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ARTICULATING STARDOM
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Despite the early interest shown by the Prague School, the role of the actor as re-presenter of signs has barely been examined.[1] Thus one of the main purposes of this chapter is to focus attention on the categories and variables that I take to be essential to the semiotics of acting in film and, by extension, television. My second purpose is to develop a means of reconciling a 'political economy' approach to stardom in mainstream (Hollywood) cinema and the theorisation of the star as an interplay of representation and identification. The crux of my argument is that stardom is a strategy of performance that is an adaptive response to the limits and pressures exerted upon acting in the mainstream cinema.

To pursue this argument it is necessary to show how stardom develops as a response to the interaction of three areas of discursive practice or economies —systems of control that mobilise discursive resources in order to achieve specifiable effects. These are: the cultural economy of the human body as a sign; the economy of signification in film; and the economy of the labour market for actors.

But before addressing these points directly, it is necessary to explore the relationship between stage and screen acting, since it is my reading of this relationship that conditions the treatment that follows.

STAGE AND SCREEN

The view that stage acting provides a yardstick against which to evaluate acting on screen is widespread among actors, even among those whose main professional activities have been confined to the screen. A common argument is that the stage is an actor's medium, in the sense that it is on the stage that the actor is best placed to realise his or her 'creative intentions' in character portrayal.[2] While such assertions may be seen as conditioned by the desire to be publicly associated with an elite institution—the 'Stage', its

'Great' tradition etc.—certain empirical features of the work situation of the actor tend to confirm such a judgement.[3]

Two recurrent themes can be identified. First, that 'good' acting is based on some concept of intentionality, or even authorship. It is taken for granted that the participation of the actor(s) in the process of signification should be an outcome of the deployment of a conscious and constitutive control of performance. And it is more or less uniformly held that film (or video) presents a latent and readily actualised threat to this requirement, whereas theatre does not. Second, it is regularly assumed that theatre as a medium, because it entails 'live' performance before an audience and because the duration of the performance is the performance *per se* rather than the provision of materials editable downwards into a performance given elsewhere, requires of the actor a more sustained exercise of skills and commitment than is the case where an editable medium is used.

Preference for the stage, therefore, expresses a reaction and an adaptation to the organisational realities of working in the mainstream theatre and cinema. The discursive practice of acting, in Britain and the USA at least, is deeply implicated in the project of intentionality. The most concrete evidence of this implication relates to the training of actors.[4] The regime of exercises that constitute an actor's training, while certainly increasing his or her adaptability in respect of specialised skills like juggling, dancing and so on, are nevertheless intended to increase the conscious mastery of the actor over verbal, gestural and postural behaviour. In a similar way, versatility of accent, posture, walk and other markers of difference, is *intended* to enable the actor to 'naturalise' such exogenous behaviours (or possibly, some elements of own behaviour to be used consciously in performance) as his or her own for the duration of performance in order to be convincing 'in character'.[5] At its extreme, the prioritisation of intentionality—the intention, in this case, to communicate some 'truth' about the interior reality of the character—has a Cartesian ring about it: the maximisation of conscious control over acquired dispositions, inherited characteristics (the utopia of make-up) and their conventionalised meanings in the culture at large. Taken to its extreme, and to the extent that actors, like any other occupational group, have an interest in excluding untrained entrants, such an extreme has a pragmatic value, such an emphasis requires that: '[the] actor must be able to be true to any conceivable character, making all actions believable and spontaneous.'[6]

More routinely, it leads to the norm of impersonation. This states that in playing any character, the 'real' personality of the actor should disappear into the part or, conversely, that if the range of the actor is limited to parts consonant with his or her personality then this constitutes 'poor' acting. This latter, negatively valued converse, I shall refer to, hereafter, as

personification. A number of points can be made about impersonation: for example, it seems to transcend acting styles—Method and Broadway/ repertoire styles tending to propose different strategies of realisation of the same objective—and it serves to grade positively the standing of the actor among peers.[7] But probably the key theoretical issue relates to the concept of authorship implicit in such a project.

As Foucault has argued, the concept of 'Author' can be seen as a principle of coherence, governing the identification, organisation, circulation and reception of texts, rather than as verbal marker denoting a discrete historical identity that unfolds transparently through the text. In this regard, he writes of the 'author function' rather than the 'author'.[8] One of the key thrusts to Foucault's argument is to highlight the various ways in which the romantic conception of the author—as a unified subject purposively unfolding his or her interiority before a reader, a parallel coherence in the sphere of reception —constitutes a denial of inter-textuality. Does the concept of impersonation, in fact, constitute a performance variant of the myth of the author?

My answer to this is, basically, no. To put it bluntly, so long as the contribution of the actor (or for that matter any other functionary in the process of collective production) disappears into character, then the performance text—or more strictly the text created by the ensemble of performances—can be assigned a unitary, global author. Notwithstanding this fact, the romantic myth of the author has readily and voraciously fastened itself to the world of performance by a facile, but plausible extention of the literary conception of the author to that field.[9]

The objective of performance is the re-presentation of a text through the activation of its various parts—in acting usually a narrative realised through its characters or in music the realisation of the score through the execution of its instrumental parts and so on. The relationship between the execution of the 'parts' and the ultimating 'text' may be more or less specified by the nominal author through a system of notation, but the intrinsic relationship between the script or score is intertextual: it is only through the performance —in reality, an ensemble of performances—that the 'text' is fully realised, yet each performance constitutes a specific text in itself, more or less a version or a token of the notated or written text and implicated in the discourse of the past, present and future versions of the text. Thus it is meaningful, if finally misleading, to speak of Shakespeare's Hamlet in relation to Olivier's or Gielgud's Hamlet and so on.[10] The notion of the author as opposed to author-function is clearly, if mistakenly, operative in such formulations in the sense that it is the leading actor's name that is used (especially when he assumes a directorial role) to indicate a specific realisation or re-presentation of the text, but neither the text nor its version constitute a definitive 'work' or vision transhistorically foreclosed around the

intentions of the author. For actors, intentionality is doubly articulated: the actor deals with a part which is only a moment of the totality of the performances given by other actors (or other participants, a one-man show is never produced by just one individual) and that totality is itself, as already indicated, intrinsically intertex tual. The actor's intention to portray a specific character in a specific way may seem at first sight, and in the case of a leading actor is often so represented, to correspond to authorship conceived as the creative principle of the fixed, delimited text. But the process of character representation through impersonation entails that the actor should strive to obliterate his or her sense of identity in order to become a signifier for the intentionality inscribed in character. Such obliteration returns the project of intentionality to the level of the narrative itself which is usually 'authored' reductively in terms of the director's or playwright's 'vision', rather than as a meaning emergent from a collective art of representation.[11] The full participation of the actor in the narrative as character thereby depends upon the suppression of the literary conception of the author.

The other aspect of intertextuality relates to the fact that the actor as a private individual is already constituted as a sign within the host culture, in so far as his or her behavioural and physical attributes have been read and will be read as cues to personality. The placing of the actor on stage or screen certainly intensifies this inferential process and for the purposes of a single casting may re-enforce characterisation. But overall the range of characters an actor may attempt is limited by the given-ness of her or his physical and behavioural attributes. Once again, impersonation 'frees' the actor for a range of parts in so far as it suppresses what in non-actors would be regarded as the authenticating markers of their personality. These considerations point towards the conclusion that the norm of impersonation serves as the basic instrument of the construction of difference in acting styles.

The impact of the technology of film on impersonation constitutes the final aspect of the situational logic that underpins the preference for stage over screen. Put in its bluntest form, there is a widespread belief among actors and other commentators that film as a medium regularly if not necessarily entails a deskilling process, in the sense of rendering the skills of the actor obsolete or of entailing dilution—the substitution of the untrained actor for the trained. As Edgar Morin put it: 'The cinema does not merely de-theatricalise the actor's performance. It tends to atrophy it.'[12]

While it's absurd to conclude as Morin does that acting in film requires no skills whatsoever, it is important to identify the transformations in the practices of acting that film technology entails. The impact of film on acting rests ultimately on the sheer variety of codes that can be mobilised in order to fabricate the movement of the narrative.[13] The formative capacities of film threaten to disrupt the project of constructing, from actor-located processes

of signification, a psychologically consistent character. The construction of
character in film is not usually a linear temporal process. The behaviour of the
character, a supposedly coherent subject unfolding within the place and time
set by the narrative, is very often constituted out of minute quanta of
behaviour, repetitiously delivered (takes). Such quanta, necessary because of
contractual or locational economies, are dramatically discontinuous in terms
of the chronology of character and plot, e.g. the actor as character must play
to a character he has never seen or act out the aftermath of an affair that has
yet to be enacted. Equally, a given quantum of performance, itself a mere
fraction of an action, may be greatly inflected by camera position, omitted
altogether, cut and reduced, resited through editing and so on.[14] Alternatively,
though interrelatedly, the formative capacity of film, particularly its capacity
for sequences in which only inanimate objects appear and their substitution
for the actor as a signifier, can readily displace the actor from the action, so
that inanimate or non-human animate objects signify states of emotion
formally within the capacity of the actor(s) to project.[15]

   Thus film technology confronts the actor with an effect which may be
broadly identified as de-skilling. This is not to imply that acting in film does
not entail the use of skills. A movement from stage to screen in a literal sense
involves re-skilling—though conversely the kinds of skills acquired by stage
training are not easily mastered by those only experienced in film work.[16]
Rather the notion of skill does not rest on some simplistic conception of a
fixed technical content so much as the question of whether such content, at
whatever level of complexity, is monopolisable by a specific set of workers.
And whether in this context the technology is implemented in a way that
enhances or undermines the control of the contending parties of employees
and employers.[17]

   Viewed in this light, it is clear enough that the routinised practices in the
mainstream cinema tend to shift the frontier of control away from the actor
towards the director or, where this is not the same person, those empowered
to render the final cut. Equally it is no small matter for professional standing
and employment chances that the formative capacities of film (or video) can
be used to compensate for a low level of technical ability as an actor,
enabling untrained actors to produce convincing on-screen performances.[18]
Under such circumstances a preference for the theatre is not surprising. The
requirement of unaided projection and the necessity of repeat performances
before a 'live' audience virtually eliminates this threat in the theatre. So, too,
it is in the theatre that actors have the greatest degree of direct control over
the signifying direction and grain of their performance—even if this control
is only unevenly realised in practice.[19]

   Again, this preference is materially reinforced by the historical priority of
the stage and by the fact that where acting is taught in drama schools and

colleges, such teaching has a stage bias, for obvious reasons of cost, but also because the demands of stage acting can be scaled down whereas film acting techniques cannot be readily scaled up.[20]

The drift of these remarks is towards what I would term a qualified technological determinism. Technology always represents a complex of potential uses, but the social relationships of production in which it is embedded tend to prioritise particular forms of use and patterns of technological application over others. Thus the effects of characterisation achievable by the cumulative process of the actor's performance on stage are only sustained in film and television if measures are taken to compensate for the atomising effects of normal usage. Where such measures—e.g. rehearsals or collective decision-making—are absent, self-referential compensations arise such as playing to the camera, assumption of producer or director's role on the part of leading players and stardom.[21]

I want now to examine stardom as a particular variant of performance in film—a variant that is, I would contend, only comprehensible as an interaction, with varying situational outcomes, of the three economies signalled at the outset of this article.

THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF THE HUMAN BODY

Performance or representational arts, whether these occur in a theatrical, cinematic or televisual context, necessarily bear a relationship to the diversity of signs distributed in the culture at large. The exact nature of the relationship between the representational regime within the theatre and the world outside has been historically variable, but in the West, at least since the late nineteenth century, the theatre and subsequently film and television have been dominated by naturalism. Naturalism may be defined as that mode of theatrical representation which claims that the external aspects of the individual, his or her utterances, behaviour and appearance in everyday settings, gives a privileged access to personal and collective realities.[22]

If we take the familiar contrast between naturalism and more formalistic regimes of theatrical representation in which symbolic as opposed to iconic or indexical signs predominate, such as the Chinese classical or the Japanese Noh theatres, then the implications of naturalism become clear. (C.S. Peirce defines a symbol as signifying by convention, an icon by resemblance and an index by physical connection.) Under a naturalistic system all signs deployed in performance lay claim (however spurious) to be motivated—to be a mimesis of the extra-theatrical, extra-cinematic and so on. This mimetic relationship can be seen as a constraint on the autonomy of sign production since the subcoding of resemblance is constantly referred back to the iconic

or indexical actuality of the signified—or, rather, what in such a system can be construed as the same, the perception by the audience of verisimilitude. In non-naturalistic theatre, however, the regime of signification creates its own signified(s) by the deployment of highly conventionalised systems and sub-codes of reference—the audience not expecting verisimilitude (in the naturalistic sense) but an internal con sistency in the relationship between signifiers and signified. Since even naturalistic regimes have their own specific sub-codes, the difference here is between a covert and overt use of signs and codes of representation and the gearing of the relationship between the signifier(s) and signified(s) as more or less conventional, more or less motivated.[23]

In a theatrical tradition permeated with naturalism, and the American theatre is particularly notable for this development, the actor confronts problems in characterisation that relate to his or her being as a general cultural object rather than a theatrical object.[24] The actor is a re-presenter of signs in that he or she activates or deactivates via impersonation those aspects of the general cultural markers that he or she bears as a private individual for character portrayal.[25] The nub of these problems stems from the fact that if the theatre is to 'mirror' the street, the street is already populated with signs. So that the actor as a member of the host culture—with a given hair colour, body shape, repertoire of gestures, registers of speech, accent, dialect and so on—always pre-signifies meaning. Such a relationship creates difficulties for the process of impersonation which are well known. First, there is the pre-performance selection process of type-casting, which has a persistent tendency towards self-fulfilment—only actors who look the part get the part.[26] This relationship, which ties the actor as it were to biological and social destiny, is compounded by another in performance—the process of semioticisation: the fact that anything appearing in the frame of the proscenium arch or of the camera is by that fact invested with meaning. The difficulty here lies in the suppression of those elements of the actor's appearance and behaviour that are *not intended to mean* at the level of the characterisation.[27]

By contrast, in a theatrical regime where the gearing between offstage codes and onstage coding is low or conventional and is consciously understood to be so by actors and audience alike, the physical qualities of the actor, as supposed characterological markers, provide a weaker constraint on casting. The application of make-up, dress and mannerisms do not require a literal defence, either iconically or indexically. Obviously enough, these differences are only a matter of degree, since as Eco has pointed out, even iconic sign-functions rely on conventions.[28] But it is still the case that naturalism offers a constraint not found in more canonical systems—systems where the distance between stage/screen are formally coded.

THE ECONOMY OF SIGNIFICATION IN FILM

As pointed out above, film (and video) can reduce the actor's control over performance. There remains the question of the features of film as a medium and how these provide, as it were, a semiotic 'conduit' for the implementation of social decisions and objectives related to control. To understand these features it is necessary to identify the point of engagement of the actor with the narrative through his or her engagement with character. As Stephen Heath has pointed out, the terms 'character' and 'actor' are ambiguous because they cover what are a whole series of positionalities in relation to the narrative.[29]

For the purposes of explaining the immediate interaction between actor and medium, the variables that have a direct pertinence are *character, person* and *image*. At the same time it is necessary to allow for extension of the term *image* to cover both filmic and extra-filmic or cinematic processes of representation and their interaction. In the first place, it has long been recognised that to any actor's appearance and behaviour before camera, film adds its own enhancement, producing effects that while originating in the apparatus nevertheless appear to be part of the 'natural' physical and behavioural properties of the actor.[30] Such a process of enhancement, whether by omission—the gauzing out of wrinkles in close-up, 'best side' shots and so on—or by addition, low angle enhancement of stature, lighting and so on, does not merely affect stars, *but actors in general*. Second, the image on screen is itself, especially in the case of the star, usually reinforced by extra-discursive practices, or more exactly the interaction of filmic and non-filmic discourses.[31] Two of these can be mentioned here. First, actors tend to develop a 'personality' for purposes of public interaction, which indicates that they are 'Actors' and suggests to potential employers that they are interesting and energetic people, including in this the entire paraphernalia of body maintenance, grooming and so forth. Second, it is also the case, especially with stars, that the image on screen is already contextualised by the circulation of biographical and personal anecdotal materials that frame their appearances on and off screen. One can go further than this and suggest, as studies of Ingrid Bergman and Doris Day have shown, that it is the extra-filmic discourse that has the greatest impact on the public's knowledge of the star, contradicting the evidence of what can be seen at the point(s) of performance.[32]

In this connection, Richard Dyer's term 'star image' is useful, since as his analysis shows many of the devices used to privilege the presence of stars in films equally enter into the construction of character. The moment of the star image is, in fact, the moment of a proprietorial claim to such effects as though they were a property of the star as a person, a claim which subsists not

primarily in what is represented on screen, but in the subsidiary literature where the image is rendered as a 'real life' property of its bearer, the actor as star.

Dyer, on the other hand, in his discussion of stars deploys a global opposition between character, 'a constructed personage in film', and personality as 'the set of traits and characteristics with which film endows [characters]'. This definition nevertheless includes audience foreknowledge, name, appearance and dress, decor and setting—codes which are not specific to film—alongside codes which are, so that his specification remains ambiguous in respect of the interweaving of the filmic and non-filmic.[33]

In order to preserve what is useful in these specifications for an analysis of acting I suggest the following modifications. The term *character* is adequate as it stands. The term *person* should be taken to include an understanding that the physical presence of the actor is already coded in the general sense of having the socially recognised attributes of an individual in the host culture (however problematic this 'fix' may be), a 'personality', and in the specific sense that this 'personality' is adapted to the exigencies of acting. Likewise, the term *image* should be restricted to the visual impact of the film 'system' on the actor's 'personality' off screen, so that the coherence of the actor's image on screen is clearly identified as a technologically based construction. Finally, I would introduce the term *persona* to cover what Stephen Heath has called 'the conversion of the body, of the person, into the luminous sense of its film image'[34]—an articulation of person and image as I have redefined them. The persona, in other words, is the intersection of cinematic and filmic discursive practices in an effort to realise a coherent subjectivity.

With these background points in mind, I want now to indicate two specifically filmic processes that provide what I referred to earlier as the semiotic conduit through which social decisions affecting the standing of personae or stars are infiltrated into the filmic system. These are: hyper-semioticisation and the displacement of interiority. By the former, I mean to indicate the intensification of the process observed in theatre. The use of close shooting in the cinema invests greater meaning in the actor as a signifying mass, involving in the process of signification parts of the actor's body, such as the eyes, mouth and so forth. This means, in effect, that the actor can signify merely because he or she has automatic or physiologically given qualities, e.g. lip shape and movement, facial mass and habitual expressions.[35] Under such circumstances, impersonation becomes the ever more redefined control of fine as opposed to gross bodily behaviour. The problem here is that as one increases the scale of observation, the range of behaviours approach the uncontrollable or, conversely, mere passivity will signify. The scale of observation has conventional limits. Thus the close-up

commonly goes no closer than the face, with more radical variation limited by the canons of naturalism. The face itself, which is posed in point-of-view cutting as the centre of the look and the authenticating moment of the character, is usually presented without make-up. That is to say, make-up is constructed in such a way as to obliterate its own occurrence and where possible the minimally retouched features of the actor provide the basis of the significatory play of depth of shot, focus, lighting and so on.[36] Such a *conventional* system for rendering apparently *motivated* signs seems a logical consequence of naturalism and to a large extent it clearly is. But it comes up against economic criteria, as evidenced by Jack Warner's exasperation at having paid Paul Muni so much for a performance in *Juarez* in which the star is unrecognisable.

For the actor committed to impersonation in such circumstances, the gross details of physical endowment pose severe problems since they are very often unalterable.[37] Generally speaking, the actor cannot be moved out of the naturalistic personality implications of his or her physique, however stereotypical or factually wrong these are. Ernest Borgnine can be made into a better looking Ernest Borgnine, not another Robert Redford.

In fact, the predominant tendency is for the norm of impersonation to be abandoned at the level of casting in favour of a strategy of selection based on personification—let the actor be selected by physical type anyway and let these physical attributes mean in and of themselves. In other words, the actor becomes the most rudimentary form of the sign, the ostensive sign in which the substance of the signifier is the substance of the signified: the actor is the person, has the personality, his or her appearance suggests she/he is, notwithstanding the fact that this constriction relies on a first order conventionally in the culture which the actor represents and, sometimes, redefines.[38] Such a form of type-casting is to be found in its most pronounced and literal form in the film (and television) industry and, to a lesser degree, in the theatre.

Thus, the ideal leading man should be aged between 19 and 25 years, at least 5 feet 10 inches tall but not over 6 feet 2 inches, well proportioned physically, handsome, rugged or interesting looking, have all his own teeth and hair. The ideal ingenue should be aged between 18 and 22, 5 feet 3 inches to 5 feet 7 inches tall, possess a well-proportioned body and an exceptionally beautiful and interesting face.[39] Obviously enough, few if any actors meet all these requirements, but this does not remove their pertinence as the criteria of selection. Casting directors may not be able to articulate 'ruggedness' with any precision, but they know it when they see it. Again, it is certainly the case that types change in the long term, but this does not eliminate their effectiveness in the short term. For the majority of actors the short term is all there is.

Given the selection of actors by type, there follows the fact of type-casting as a serial phenomenon: actors are limited to a particular kind of character for their working life—what might be called the Elisha Cook Jr syndrome—or, at least, will be so unless vigorous efforts are made to overcome type. Just as importantly, though, actors become committed in their on- and off-screen life to personification in the hope that by stabilising the relationship between person and image on screen they may seem to be the proprietors of a marketable persona. Robert De Niro is an interesting case in this regard, since he appears, paradoxically, to combine to a stunning level of virtuosity the capacity for impersonation with a drive, role by role, to transform himself physically into the substance of the signified, e.g. Jake La Motta in *Raging Bull*. In fact, De Niro's approach to acting is entirely consistent with an effort to adapt impersonation to the control relationships and techniques implied in film work. On the one hand:

> With a play you've got that one performance that night, but if you're doing a movie it's piece by piece. You can do maybe ten takes -one or two could be exceptional—you've got the chance to get it right. I never tire of doing takes.

On the other:

> The main thing is the script.… Then I have to get to know the director… because it's so much work—you can be stuck with someone for six months and it's an absolute nightmare. You've got to know that you're on the same track: you can disagree, you can try it your way, their way, ultimately they edit it and it's their film.…[40]

In other words, the advantages of takes are premised on the social relations of production. De Niro's commitment to Method acting—his efforts to research the background and seek out real-life models for the characters he portrays—is consistent with the atomising effects of film on character portrayal. Such a radicalising displacement towards the 'real' seeks an authenticating sense of character outside the process of filming. The emphasis on the script points towards a similar form of monitoring device to control portrayal of character 'in pieces' and the physical transformation of the self seems the last step in the mimetic grasp of the extra-cinematic real.

The tendency for film to transform the actor into an ostensive sign, its problematic insertion into the norm of impersonation, is enhanced by the second process, the displacement of interiority. It is generally accepted that film poses limits on the representation of interiority, inclining towards behaviourism, showing the 'surface of things'. The mainstream cinema has

developed a range of devices that reconstitute the interior space of the character, but the basic point remains: films tend to re-site the signification of interiority, away from the actor and onto the mechanism. Richard Dyer has ably catalogued these effects elsewhere[41] and I do not intend to pursue them here, but this process of displacement underlies and produces the image. This means that the process of character portrayal in film, whether angled towards impersonation or personification, takes on a quasi-automatic form in which the actor's performance in part originates in his or her behaviour and in part in the action of the filmic apparatus, including in the latter lighting and camera deployment. In other words, the projection of interiority becomes less and less the provenance of the actor and more and more a property emerging from directorial or editorial decision. Under such circumstances, a potential politics of the persona emerges in so far as the bargaining power of the actor, or more emphatically, the star, is materially affected by the *degree* of his or her reliance on the apparatus (the image), as opposed to self-located resources (the person) in the construction of persona. Consequently it is plausible to speak of high and low autonomy stars to compare, for instance, Bette Davis's use of acting skills to broaden her range of characterisations, with Joan Crawford's singular pre-*Mildred Pierce* persona.[42] Similarly, the established policy of building stars from inexperienced players under the studio system, can be seen to contain an element of fabricating subordination among potential stars.

The twinned processes of hyper-semioticisation and displacement of interiority lead to a paradoxical situation: while film increases the centrality of the actor in the process of signification, the formative capacity of the medium can equally confine the actor more and more to being a bearer of effects that he or she does not or cannot originate.

THE ECONOMY OF THE LABOUR MARKET FOR ACTORS

The effects so far identified at the level of film have a latent status, or rather would have were it not for the effects of the labour market on actors seeking continuous and stable employment. The broad features of the labour market for actors in film and television are well known and have remained unchanged for decades. Wherever and whenever we look there is a large oversupply of actors, as measured by membership in the appropriate union. Thus in 1979 roughly 90 per cent of Hollywood's Screen Actors Guild membership of 23,000 earned less than a living wage and among the membership of Equity in the UK, 70 per cent of members are unemployed in any one year.[43] Again, of those actors who do find work, there is a marked disparity between the earnings of leading players and stars, who are able to

negotiate personal contracts and the majority of actors who earn at or slightly above the basic rate set by collective agreements; the magnitude of difference being in excess of fifty times, sometimes a hundred. As a result, competition for parts, *given the operation of naturalistic conventions,* lead to an emphasis on what is unique to the actor, displacing emphasis from what an actor can do *qua* actor onto what the actor *qua* person or biographical entity is. In this manner, what Robert Brady calls a personal monopoly is constructed.[44]

In film, the construction of a personal monopoly rests on shifting the emphasis in performance towards personification, but such a shift takes the radical form of carrying the implications of the actor's persona into everyday life. Thus actors seeking to obtain stardom will begin to conduct themselves in public as though there is an unmediated existential connection between their person and their image. Another way to put this is to say that the persona is in itself a character, but one that transcends placement or containment in a particular narrative (or in the case of the vehicle subordinates the narrative to the spectacle of the persona) and exists in cinematic rather than filmic time and space.[45] Indeed, the persona, buttressed by the discursive practices of publicity, hagiography and by regimes of cosmetic alteration and treatment, is relatively durable and if sedimented in public awareness will tend to survive discrepant casting and performances.

For actors of limited or average ability, investing their energies in the cultivation of a persona represents something within their control and a means of competing with actors who have ability in impersonation. Indeed, in the studio system impersonatory skills were assigned a lower value compared to the cultivation of personae.[46] In contemporary times, the tendency towards personification may have increased with the advent of advertising as a field of employment, which combines naturalism with the sedulous cultivation of personal charm as an ingredient in the sales pitch.[47] On the other hand, the self-referentiality of Method acting—the so-called personal expressive realism of Brando, for example—rather than representing the triumph of the actor as impersonator can be seen as a successful adaptation of impersonation to the pressures of personification, deploying impersonation to refer back to the person of the actor, the consistent entity underlying each of his or her roles.[48]

The tendency towards the formation of personae as a monopoly strategy should not be taken as unproblematic, however. The norm of impersonation maintains a powerful presence for a number of reasons. It is an integral value central to the practice of acting itself. Again, even under the most automatised conditions of production, there remains a need for actors who can 'effortlessly' produce performances in character—hence the remark that character actors are a 'brassiere for the star, literally holding him or her up'.[49] Nor is the adhesion to such a norm surprising, given that it provides an

avenue of accomplishment for actors who do not fit into prevailing stereotypes. Accordingly, alongside the star system, the realm of the ostensive sign *par excellence,* one finds the operation of a hierarchy of character actors, whose professional reputation, length of careers and durability of earnings may outpace that of the more transitory stars. Such a hierarchy provides, as it were, its own counterstars, individuals like Robert Duvall, for example, whose claims to eminence rest squarely on their impersonatory skills and character playing. On the other hand, one of the decisive and recurrent effects of casting is that a given character type will sediment itself into the actor's personality so that the line between character and persona becomes blurred or, at least, requires extreme vigilance:

> I find that the character of JR keeps taking me over in real life. Not that I get that mean, I hope, but I do find the Texas accent drifting in and out. People I meet really want me to be JR, so it's hard to disappoint them.
> (Larry Hagman).[50]

Finally, it is necessary to qualify the view that personification arises *solely* out of the actor's adaptation to his or her conditions of employment. Such conditions are products in turn of the interests of monopoly capital operating in the sphere of cultural production. The ramifications are complex, but basically personification serves the purposes of containing competition amongst the tele-film cartel companies by representing the star's contribution as resting on his or her private properties as a person. In such a manner, a specific production can be valorised by 'Values' that are not distributed throughout the field of production as a whole—such as technical expertise, for example. The exploitation of the latter, as the latest wave of special effects pictures show, tends to escalate costs enormously. Equally, the centrality of personae (stars) as an index of value provides a form of control over the detail of performance in favour of those who have control over the text. The readiness of actors to function as ostensive signs can be seen as a defensive strategy: by accepting the loss of autonomy (either real or merely latent) entailed in the transfer of signification from the actor to the camera, with its off-screen constraints arising from stardom as a way of life, the actor paradoxically increases the reliance of the apparatus on his or her presence as a unique object or, more precisely, a behavioural commodity. The contradictory pressures, the paradoxes of identification that are induced by the shifts between personification and impersonation rather than some diffuse notion of a fit between stardom and capitalism provide the basic configuration of stardom in mainstream cinema.

NOTES

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1 A recent discussion can be found in Kier Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London, Methuen, 1980). In what follows I will assume for purposes of simplification the perspective of a single film actor (male or female). I wish to acknowledge the useful criticisms of the *Screen* editorial collective, particularly Andrew Higson, of an earlier draft of this paper.

2 See the accounts in Lillian and Helen Ross, *The Player: The Profile of an Art* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1962) and Ivan Butler, *The Making of Feature Films: a Guide* (London, Penguin, 1961). For a recent statement see Tony Booth's remarks in 'All actors should be working class', *Marxism Today,* October, 1984.

3 Pierre Bourdieu, 'Intellectual field and creative project', in M.F.D.Young (ed.), *Knowledge and Control* (London, Collier-Macmillan, 1971).

4 cf. J.Bensman and R.Lillenfield, *Craft and Consciousness* (Wiley Interscience, 1973).

5 Peter Barkworth, *About Acting* (London, Secker and Warburg, 1980), 13.

6 D.Mixon, 'A theory of actors', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour,* 13, 1 (March 1983).

7 cf. Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London, British Film Institute, 1979), 158. By psychological identification or behavioural imitation, respectively.

8 Michel Foucault, 'What is an author?', *Screen,* 20, 1 (Spring 1979), 13–33.

9 For a recent example of this incursion see Hall Hinson, 'Some notes on method actors', *Sight and Sound,* Summer 1984, 200 ff.

10 cf. Richard Woolheim, *Art and its Objects* (London, Pelican, 1978), 90 ff.

11 The complaint that actors attempt to make any role convincing, regardless of the consequences of making e.g. Eva Peron, loveable, has its origins in this displacement of intentionality.

12 Edgar Morin, *The Stars* (New York, Grove Press, 1960), 144; and on skill, on 152.

13 cf. Bill Nichols, *Ideology and Image* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1981), 82.

14 Bruce Dern has suggested, implausibly, that the actor may overcome the problem of arbitrary editorial control, given the centrality of the character he plays, by making each take the same. See J.Kalter, ed., *Actors on Acting* (Oaktree Press, 1979), 192, and James Mason's remarks in Ivan Butler, op. cit.

15 The classic statement is A.Knox, 'Acting and behaving', in R.Dyer MacCann (ed.), *Film: a Montage of Theories* (E.P.Dutton, New York, 1966).

16 cf. Jack Lemmon's remarks on Tony Curtis in W.Hyland and R.Hatnes, *How to Make It in Hollywood* (Nelson-Hall, 1975).

17 See David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Blackwell, 1982), 109 and 119. For a general discussion, see Paul Thompson, *The Nature of Work* (London, Macmillan, 1983).

18 Rod Steiger makes this point in Ross and Ross, op. cit., 278.

19 The use of 'live' audiences on television would have to be assessed carefully in this regard. Such performances are usually edited for transmission.

20 See P.K.Manning and H.L.Hearn, 'Student actresses and their artistry', *Social Forces,* 47, 1969 and A.K.Peters, 'Acting and aspiring actresses in Hollywood', Ph. D.thesis, UCLA, 1971.

21 V.I.Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting* (Mayflower edition, 1958), was one of the first to recognise the impact of editing on the actor's motivation and to propose the necessity of involving the actor in the total process of production.

22 See Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London, Penguin, 1971), 271–99 and M.Gorelik, op. cit., 47 ff.

23 For these reasons Brecht admired the Chinese theatre and saw it as enshrining the 'A-effect'. See John Willett (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre* (London, Eyre Methuen, 1977), 136 ff.

24 On the dominance of naturalism in the US theatre, see G.B.Wilson, *A History of American Acting* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1966).

25 See Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge University Press, 1974), especially chapter 6, for the history of the relationship between the theatre and the street.

26 J.Turow, 'Casting for TV parts: the anatomy of social typing', *Journal of Communication,* 28 (1978), 19–24.

27 cf. Jonathan Miller cited in Elam, op. cit., 77. Erving Goffman's distinction between signs given and signs given off is important here. See his *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (London, Penguin, 1971), 14.

28 See Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1976), 199.

29 Stephen Heath, 'Film and system: terms of analysis', Part II, *Screen,* 16, 2 (Summer 1975), especially 101–7.

30 cf. I.Pichel, 'Character, personality and image: a note on screen acting', *Hollywood Quarterly* (1946), 25–9.

31 'In other words, a film is significant only in so far as it mobilises one discourse to produce effects in another'—Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling, 'On authorship', *Screen,* Spring 20, 1 (1979), 41. A more extensive treatment of the occupational determinants of stardom, from the side of the cinematic as opposed to the filmic, can be found in Barry King, 'The Hollywood Star System', Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1984.

32 Richard Dyer, 'Four films of Lana Turner', *Movie,* 25 (1977/8), 30–52; J. Damico, 'Ingrid from Lorraine to Stromboli', *Journal of Popular Film,* 4, 1 (1975), 2–19; and Jane Clarke, M.Merck, Diana Simmonds (eds), *Move Over Misconceptions* (London, British Film Institute Dossier no. 4, 1980).

33 Richard Dyer, *Stars,* op. cit., 100 ff.

34 Stephen Heath, op. cit., 105.

35 cf. D.Thomson, 'The look on the actor's face', *Sight and Sound,* 46, 4 (1976). Bela Balazs' *Theory of Film* is the *locus classicus* of this view.

36 See P.Stallings and H.Mandelbaum, *Flesh and Fantasy* (St Martin's Press, 1978).

37 Though there are examples of anticipatory cosmetic alteration. Joan Crawford's career provides some classic examples.

38 See Umberto Eco, 'Semiotics of theatrical performance', *The Drama Review,* 21 (1976), 111.

39   See N.Blanchard, *How to Break into Movies* (New York, Doubleday, 1978), 41 ff;
     J.Sleznick, 'The talent hunters', *American Film* (Dec.–Jan. 1979), 60; and
     L.G.Yoaken, 'Casting', *Film Quarterly* (1958), 36.

40   Transcript of Guardian Lecture, reprinted in *Three Sixty°: British Film Institute
     News* (*May* 1985), 10–11.

41   Richard Dyer, *Stars,* op. cit.

42   See Barry King, op. cit.

43   See Jeremy Tunstall and David Walker, *Media Made in California* (Oxford
     University Press, 1981), 78. If only actors, as opposed to other performers, are
     taken into account employment is at 80 per cent. See John Lahr, *New Society* (20
     December, 1984), 468–9.

44   Robert Brady, 'The problem of monopoly', in Gordon Watkins (ed.), *The Motion
     Picture Industry,* Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science
     254 (November 1947), 125–36.

45   cf. Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (London, Macmillan, 1982), 67.

46   H.Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* (New York, Little, Brown and
     Co., 1950), 206.

47   Employment in advertising is not only an alternative to 'straight' acting but can be
     very lucrative if syndicated.

48   Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (Stephen Heath (ed.), London, Fontana, 1977),
     75.

49   H.Powdermaker, op. cit., 210.

50   Quoted in *The Sunday Times Magazine* (26 August 1984).