following structure –

> I saw a bear (stimulus)
> I was frightened (emotion)
> so I ran (response).

Here the actor's training must concentrate upon developing the skill and concentration necessary to *emote fear*. But in Meyerhold's biomechanical schema, we have the following structure –