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PART THREE

STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Introduction

The essays in the last two sections dealt with acting in general, either analyzing the status of film acting in general or broad historical trends in the creation and transformation of film acting in the early twentieth century. Essays in this section, by contrast, attend to specific performances or modes of performance, ranging from Lillian Gish's performance in *True Heart Susie* (1919) to Marlon Brando's performance in *On the Waterfront* (1954), and from 1930s American film comedies to European avant-garde and independent cinema. These essays represent a range of approaches to cinema acting. In addition to analyses of the external signs of performance, or, in other words, descriptions of what an actor or actress does on screen, these essays consider various theories of acting and actor training that lay behind individual performances, as well as general principles of performance for specific genres or modes of filmmaking. Just as the essays in the last section attested to the resiliency of seemingly outmoded styles of acting, such as the "histrionic" style, and the overlap among acting styles in different historical periods, the essays in this section suggest that at any given moment in time, and even within a single performance, there is not a simple or singular approach to acting involved, such as a Delsartean system of poses or pure Method acting. Instead there exists a host of options that will be employed by an individual actor in a single film, within a genre across a series of films, or among members of an ensemble in a film or series of films. Offering varied approaches to acting and providing close and detailed analyses of acting in four distinct styles and time periods, the essays here furnish a glimpse of the wide-range of styles and techniques employed in film acting and provide models for future research.

Following on the heels of the transitional period in silent-film acting discussed in the essays by Roberta Pearson and Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs in the last section, it would seem that Lillian Gish's performance in *True Heart Susie* would be easy to place within the well-established "verisimilar" style. However, despite the fact that the dominant discourse around acting since at least 1914 emphasized "natural," transparent behavior, James Naremore claims that a close examination of Gish's 1919 performance shows her employing a wide variety of acting styles, and not just the dominant "natural" style. In a performance that Naremore says "ranges between innocence and experience, between stereotypical girlishness and wry, sophisticated maturity," Gish draws on techniques that range from the much-praised naturalism for which Griffith and

his actors are famous to the seemingly outmoded but nonetheless effective practices of gestural "signing," pantomime, and pictorial poses. Naremore claims that Gish shows a gift for physical comedy and adopts a wide vocabulary of movement akin to emergent silent comedians such as Harold Lloyd. In addition, she utilizes small gestures and extremely subtle changes in expression—akin to the "polyphonic play of features" Balàzs describes—in close-ups where she "reduces theatrical pantomime to its most microscopic form, displaying a stream of emotions."

Rather than a single performance, Henry Jenkins's contribution examines general principles of performance in early sound comedies. Looking at five classes of comedian comedy, including revue films, showcase films, comic romances, anarchistic comedies, and affirmative comedies, Jenkins suggests that there are certain tendencies in comedian comedy of the 1930s, which will be employed to varying degrees in these varied subgenres and which differ from classical realist styles. First, he notes that, as in the musical, moments of comedic performance will be more or less integrated with the narrative, but that, in general, comedian comedies will allow moments of virtuoso comedic performance to exceed and even abandon narrative motivation. Second, unlike classical realist cinema, where the character and star will usually be well-integrated to create a neat fit, in early sound comedies, the performer's personality will often overtake the role. Related to both of the above, Jenkins finds that comedies allow a kind of "expressive anarchy" in which the comedian's gags are not coordinated with the development of a rounded character, but function independently of character. This goes against a classical realist tendency toward "expressive coherence" between actor and role. This "expressive anarchy" factors into a more presentational style of performance in which comedians frequently violate the representational convention of the fourth wall and employ direct address, reflexive gags, and muttered asides to the audience. Finally, Jenkins claims that actors in a single film will represent a heterogeneous mix of contrasting acting styles, rather than homogeneity across the cast. Thus, in a Marx Brothers movie, for instance, there may be differing codes of performance for Groucho, Harpo, and Chico, as opposed to straight comic foils like Margaret Dumont, and there may be an entirely different set of performance principles at work for the romantic leads.

Taking a different tack from both Naremore and Jenkins, Virginia Wright Wexman situates her analysis of Marlon Brando's performance in *On the Waterfront* in a discussion of Method acting and the sexual politics of 1950s America. Wexman claims that American films in the 1950s adopted the Method as a more realistic style of acting not only because of the style's emphasis on a close fit between actor and character but also because Method techniques were "peculiarly well-suited to delineate a new type of male romantic hero." Wexman traces the tenets of Method acting from its origins with Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre through its incarnation at the American Group Theatre in the 1930s to Lee Strasberg's interpretation of the Method at the Actors Studio in the 1950s. She argues that the Strasberg version of the Method was especially well-suited to the Hollywood star system because Strasberg transformed a socialistic, egalitarian theory of acting into a more solipsistic, confessional approach to acting that mapped the actor's personal feelings onto those of the character. Through a close reading of Brando's Method techniques in *On the Waterfront*, Wexman finds that he "recreates romance as a drama of male neuroticism" and also invests his characterization "with an unprecedented aura of verisimilitude."

Finally, Andrew Higson offers an assessment of acting in independent European cinema that is, at the same time, proscriptive for British independent cinema. In order to characterize an acting style, Higson suggests that one can examine the *intentions* behind acting, by looking at theories of acting, such as Brecht, or actor training, such as the Method, or examine the *effects*

of acting, or what happens on screen. His interest is "in the relationship between the two," to consider both the skills and forms of concentration specific to certain schools of acting and the "meaningfulness of acting signs" produced under various institutional and ideological conditions of cinema. While considering theoretical positions from Brecht, Kuleshov, Bresson, and others, as well as actual performances in films by Bresson, Deren, Kuleshov, Straub-Huillet and Eisenstein, he proposes a semiotics of the following acting signs: the facial, the gestural, the corporeal (or postural), and the vocal. He advocates descriptive parameters for acting in independent or avant-garde cinema that would include: economy of the voice; economy of the face, gesture and body; precision of movement; fragmentation of character and externalization of emotion; stylization and distanciation; and working in an ensemble across a number of films. By categorizing independent acting in this way, Higson hopes to be able to capture the unintended effects of acting, moments when intention and effect seem at odds, and to be open to the ambiguities, contradictions, and imprecision of meaning built into any acting strategy. He also aims to escape rigid assumptions about the ideological efficacy of any particular theory of acting, or false polarizations, such as the common opposition between naturalist and anti-naturalist acting.

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Lillian Gish in *True Heart Susie* (1919)

JAMES NAREMORE

Griffith's *True Heart Susie* opens in a one-room Indiana schoolhouse, where a teacher is conducting a spelling bee. The students are standing in a row around the walls of the room, arranged according to their ages. The camera isolates two students—William and Susie (Robert Harron and Lillian Gish)—showing them facing the camera as if in a police lineup. Susie stands on the left, holding herself at attention with her arms stiffly at her sides; her head is cocked slightly, her eyes opened wide, her brows raised in an exaggeratedly cute, almost dopey, innocence. Next to her William stands more awkwardly, rocking from one foot to the other in discomfort over the teacher's impending question. Although a title card prior to the shot identifies Susie as "plain," the girl we see is quite pretty. Her tiny nose and rosebud mouth are set off against her large eyes, and her pale face is surrounded by wispy blonde hair gathered into pigtails. A simple plaid frock conceals her body, but obviously she is slender and well proportioned.

Griffith now cuts to the teacher, who quizzes the younger students and turns to glance offscreen in the direction of William and Susie. "Anonymous," she asks, and we return to a shot that appears identical to the previous one; at any rate the camera angle is the same, the clothing and the relative positions of the players are the same, and Robert Harron still looks like the same clumsy boy. Gish, however, might be a different person. One reason for the change is a subtle, unmotivated alteration in the lighting, which makes her hair seem much darker; but she also wears the hair differently, so that bangs fall over her forehead and her curls are less evident. Moreover, her posture and her facial expression suggest that she has totally revised her conception of the role. Her arms are relaxed, her hands are clasped calmly in front of her, and she glances sidelong up at William; gone is the kewpie-doll innocence, replaced by a quite mature face, less self-consciously pretty and more knowing.

Suddenly, a jump cut returns us to the first image of the couple, as if Griffith had discovered an error, partly erased it, and restored the original shot. William raises his hand for another chance at answering the question. Susie, looking rather dotty, her eyes wide with fake innocence and her head wobbling from side to side, seems to say, "I know!" She spells the word, ending her recitation with a self-satisfied smile.

When the sequence is slowed down with an analyzing projector or when a single frame is isolated from the two shots, the transformation in Gish is remarkable. During an ordinary viewing, however, the error in continuity goes by almost unnoticed. I mention it chiefly

because the two images of Gish indicate a polar opposition that she keeps in balance throughout the film. Her performance ranges between innocence and experience, between stereotypical girlishness and wry, sophisticated maturity—the latter quality giving *True Heart Susie* much of its continuing interest. In other ways, too, Gish adopts a variety of expressive attitudes for the role. As the narrative develops, she exhibits distinct personae that mark the growth of the character; and within individual sequences, her performance involves multiple faces that the audience is *supposed* to notice—especially when Susie is shown masking her feelings around others. If we look at her work more closely, we can see that it also entails a variety of acting styles, creating a complex emotional tone within Griffith's otherwise simple story. Thus, although Susie may be a "true heart," her identity (much like Gish's public identity as a star) is created out of disparate, sometimes contradictory, moments, all held together by a name, a narrative, and a gift for mimicry. The minor disturbance of illusion in the sequence I have described helps call attention to the way Gish normally keeps differing elements of the characterization in harmonious relation, maintaining a sense of unity across scores of shots.

I want to emphasize Gish's variety because *True Heart Susie* requires a good deal more actorly invention than is usually recognized. Then, too, I hope to counter the misleading notion that good movie acting consists of *being* rather than *meaning*. In certain ways, of course, we hardly need to be reminded that Gish was a player who contributed artistic labor to her films; her scenarios were constructed to highlight her emotive talents, and the silent medium made her seem an artist by definition, a "poet" who suggested character through pantomime. Even so, the dominant theory of movie acting after 1914 was articulated in terms of "natural," transparent, behavior. "We are forced to develop a new technique of acting before the camera," Griffith wrote. "People who come to me from the theater use the quick broad gestures and movements which they have employed on the stage. I am trying to develop realism in pictures by teaching the value of deliberation and repose" (quoted in Gish, 88).[1] As a result, performers like Gish were frequently praised for their authenticity, a quality that transcended mere art.

The star system contributed to an increasingly antimimetic conception of acting because it made some of the links between actors and roles seem inevitable. Almost from the beginning, movie stars were regarded as aesthetic objects rather than as artists, or as personalities who had a documentary reality. Griffith and many other directors strengthened the "organic" effect by inserting details from an actor's real life into the fiction. In *True Heart Susie*, for example, when Susie carries on imaginary conversations with the photograph of her dead mother, the picture she looks at shows Lillian Gish's own mother, cradling the infant Lillian in her arms. When William later tells Susie that men flirt with "painted and powdered" women but marry the "plain and simple ones," the joke is partly on Robert Harron, who said the same thing during his offscreen courtship with Dorothy Gish. It hardly matters whether anyone in the audience recognized these details, since the deepest purpose of biographical material was to facilitate performance, helping players to merge with their parts. The emphasis on personal relevance and sincerity was further enforced by the early critical discourse on stars, which helped shape the attitudes of viewers and moviemakers alike. Thus Edward Wagenknecht, who in 1927 wrote the first extended appreciation of Gish, remarked that "she always claims the right to make her roles over to suit Lillian Gish." He praised her for expressing "her own point of view, a distinctive something which is Lillian Gish and nobody else on earth." "The part and the actress are one," he wrote. "In a very deep and very true

sense, she is the profoundest kind of actress: that is to say she does not 'act' at all; she *is*" (249–50).[2]

At first glance, *True Heart Susie* lends additional support to such romantic-realist attitudes. It contains a virtual sermon on the theme of Art versus Nature, and its central character is valued precisely because she is what she seems. "Is real life interesting?" Griffith asks in the first title card, and the story, as it develops, becomes a parable about craft and deception in conflict with simple, artless goodness. Susie, the true-hearted country girl, is contrasted at every point with Bettina (Clarine Seymour), the scheming milliner from Chicago: Bettina drives around in "Sporty" Malone's flashy car, dances the Charleston, and engages in loose sex; meanwhile Susie embraces her cow, does spontaneous dances of joy, and lives in single-minded devotion to William. Bettina spends a good deal of time in front of a mirror, fashioning an image, whereas Susie is shown hoeing the fields or sitting by the hearth. Bettina "acts" in flamboyant style, deceiving men with her paint and powder, but when Susie tries to follow suit, daubing her face with cornstarch (a homelier, more "honest" substance that is all she can afford), her puritanical aunt berates her: "Do you think you can improve on the Lord's work?" The equation seems exact: if Art is as bad as Bettina, then Nature is as good as Susie—hence, by a process of association, we might argue that Gish is profound to the degree that she rejects old-fashioned theatrical mimesis, letting her moral "self" shine through the fiction.

But when we examine Griffith's parable more closely, it doesn't work out so neatly. All three major characters aspire to middle-class respectability, and this desire involves them in various degrees of "acting." *True Heart Susie* is therefore filled with performances-within-performance: Bettina is the most obviously theatricalized figure, batting her eyes seductively at William, playing a carefully contrived role that enables her to capture the town's most eligible bachelor. Prior to her entry on the scene, however, William has also developed an image for himself. When he returns from college, he no longer behaves like a rube; grandly stroking a new mustache, he parades the streets and practices a sermon, using Susie as his enraptured audience. As for Susie herself, she is in one sense as much a schemer and actor as Bettina. She decides early in the film that she will change William from a bumpkin into an educated pillar of the community ("I must marry a smart man!"). She sells her farm animals in order to pay William's college tuition, and then keeps the source of the money secret, playing the innocent companion. From the first we see that she is more clever than William; unable, because she is a woman, to become a Horatio Alger, she determines to create one and marry him. And although she is less sophisticated than Bettina, she seems no less sexually and romantically driven, ready at any moment to dress up for William. Bettina is in fact Susie's doppelgänger, as Susie inadvertently acknowledges in the scene where, overcome with pity, she holds her ailing rival in her arms. The real difference between the two is that Susie is wiser and more self-sufficient, and her craftiness is benign; William is her work of art.

It is difficult to say exactly how much Griffith wants the film to be interpreted in this ironic fashion. Like the novelist Samuel Richardson, he is too didactic to be described as a formal realist, and too realistic to be described as a "primitive" or a wish-fulfilling fantasist. Terry Eagleton's remarks on Richardson's *Pamela* could be applied with little qualification to *Susie*: "Do we laugh with Pamela at the novel's solemn moralizing of her 'baser' motives, or laugh with the novel at her . . . self-apologies? Do we have the edge over both the novel and Pamela, or does the novel have the edge over us all?" The problem confounds us because

Richardson's writing (like Griffith's direction and Gish's performance) seems compounded of two voices, neither having absolute priority. The result is what Eagleton describes as an uneasy relation between "the metalanguage of bourgeois morality" and a "still resilient popular speech" (*The Rape of Clarissa*, 32–33).

The film seems only partly aware of the discrepancy, and its plot goes through a series of improbable twists in order to achieve a happy ending. Bettina steals William from Susie, marries him, and becomes a philandering wife. One evening, she finds herself accidentally locked outdoors during a rainstorm. Her exposure to the elements gives her pneumonia, and even though Susie nurses her, she dies. Later, one of Bettina's friends tells William the truth about his dead wife's infidelity, and at nearly the same moment he learns that Susie paid for his education. Soon afterward, in an especially coy scene, we see him proposing marriage to Susie from outside her flower-bedecked window. They consummate a long-deferred kiss, and to make the ending still more rosy the film transforms Susie—now a mature woman who has suffered rejection—back into a girlish innocent: Griffith closes with a reprise of an image we saw near the opening, showing William and Susie *as children*, walking together down a country road. The soft focus shot is bathed in a nostalgic light, and a title card asks us to imagine the two "as they once were." Thus, using plot conventions of nineteenth-century melodrama, together with certain events from Dickens's *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, Griffith has awkwardly smoothed over the many contradictions that sustain an ideology of the natural self.

As Thomas Elsaesser and others have pointed out, this sort of plot has a long history; where *Susie* is concerned, the ancestry of the narrative can be traced back not only to Richardson's novels but also to the eighteenth-century dramatic genre known in England as "sentimental" or "weeping comedy." Literature for the stage in the eighteenth century was designed to challenge the cynical attitudes of Restoration drama (much as Griffith denounces flappers and city slickers), showing bourgeois life in its best light. Leading characters were admired for their sincerity or "sentiment"—a term that suggested "virtuous or moral emotion"—and the chief acting style, made famous by the tragedian David Garrick, involved painterly *tableaux*, in which the players struck elaborate poses (Todd, 34). The typical plot formula combined pathetic and comic situations, resolving all conflict in the fifth act and confirming marriage and sensitive fellow-feeling as the ultimate good. Oliver Goldsmith joked about the form, noting its hypocritical tendency to forgive any fault or reprieve any character "in consideration of the goodness of their hearts." Nevertheless, sentimental comedies multiplied, directly influencing Victorian literature and, indirectly, the Hollywood narrative. The leading characters of such dramas also helped to form the style of early movie stars. Gish, for example, repeatedly played women whose emotions were "spiritualized," motivated by a simple goodness of heart. Charles Chaplin is a more complex, refined version of the same type. As David Thomson notes, "Chaplin's persona is often very close to eighteenth-century sentimentality: a beautifully mannered dreamer who has trained himself into the emotional sensibility that will sometimes shame a woman" (98).

Variants of bourgeois sentimental comedy can still be found in modern theater and films, disguised somewhat by naturalistic conventions and inflected by the Freudian "family drama." Critics nearly always treat Griffith's uses of the form with condescension, but the survival of the basic plot indicates that we have not moved far from his values—especially as they are expressed in marriage, family life, and charity toward the weak. Raymond Williams has cautioned historians not to take these values lightly:

> The wider basis of sentimental comedy, and of a main tradition in the novel, was the particular kind of humanitarian feeling, the strong if inarticulate appeal to a fundamental "goodness of heart"; the sense of every individual's closeness to vice and folly, so that pity for their exemplars is the most relevant emotion, and recovery and rehabilitation must be believed in; the sense, finally, that there are few absolute values, and that tolerance and kindness are major virtues. In rebuking the sentimental comedy, as in both its early examples and its subsequent history it seems necessary to do, we should be prepared to recognize that in point of moral assumptions, and of a whole consequent feeling about life, most of us are its blood relations. (*The Long Revolution*, 288).

Seen in Williams's terms, one of Lillian Gish's achievements was to embody a "feeling about life"—making "good heartedness" plausible, conveying sweetness and moral sentiment without making us doubt her sincerity. The somewhat Cavalier ethos of American life after World War I, when a good many important stars were beginning to resemble college boys or flappers, made this job especially difficult; Gish was able to maintain her stardom into the middle twenties (when L. B. Mayer tried to talk her into having an "affair" that the studio could publicize) only because she was a master at expressing believable contradictions within her old-fashioned characters, hinting at sensuality and sophistication even in a purely bucolic role like that of Susie.

Gish's ability both to play comic scenes and to give a relatively complex tone to pathos also suggests that she was far from being a "natural" personality whom Griffith employed in appropriate fictional contexts. True, she had physical characteristics well suited for Griffith's fantasies of delicate, idealized girls tormented by brutish males. Never an extraordinarily beautiful or striking woman, she had a china doll's complexion and an ability to look young (which she retains even today). To a degree, however, her physical appearance was the product of design. Her features seem petite and regular—the perfect incarnation of WASP beauty—but she has said that she never laughed in her early films because her mouth, which is so tiny on the screen, was oversized in relation to her eyes.[3] She is usually described as "frail," but her softness was an illusion, like Chaplin's. She was small but strong, as anyone can see from her erect carriage, which in some contexts made her look prim. She had an iron constitution, a highly conditioned and flexible body, a cheerful and attractive face, and a capacity for delicate gestures. Out of this raw material, aided by her intelligence and apparently Spartan devotion to her job, she made herself into a memorable character type and an expressive instrument with more range than is immediately apparent.

Gish specialized in child-women with a strong maternal streak—a description that already suggests some of the oppositions she was able to contain. Despite the cloyingly sweet roles she was given, she was able to seduce the audience and redeem the movie, sometimes with such skill that her art was invisible. Thus Charles Affron, who recognizes her inventiveness in other contexts, finds her merely "adorable" in *True Heart Susie*, a film he describes as a "personal" and "original" Griffith work in which Gish is "never asked to be anything more than cutesy-pie." Her performance, he claims, is "simplistic" and "shackled by sweetness" (48–47). The trouble with this conclusion is that if the film works—and virtually everyone seems to agree that it does—it must do so largely because of Gish, who contributed to its most compelling imagery and who completes what one might call the "writing out" of the plot through action. In fact Gish is asked to do a great deal in the course of the film. Not only must she convey Susie's growth from innocence to experience, charting the turns of the narrative

she must also provide a lively charm that will countervail self-sacrificing goodness. As she herself once put it, "Virgins are the hardest roles to play. Those dear little girls—to make them interesting takes great vitality." At every moment, therefore, she suggests a duality in her character, making us feel cleverness beneath youth, strength beneath fragility, humor beneath spirituality, and sexual warmth beneath propriety. To do all this, she has to call upon a variety of skills and a number of possible "selves." In the following brief analysis, I try to point out some of them, illustrating the range of tasks she accomplishes in the course of what might seem one of her simplest performances.

Gish was influenced by the pantomime, or mimetic, form of acting she had learned in turn-of-the-century theater. But in Griffith's films, even at this relatively late period, players could swing back and forth between radically different kinds of behavior. At one extreme, especially in comic episodes, his characters used a rudimentary gestural "signing." Notice, for instance, the scene in *True Heart Susie* where Susie shares her bed with the ailing Bettina: first Gish purses her lips, squints, and doubles up her fist as if she were going to sock her rival in the jaw; then she virtually wipes away the angry expression and registers ostentatious pity, tenderly putting her arm around the sick woman. At another extreme, Griffith inherited some of the performing conventions of eighteenth-century sentimental drama. In close-ups, his actors could sometimes behave with remarkable naturalism, but they were also required to model for artfully posed moments of gestureless "restraint." The style was influenced by late Victorian portrait photography and painting, which meant that Gish had to serve not only as Griffith's Little Nell, but also as his Elizabeth Sidall and his Jane Burden. She seems to have been eager and skillful at turning herself into a pictorial representation, an object of desire; she selected her own clothes with fastidious care, she persuaded Griffith to hire Hendrick Sartov because of his ability to light her hair, and she was able to pose for virtually still, "painterly" imagery without appearing as rigid as a figure in a *tableau vivant*. *Susie* is full of these images, largely because the central character spends so much time "waiting" for her man. It is worth considering some of them to illustrate how even as a photographic model Gish appears in a variety of guises.

At one point, for example, she is Susie the rural maid, patting her cow on the neck and kissing it farewell; the dumb animal nuzzles her, its broad, hairy face in vivid contrast to her own, which is childlike, pigtailed, sad, and very pretty beneath a flat little hat. Later, preparing herself to be a "fitting mate" for her hero, she is posed like a young Lincoln, reading books by firelight, her hair gathered in a bun and a look of eager studiousness on her face. Still later, in a shot titled "Susie's Diary," we see her in her room at night, her hair down to its full Pre-Raphaelite length, as in an illustration for a pseudo-Arthurian romance. Wearing a loose dressing gown, she is seated on a stool at the right of the frame, her knees toward us and her upper body twisted slightly to the right as she leans forward on a desk to write—an unnatural position that creates a languid, graceful line and contributes to the sublimated eroticism of the image. An unmotivated keylight falls from the upper left, making her skin glow white, and backlighting halos her fine hair, which spills in ringlets down her cheeks; her lashes are lowered to the paper, her slender hand holds a pencil, and her features are relaxed and aristocratically serene. By contrast, toward the end of the film she is depicted as a "single-track heart" and is seated more naturally at the same desk, her hair gathered in a spinsterish bun and romantically backlit; two white, furry kittens are perched on her shoulders, making her look like an angelic *Venus im Peltz*.

In shots like these Gish is virtually a piece of statuary, but in the more dynamic portions of the film she employs a wide vocabulary of movement. The demands on her in this regard would have been great in any film, but Griffith's rehearsal methods gave the leading players an especially important function in the "writing" of his stories. He seldom used a script, preferring to start with a vague outline and develop the action by positioning the players on a bare stage. Sometimes he demonstrated all the parts himself, but by 1919 Gish had become so sensitive to his methods that she was allowed to create the details of her behavior and appearance. Much of her activity in *Susie* consists of variations and sudden departures from a simple graphic set of movements: she holds her head straight and high, squarely topped by a flat, narrow-brimmed hat, keeping her arms stiff at her sides, so that when she walks her upper body seems disassociated from her legs. In the first part of the film the posture and walk are comically stylized and exaggerated; in context with the rest of the action, they suggest various things about Susie: her naive innocence, her puritanism, her directness, her single-minded devotion to a man, her almost soldierly courage, her sense of duty, and her "unaffected" country truthfulness. Her movements make an amusing contrast to Bettina's swiveling hips and butterfly gestures, especially in the scene where the two women are brought together at the ice-cream social in the local church; and although Gish modulates her behavior slightly as the character grows older and gains dignity, she often duplicates the best work of the silent comedians. Her doggedness as she paces along behind her lover is much like Keaton's; her slump-shouldered movement away from Bettina's flirtations with William is pure Chaplin; and her innocent, level-headed gaze whenever she enters or exits a scene makes her resemble no one so much as Harry Langdon.

Susie's wide-eyed face and fairly rigid upper body become a character "tag" and a recurrent joke (at one point, delighted to discover that Bettina is showing interest in another man, she skips across the floor of her room and spins in a joyful circle without moving her arms and head), but they also establish a pattern that can be broken in interesting ways. Because her posture suggests the idealism, determination, and restraint bred into her by an aunt who tells her, "Deport yourself," her moments of letting go have a special force, like emotions breaking through repression. Sometimes they also reveal new aspects to the character, as if a mask had been dropped briefly.

One of the best examples of the latter effect occurs in Gish's pantomime during the comic sequence when Susie and William walk through a lovely, almost expressionist, bower of trees on their way home from school. Susie is in an adoring trance, walking about one step behind William but occasionally brushing his arm. Each time he moves, she follows. He pauses, turns, and paces toward the camera with her immediately behind him. Awkwardly pretending that his mind is on something other than the girl at his side, he turns again and walks toward the trees; she wheels and turns with him, patiently waiting for his attention but not demanding it. Griffith cuts to a closer view as they come to a stop before a tree, showing them from the waist up, looking at each other in a shared composition. Susie stares straight up at William from beneath her flat bonnet, her eyes no longer adoring nor quite so innocent; in fact, the look has a great deal of frankly knowing sexual desire behind it, so that it tempts William and flusters him at the same time. He bends slightly to her; suddenly she leans forward on tiptoe most of the way toward his face, closing her eyes in a comic gesture of passivity. At the crucial moment he hesitates, backs off, and turns his head toward the tree so that his back is to the camera. For just an instant Gish makes a gesture that almost breaks the representational surface of the fiction: she turns her own face away from William for the first time, showing it

to the camera but not quite looking into the lens. She registers frustration and sad disappointment, but she also seems to comment on William, taking the audience into Susie's confidence as if she were a roguish character in a farce. Almost immediately her expression turns back into the sad look of a little girl, but not before it has told us that her character is more clever and self-aware, more of an "actor" than we had thought.

Gish also changes the basic pattern of her behavior when she expresses hysteria or inconsolable grief. Her pantomime when she receives William's first letter from college is silly (she wrote that she had a "constant argument" with Griffith because he wanted her to play little girls as if they had "St. Vitus's dance" [99]), but her moments of pain are among the most effective in the film. At one point, wearing the flat hat and a frilly, beribboned dress that makes her look as old-fashioned as ever, she prepares for an "overwhelming assault" on William. Marching to his house, she arrives only to find him embracing Bettina, and she instantly shrinks back against a door to hide herself, holding a small black fan like a shield in front of her body. As she leaves the scene, she is hunched over and hobbling slightly, shaking with ironic laughter and tears. Later in the film, her spunky, straight-backed posture gives way completely. After the wedding of William and Bettina, she waves goodbye to the married couple, backs away into the garden behind her house, walks slowly and weak-kneed toward a fence, holds it briefly for support, and then suddenly collapses to the ground, her body curling into a fetal position. It is one of many occasions in Gish's career when she is subjected to overwhelming torment; yet here there are no bullies, no ice floes, no blasts of wind or ravages of disease—only the force of the character's emotions and a sudden release of stiff muscles.

Gish's most impressive moments, however, involve her face alone. I am referring not only to the relatively crowded middle-distance shots, which she usually dominates by her position in the frame and the animation of her features, but also to the several instances when she is given large, lengthy close-ups. Here, virtually unaided by *mise-en-scène* or expressive objects, she reduces theatrical pantomime to its most microscopic form, displaying a stream of emotions, conjoining her movements so gracefully and inventively that we hardly notice how various they are.

One of the most protracted examples of the technique is the scene in which Susie, hoeing in a garden, overhears William and Bettina conversing on the other side of a hedge. The scene serves both to illustrate how much emotion Gish could gather into a single close-up and to rebut oversimplified interpretations of the Kuleshov effect. In one sense, of course, Kuleshov was correct: the various muscular arrangements of a human face (which are "coded" differently in different cultures) have little force or meaning outside a specific narrative context. We are able to "read" the lengthy succession of emotions in this scene—tension, pain, worry, grief, numbness, anger, fear, suspicion, curiosity, confusion, shame, and so forth—partly because of Griffith's repeated crosscutting between Susie and the couple on the other side of the hedge. Once a general context has been established, however, we are able to make clear distinctions between the emotions by reference to Gish's face alone.

Later in the film—in what must be one of the more complex reaction shots in the history of movies—Gish employs the same close-up pantomime without benefit of crosscutting, using only her face and her left hand to speak to the audience. After Susie accidentally discovers that William and Bettina are engaged, she backs out of William's doorway and leans against a wall. Unseen by the couple in the next room, she tries to recover from the shock and assess her new situation. In close-up, Gish makes Susie waver between shock, grief, fear,

and a sense of ironic detachment that keeps her from falling into self pity. In fact, Gish elicits more emotion from the audience than she herself shows—although there are tears in her eyes at one point, she demonstrates how the close view of the camera enables the actor to use smaller and less extreme emotional gestures. At no time is she the wilting, suffering heroine who gives way to hysterics. She laughs ironically more often than she cries, creating a drama out of Susie's precarious balance between strength and pain.

[. . .] A few of the many faces she gives us during this crucial close-up [. . .] give the impression of expressive gymnastics, but in the shot itself they are linked together with such fluid transitions that Gish seems to be doing hardly anything. Turning her head away from the scene she has just witnessed, she faces the camera and looks abstractedly downward, her lids half lowered. She seems dazed or lost in thought, and her left hand rises to finger the dark choker around her neck. (This movement echoes a gesture from earlier in the film when William sits on her front porch and asks if she thinks he should get married. Trying to conceal her emotions, Susie smiles pleasantly and lifts her hand involuntarily, somewhat nervously, to stroke her neck and cheek.) There is just a hint of crazed numbness in her face, an effect that owes chiefly to the unfocused look in her eye, and to a tiny wisp of hair sticking wildly out from under her bonnet. Her fingers rise slowly from the choker, moving up her throat and cheek to pluck at her right earlobe. Her head tilts and she "thinks," a sad, faraway look in her eyes. Her half-closed lids blink, her head straightens almost imperceptibly, and the corners of her eyes turn down more; she blinks again, looks up a bit, and a wry little smile breaks over her mouth. For a moment Gish allows herself a half-suppressed laugh that seems to block her tears, her hand moving down from her ear to cradle her chin. She lowers her eyelids again and purses her lips slightly, continuing to smile. Turning her head, she glances toward the room where she has just seen William and Bettina; still holding her hand to her cheek, she smiles more openly, presumably amused by the foolishness of everyone concerned in the love triangle. (At this point she looks older than at any time in the film and evokes the same sort of saddened, tolerant, maternal amusement she uses in Laughton's *Night of the Hunter* thirty years later.) Her smile fading a bit, she turns her head back toward the camera, her eyes cast to her left, looking at nothing in particular. Her head then turns to the left, and she brings her hand from her cheek to her chin. Cradling the chin once more, she brushes her lips thoughtfully with her extended little finger. Her smile has faded almost completely, and her mouth parts while her finger moves gently, pensively, back and forth across her lower lip; maternal only a moment ago, she now looks sexual and childlike, her lips forming into a moue. Her eyes blink again and glass over, as if she were in a trance. Her little finger plucks more roughly at her lip, rubs it, and then plucks it again. She turns her head back toward the room and inserts the tip of her finger between her lips, nibbling it thoughtfully. Her other fingers, spread across her cheek, clutch slightly at her face, the nails digging into her flesh in a way that suggests a sudden painful surge of emotion. She holds this position for a moment and then relaxes, moving her hand away; a slack, heavy-lidded look passes over her, and her head bobs. She seems on the verge of fainting, but then rights herself, raising her head. Her mouth opens slightly and her eyes widen in fear, her brow furrowing. She tilts her head to the right, her hand touches the choker again, and she softly rubs her neck to dispel the fearful thought.

I have dwelled upon this shot because it shows various articulations of Gish's face and also because shots of its type occur in modified form in virtually all "women's melodrama"—a genre that *True Heart Susie* prefigures. The full close-up of a woman suffering for love is the very

centerpiece of such films, the image to which they all gravitate. But the actor is seldom called upon to register suffering alone. Usually, the film wants the woman to express some delicate, "restrained" mixture of pain, renunciation, and spiritual goodness—a smiling through tears that leads up to a kind of acquiescence in suffering. Barbara Stanwyck's *Stella Dallas* is a classic example, and it is interesting to compare Gish's long close-up to one of Stanwyck. In both cases, the actor's job involves *combining* conventional expressions (anger or indignation are the only emotions the genre seems to rule out), so that the shot has a slightly ambiguous effect.

Where Gish is concerned, the close-up is especially notable on technical grounds, giving her an opportunity for straightforward, bravura pantomime, showing the remarkable range of effects she could achieve within the limits of a formula and without the aid of props, editing, or expressive photography. Her carefully modulated changes of expression also reveal something about the structure of her performances in general. She was a superb instrument for Griffith's obsessive "visions" of maidenhood crushed like a flower, and she was also good at suggesting other qualities—maternal care, sexuality, intelligence, and a prim courage and resolve that embodied elements of the pioneer ideal. In some ways, she was a more sophisticated artist than the director she always referred to in public as "Mr. Griffith"; in both the comic and pathetic episodes of this film, she gives her character an ironic self-awareness, cutting against the grain of Griffith's pastoral allegory, as if she were constantly tending toward the more plausible version of Susie that can be seen in the second image at the beginning of this chapter. Whatever her personal motives, however, her success depended on the way she collaborated with and complicated Griffith's sentimental fictions; ultimately, her different faces and gestures were organized into the illusion of a "personality," and her mime took on the power of myth.

Notes

1 Gish recalled that one of Griffith's favorite mottos was "Expression without distortion," and Mack Sennett once claimed that when he tried acting for Griffith he was congratulated by the director for simply standing in front of the camera.

2 Wagenknecht's rapturous mystification of Gish is understandable, given her charm, and is no different from countless other essays about actors. Compare, for example, George Bernard Shaw's comments in the English *Saturday Review* of the 1880s, on the stage performances of Mrs. Patrick Campbell: "Who wants her to act? Who cares twopence whether she possesses that or any other second-rate accomplishment? On the highest plane one does not act, one is. Go and see her move, stand, speak, look, kneel—go and breathe the magic atmosphere that is created by the grace of all those deeds. . . ."

Interestingly, although Hollywood promulgated similar ideas, it sometimes tried to create counterillusions that would selectively dispel them. Hence, the typical fan magazine story that showed an actor like Edward G. Robinson at home among his paintings and children, a happy bourgeois rather than a Little Caesar. Dorothy Gish once joked about how her sister was confused with her screen persona: "The popular conception of Lillian as soft and dreamy makes me think of the gag used too often in the comic strips. A hat lies upon the sidewalk; some person kicks it enthusiastically and finds to his astonishment and pain that there is hidden inside it a brick" (*The Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me*, 96).

3 Griffith's racist imagination prompted him to turn Gish into an Aryan ideal, but he was not alone in such attitudes. Throughout the silent period, the faces of "spiritualized" characters were supposed to have small, delicate features. As late as the thirties, Humphrey Bogart was typed as a villain partly because executives at Warner Brothers thought his lips were too large to play a sympathetic leading man; ironically, as Louise Brooks has pointed out, Bogart's mouth was quite beautiful, and once he became a star, it turned into his most expressive feature: "Bogey practiced all kinds of lip gymnastics . . . Only Eric von Stroheim was his superior at liptwitching" (*Lulu in Hollywood*, 60).

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9

"A High-Class Job of Carpentry"

Toward a Typography of Early Sound Comedy

HENRY JENKINS

[. . .] While it is beyond the scope of my current project to propose a general framework for discussing film acting across different genres, I would like to isolate a series of five fairly basic criteria that, if not exhaustively, point toward some key issues surrounding performance in the early sound comedy. These five criteria reflect the five central relationships that constitute film performance—the performer's relationship to the narrative, to the character, to the signs of his or her own performance, to the other performers in the production, and to the audience. One might, of course, add the player's relationship to the script and to the director, but those relationships are less open to textual analysis and can be resolved only through historical investigation.

Narrative integration. Performance within some genres, such as the musical or the comedian comedy, may be foregrounded in certain more or less enclosed sequences of self-conscious spectacle rather than integrated into the overall development of the narrative.[1] Patricia Mellancamp characterizes the song-and-dance numbers within Hollywood musicals as "closed units within the larger narrative, set off by a system of brackets"; the audience's attention shifts at such moments from plot development onto the materiality and atemporality of performance.[2] The interaction of certain codes of visual and aural representation (musical accompaniment, centered framing, elevated staging, internal audiences) mark these sequences as privileged moments of heightened interest. Historians of the musical trace a general movement toward the causal and thematic integration of these performance spectacles. Many comedies, as we have seen, are also characterized by a fairly sharp division between sequences of performance virtuosity and sequences of narrative development and exposition. This heightened attention to performance is partially a product of certain visual codes (frontality, flattening of narrative space, long takes and camera movements, absence of point of view cutting). Much as in the musical, these sequences may be presented as diegetic performances (as in the mangled magic act William Gaxton, Ole Olsen, and Chic Johnson perform in *50 Million Frenchmen*, Warner Brothers, 1931); they may also stand apart from narrative actions because of their qualities of excess, stylization, and exaggeration (as in Mitchell and Durant's acrobatic display in *Stand Up and Cheer* or the Marx Brothers' mirror act in *Duck Soup*). These scenes exceed their narrative motivation through their flamboyance, their refusal of narrative economy, and their prolonged duration. Some such sequences exist

in almost all film comedies, though many comedies actively foreground performance as performance while others subordinate performance almost entirely to the demands of narrative and character development.

Character integration. As Richard Dyer has argued, there is almost always a problematic fit between the film character and the star's image.[3] The star's image is an extratextual construct developed through the audience's familiarity with the performer via other film appearances, promotional materials, publicity discourse, and reviews and commentary. As such, the polysemic and fully articulated star image often overpowers the character played in any given film. Some film movements, such as Soviet montage or Italian Neorealism, cast nonactors who bear no such semiotic traces to maximize the fit between performer and role. Classical cinema minimizes the gap between star image and character, typically by casting stars into roles closely corresponding to their preexisting images. Humphrey Bogart may become Rick Blaine in *Casablanca* (Warner Brothers, 1942), largely because the character is a composite of traits already associated with the Bogart persona; much of the film's dialogue further develops the character as a unique individual. Rick fought in the Spanish Civil War, once lived in Paris, was unlucky in love, owns the Café American, never drinks with his customers, etc. Steve Seidman argues, however, that comedian comedy heightens audience awareness of the central clown's extratextual status at the expense of integration into a specific character.[4] Dialogue functions less to reveal information about characters than to present gags; characters are reduced to stock roles and can be completely overpowered by the performer's own personality. In some cases, as when Groucho Marx is cast as the president of Freedonia in *Duck Soup*, the performer is asked to accept a story role so at odds with our preexisting perceptions of the star that it produces an active gap between performer and role. Groucho makes little effort to act presidential, remaining Groucho while being placed into situations where he might reasonably be expected to conform to the demands of his office—if not to the particularities of his character. This focus on the performer's personality was a central component of the vaudeville aesthetic and contrasts sharply with expectations about performance within the realist theater and the classical cinema.

Expressive coherence. Closely related to the second category, expressive coherence refers to the degree of consistency that exists within an individual performance; expressive coherence occurs when all the performance signs are coordinated into the development of a rounded character. James Naremore argues that realist performance maintains a high degree of "expressive coherence" even in sequences where characters are themselves expected to give diegetic "performances" (e.g., Humphrey Bogart's visit to the bookshop in *The Big Sleep* (Warner Brothers, 1946).[5] Comedy, on the other hand, is marked by "expressive anarchy," as largely unmotivated performance signs (physical gestures, vocal mannerism, etc.) disrupt coherent characterization. Such signs frequently become a source of interest and amusement in their own right (as when Hugh Herbert, playing a Chinese henchman in *Diplomaniacs*, suddenly slips into a Yiddish accent and inflection).

Ensemble consistency. This term refers to the homogeneity of performance styles among all the actors within a film's cast. Realist theater typically strives for an ensemble effect in which there is a high degree of stylistic consistency across the various performances, while many early sound comedies combine different acting styles (realist, melodramatic, vaudeville) within a single text. Wheeler and Woolsey, for example, adopt a much broader, more

exaggerated style of performance, in contrast to the young couples in their romance plots who are more naturalistic; these contrasting acting styles emphasized the clown's eccentricity and the performer's virtuosity. This heterogeneity may occur between different syntagmatic units (as in *Stand Up and Cheer*, where the administrator reviews a succession of different would-be variety acts) or between paradigmatic clusters of characters (as in the example of the Wheeler and Woolsey comedies discussed above).

Audience consciousness. This category refers to the relationship between performer and the spectator. Theater historians frequently draw a distinction between representational and presentational styles of performance. Representational styles create an invisible "fourth wall" separating actor and audience; the actor displays no awareness of the spectators (or in film acting, of the camera). Presentational styles are directed at the spectators and are shaped by the audience's affective response. [V]audeville encouraged the maintenance of the presentational style long after it was out of fashion in the legitimate theater; variety entertainment rewarded the performer's direct engagement with spectators. While the extreme transgressions of the separation between spectator and performance space found in vaudeville (Olsen and Johnson's bombardment of the audience, the magician's call for volunteers to come onstage) were clearly impossible within the cinema, traces of that tradition may be found in the frontality of staging, direct address to the camera, muttered asides, and other reflexive gags. Certain gestures mark the comic star's awareness of the potential presence of film spectators. Robert Wolsey punctuates gags with looks into the camera, puffs on his cigar, and raises his eyebrows, sometimes accompanied with a prolonged "Whoa!" Groucho Marx suggests that the spectators might wish to go into lobby for popcorn until a particularly dull scene is completed. Ed Wynn giggles at his own gags and mutters, "Isn't that the silliest thing?" Jimmy Durante mutters, "Ev'rybody wants to get into de act." These performance signs reflect a higher degree of audience consciousness than would be generally characteristic of the classical cinema.

Each of these categories should be interpreted as a continuum of possible choices, not a set of binary oppositions. To take character integration as an example, most film performances maintain some degree of distance between the star's image and the film's character, though certain types of films (comedy, musical) focus audience attention on that gap while others (social problem films, melodramas) efface it as much as possible. The other categories offer a similar range of possibilities. John Mueller has revised traditional distinctions between integrated and nonintegrated musicals by suggesting other different relationships that might exist between a musical number and its larger narrative context.[6]

By focusing on these five categories, one may make fairly precise distinctions between the acting styles preferred by different genres and subgenres. It is possible to identify a set of five different classes of comedian-centered comedies in the early sound period based upon their utilization of distinctive performance strategies. Remember, however, that this particular taxonomy is constructed through critical analysis and does not necessarily reflect the explicit distinctions employed by the filmmakers or contemporary viewers, who typically categorized films from any of the five classes as "comedies" or "musical comedies."[7] Filmmakers, as was shown in the case study of *Hollywood Party*, did make implicit assumptions about the strategies of performance appropriate to different comic texts, and those distinctions are consistent with the classifications proposed here.

"The Melting Pot of Music": The Revue

Revue films, like *Hollywood Revue of* 1929, *Paramount on Parade*, *King of Jazz* (Universal, 1930), and *The Show of Shows*, stand at one extreme in their exclusive concentration on performance at the expense of any attempt at narrative or character development. These films preserved many conventions of the theatrical revue or the vaudeville show. Each presents a succession of totally independent performance units, acts, numbers, or sketches, marked off by such rhetorical practices as the opening and closing of curtains, the use of title cards, the dimming of lights, the crescendo of orchestral music, or the reappearance of a master of ceremony. Only minimal narration creates unity. *King of Jazz*, for example, opens with the image of a giant book announcer Charles Erwin explains is the scrapbook of Paul Whiteman and his orchestra: "Its pages are crowded with melodies and anecdotes, which we are going to bring to life for you by the magic of the camera." The initial segment—an animated cartoon by Walter Lantz—does indeed explain in a humorous fashion how Whiteman became known as the "King of Jazz." Subsequent sequences, however, are linked by the recurring image of the book or by introductions from Whiteman or Erwin. These segments, however, frequently have little or nothing to do with Whiteman and his band. They are selected not to reflect his "melodies and anecdotes" but rather to constitute a varied program. *Paramount on Parade* and *Show of Shows* make far less pretense at thematic coherence, depending upon the periodic appearances of masters of ceremony to introduce the individual "acts" and to create minimal unity between the segments. As Skeets Gallagher, Jack Oakie, and Leon Errol explain at the beginning of *Paramount on Parade*, "Anytime you grow confused or find yourself perplexed, one of us will stagger out and tell you what is next. . . . We're the masters of ceremony—keeping you people in touch with *Paramount on Parade*."

Performers make few efforts to blend into characters here. Their introductions identify them by name and focus attention on their particular skills and talents. These introductions may range from a simple announcement that "Chevalier's next" (*Paramount on Parade*) to elaborate sequences, such as Frank Fay's prolonged build-up for many of the performers in *Show of Shows*. The most lengthy introductions, in fact, are given to dramatic performers, like John Barrymore in *Show of Shows* or Ruth Chatterton in *Paramount on Parade*, who normally sought to blend more fully into their characters. Here, however, it is the performers' status as performers that is stressed, focusing attention not on the characters they are playing but rather on the skills with which they execute those roles. In *Paramount on Parade*, Skeets Gallagher appears outside Chatterton's dressing room, enters and berates her for being late to the show and keeping the other actors waiting; this scene plays with the disjunction between her slangy talk in the dressing room and the more pretentious language Chatterton employs onstage. She promises to appear in "less than five minutes," so Gallagher steps outside and introduces the sketch, which then builds toward Chatterton's entrance. Barrymore appears before the curtain in *Show of Shows* to explain the context for his soliloquy from Shakespeare's *Richard* III, before disappearing and reappearing again in character as the demented hunchback. This brief introduction also serves to highlight the gap between Barrymore's normal appearance and delivery and his assumption of a Shakespearean role.

Moreover, the revue films actively play with the celebrity status of some of their featured performers, highlighting their extratextual status. Maurice Chevalier's performance of "All I Want Is Just One Girl" in *Paramount on Parade* is immediately followed by an appearance by Mitzi Green who not only impersonates Chevalier's rendition but also shows how the same

song might be performed by Moran and Mack. Green's act places attention both on Chevalier's status as a celebrity performer and on Green's impersonation skills—especially given the disjunction between her frilly dress and the male stars she mimics. *King of Jazz* plays extensively with the image of rotund bandleader Paul Whiteman. Not only does Whiteman serve as master of ceremonies but he is also impersonated by a double who does elaborate dances; he is caricatured on the book's cover, on the heads of drums, even on the face of the moon; he is transformed into a cartoon character within the Walter Lantz animated sequence. *Show of Shows* directs attention to the fact that Al Jolson was one of the few Warners stars not to appear and has Sid Silvers impersonate him while Frank Fay jokes about Jolson's characteristic gestures and vocal mannerisms.

Expressive coherence is generally maintained within individual acts, though the same performers may play multiple roles in the same film and adopt different acting styles for different appearances. The revue films, like vaudeville itself, exhibited a diversity of entertainment: everything from Shakespearean drama and poetic recitations to eccentric dancing and acrobatics, from classical music to cartoons and dog acts; these works displayed little interest in stylistic consistency between the various segments. Ensemble effects were, for the most part, reserved for the closing numbers—"Sweeping the Clouds Away" in *Paramount on Parade*, "Lady Luck" in *Show of Shows*, "The Melting Pot of Music" in *King of Jazz*, etc.—which brought the entire cast together in one musical extravaganza. Even here, the numbers were staged so that each performer was allowed one final moment in the spotlight to reprise or introduce a specialty, before blending back into the larger chorus. Such sequences involved a constant play between the ensemble and the individual, between moments of novelty and a general movement toward homogeneity.

The revue films maintain a degree of audience consciousness unprecedented in the classical Hollywood cinema. As a result, they are often dismissed as overly "theatrical." A few sequences—Ruth Chatterton's "My Marine" and Helen Kane's "Boop-Boop-A-Doo School" in *Paramount on Parade*, for example—follow later Hollywood practice of constructing an internal audience to justify the more presentational aspects of performance numbers. More often, the presenters directly address the camera and through it, make concrete references to the "ladies and gentlemen" in the movie audience. Jack Oakie, who appears as a murder victim in a mystery movie parody in *Paramount on Parade*, suddenly breaks character, bursts out laughing, and points directly into the camera; Oakie claims that the sketch was "written especially for me" rather than for its alleged stars—Warner Oland, Clive Brook, William Powell, and Eugene Pallette—each of whom had previously claimed top billing. Skeets Gallagher enters one scene and thanks the audience for an anticipated ovation, holding his ear so that he may hear the applause better; there is the sound of one pair of clapping hands on the soundtrack. An off-screen voice, presumably from the cinema audience, harasses and insults his performance, before he walks off screen, glaring at the camera. Frank Fay adopts a similarly reflexive stance throughout *Show of Shows*. During his introduction of Irene Borodoni, for example, Fay explains that if the audience does not understand the French lyrics of the chanteuse's numbers, they may speak to him after the show and he will be glad to translate. Paradoxically, such devices increase the sense of spontaneity and immediacy, allowing screen performances to substitute more fully for live stage appearances, but they also direct attention upon the temporal and special gap between the performance and its reception.

Stop the music! the showcase film

The showcase film embeds the nonintegrated units of the revue film within a frame story. Comedies, like *International House* (Paramount, 1933), *The Big Broadcast* (Paramount, 1932), and *Stand Up and Cheer*, were initially viewed as an improvement upon the earlier revues because their interest was not entirely conditional upon the entertainment value of the individual segments. Yet, as the case study of *Hollywood Party* suggested, the attempt to merge spectacle with narrative, performance with characterization, presents problems not faced by the more openly presentational revue films. First and foremost, there was the problem of how to build narrative motivation for these performance sequences. For the most part, these films solved this difficulty by adopting settings in or around the world of show business; such a context not only provides a narrative rationale for the performances but also presents opportunities for diegetic audiences with whom the performers can interact. In *Stand Up and Cheer*, the central character's job (Secretary of the Department of Amusements) requires him to audition and recruit variety entertainers. *International House* concerns the initial public demonstration of a new form of television, with the revue segments displaying the technological wonders of this novel invention. *The Big Broadcast* films are set in or around radio studios and include "broadcasts" from popular performers. *Thrill of a Lifetime* (Paramount, 1933) concerns the production of a revue at a summer resort and opens in the office of a vaudeville agent—both settings where performances may naturally occur. In *Here Comes Cookie* (Paramount, 1935), a series of miscalculated business transactions leaves Gracie Allen in charge of her father's estate; the ever daffy Gracie mistakes her father's desire that he appear penniless for instructions to spend all his money. As a result, she turns his mansion into a free boarding house for vaudeville troupers. The screen space overflows with performance, embodying the vaudevillians' disruptive presence in the characters' lives. In one shot, the camera pans across Gracie's living room, showing, in quick succession, jugglers, acrobats, trained dogs, magicians, unicycle riders, knife throwers, a jazz band, and a lasso artist, all practicing their acts simultaneously in a cramped domestic space.

In each film, a certain number of performance numbers are introduced as part of the general atmosphere of the film's show world setting and are treated as pure spectacle, while others assume a higher degree of narrative significance. In *The Big Broadcast*, the survival of Station WADX depends upon a radio appearance by Bing Crosby, although the star is so embroiled in his romantic difficulties that it seems unlikely he will reach the studio in time to make the broadcast. Station manager Stuart Erwin frantically searches all over town for a phonograph recording of Bing Crosby to air instead. Meanwhile, back at the station, a series of performers (Kate Smith, Cab Calloway, the Boswell Sisters, the Mills Brothers, and Vincent Lopez and his Orchestra, among others) delay for time. The film cuts back and forth between the narratively centered actions of Erwin and performance numbers at the studio. Bing's performance is thus doubly marked as the film's entertainment highpoint and the resolution of its plot action.

The showcase film is characterized as well by a high degree of stylistic diversification; heterogeneity is introduced not simply between different forms of entertainment within the performance segments but between the presentational style of the explicit performance units and the more representational style of the narrative segments. *International House*, in fact, involves at least four different levels of performance:

1. Performers who appear only on the radioscope or in the hotel's stage show and who appear under their own names (Rudy Vallee, Cab Calloway, Baby Rose Marie, Sterling Holloway);
2. Performers who appear under their own names but assume some narrative role (Peggy Hopkins Joyce, George Burns and Gracie Allen);
3. Performers who appear as totally fictionalized characters but are only minimally integrated into those characters (W. C. Fields as Professor Quail);
4. Performers who blend into their characters and maintain the primary narrative responsibilities within the film (Stuart Erwin as Tommy Nash, Bela Lugosi as General Petronovich, Lumsden Hare as Sir Mortimer Fortescue).

The interplay between these four levels of performance is quite complex. Each level involves its own conventions regarding character integration, audience consciousness, and expressive coherence. Sequences of pure performance are explicitly marked through the presence of a diegetic audience, the constant reinscription of the frame of the radioscope during presentations of broadcast material, and the acceptance of a fairly high degree of audience consciousness including direct address. Narratively active characters (i.e., those in categories 2–4) do not appear within the radioscope; rather, their narrative tasks involve an effort to bring the radioscope more fully under their control. Dramatic actors, like Lugosi or Hare, are frequently cast as straight men or foils for the more comically exaggerated performers. Comic stars like Burns and Allen or Fields may break the flow of the narrative to engage in more ambiguously marked performance sequences within the story space proper: Gracie Allen interrupts a narratively significant conversation to perform a magic trick that she completely muddles, thus pulling the more serious performers into her comedy; George Burns and Franklin Pangborn take turns feeding straight lines to Gracie, their movements choreographed into a near dance. Such sequences fit comfortably neither in the world of explicit performance (i.e., the radioscope broadcasts) nor in the world of the narrative (the struggle for the rights to the invention) but rather work to blur the sharp boundaries between the two.

The greatest ambiguity surrounds W. C. Fields's status. Fields, as an international explorer and inventor, is first shown in a mock documentary presented on the radioscope, a scene that strongly evokes his extrafilmic image as a heavy drinker: the ground crew loads barrels of beer and trays of mugs into an airplane, a white-gloved hand reaches down to lift a mug of beer from the tray, and the camera follows it up to show Fields sitting in the cockpit, downing the drink. If the first few images are clearly established as radioscope broadcasts, the frame of its screen soon disappears and their diegetic status becomes more ambiguous. Later, Fields appears in a photograph in a newspaper Gracie reads, again as a representation rather than a narrative participant. Finally, the misdirected explorer appears in person at the International House ("Say, this isn't Kansas City?"), though he retains a privileged relationship to the broadcast images. When Fields enters the room during one of Dr. Wong's demonstrations, the broadcast image of Rudy Vallee yells at him to stop interrupting his number; Fields shoves his cane into the machinery and blows it out, changing channels to a view of a navy ship, which Fields sinks by firing a pistol into the screen. Fields's actions not only disrupt broadcast performances and narrative developments but also destabilize the space between the two.

This fairly radical (though sometimes unstable) separation of actors according to plot-centered and performance-centered functions distinguishes the showcase film from the backstage musicals of the same vintage.[8] Typically, the plot of a backstage musical, such as *42nd Street* (Warner Brothers, 1933) or *Footlight Parade* (Warner Brothers, 1933), centers upon the process of putting on a show. The performers in the onstage sequences become characters within the frame narrative; their resulting performances are rich in narrative significance. It is not Ruby Keeler the star who steps onto the stage in the climactic moments of *42nd Street* but rather her character, the young dancer who has waited all her life for her chance at stardom. Her musical number primarily marks the young woman's triumph, rather than showcasing Ruby Keeler's virtuosity, though these two cannot be easily separated. For the most part, performances in backstage musicals display a high degree of character integration and a low degree of audience consciousness when compared to the performances in showcase films. A notable exception may be cameo appearances by famous stage stars, such as the appearance of Eddie Cantor in *Glorifying the American Girl* (Paramount, 1929), that often motivate numbers existing primarily to display these performer's talents; the onstage appearance by fictional characters decreases attention to the performer's extratextual status and more fully integrates performance into narrative.

Acting in society: the comic romance

The distinction between plot-centered and performance-centered actors breaks down further within the comic romance. While the frame story in the showcase film is merely a device for structuring the performance sequences, plot becomes the primary appeal of the comic romance. Here, comic performance is subordinated to narrative demands and appears only sporadically. *Dixiana* (RKO, 1930), for example, is first and foremost a romance concerning two young lovers (Bebe Daniels, Everett Marshall) who must overcome parental opposition and the threat of a powerful rival (Ralf Harolde). Unlike traditional romantic comedy, such romances are treated melodramatically rather than comically, with particular emphasis placed upon the pain of the lovers' separation. Dialect comic Frances Cawthorne and the bulky Jobyana Howland appear as the boy's squabbling parents, who alternate between comic scenes involving the wife's hopeless efforts to cultivate her immigrant husband and more dramatic sequences involving the couples' reservations about their son's unsuitable choice of a bride. Their performance style shifts abruptly between the exaggeration of the comic scenes and the more naturalistic tone of the dramatic scenes. As dramatic performers, Cawthorne and Howland block Dixiana's upward mobility; as comic performers, they pose questions about rigid class barriers. After all, if these two can achieve acceptance in genteel society, the more ladylike Dixiana seems assured of eventual success in her attempts to leave burlesque and join the southern gentry.

Bert Wheeler and Robert Woolsey offer a comic contrast to the romantic couple. Their own buffoonish dispute over Dorothy Lee parallels and parodies the rivalry over Dixiana. This function is particularly apparent during a broadly played duel between the two comic leads that foreshadows the film's climactic and far more serious duel between the two dramatic leads. Like Cawthorne and Howland, however, the two comics also adopt a more restrained and naturalistic acting style during scenes that have greater narrative consequences, as when they must comfort Bebe Daniels following her forceful expulsion from her lover's house. These

shifts pose a threat to the expressive coherence of individual performances not present within the revue or showcase films, where individual performers retained a more fixed status. The more performance-oriented sequences must be more restrained, displaying little audience consciousness and a higher degree of character integration if the comic performers are going to be successful in making the transition to more dramatic sequences.

Most of the comic romances share a thematic concern with the problems of social assimilation, with how to "act" in proper society; such a focus helps to naturalize these disjunctions in performance style. In *Dixiana*, *Her Majesty Love* (First National, 1931), *Rain or Shine* (Columbia, 1930), *Everything's Rosie*, *Love in Bloom* (Paramount, 1935), and *Poppy* (Paramount, 1936), leading ladies escape from their show world past into high society. Their successful transition is prefigured by their conformity to a more naturalistic style of performance. The comic stars are often cast as the girl's relatives or friends. The comic stars' inability to make a similar transition into naturalistic acting, their tendency to revert back to broader styles of performance, offers not only a source of amusement for the audience but also a tangible threat to the leading lady's own assimilation. Their buffoonery often results in her expulsion from society when their "bad manners" directs attention on her disreputable background. In *Love in Bloom*, Vi (Dixie Lee) has run away from her drunken father and his rundown traveling carnival, finding a place for herself as a song plugger at a big city music shop and winning the love of a young songwriter (Joe Morrison). The father, suffering business difficulties, dispatches her brother (George Burns) and his wife (Gracie Allen) to go to the big city and bring her back with them. The film cuts between Burns and Allen's comic misadventures along the road and the progression of Lee's preparations for her wedding; the two comedians' antics provide comic relief from the more realistic romance plot as well as a vivid manifestation of the world that Lee hopes to escape. By the time they arrive in the city, just in time to make a shambles of the wedding, their disruptiveness can be reread as tragic rather than comic.

The apparent incompatibility of these two very different ways of "acting" is dramatically evoked in many of these films through the device of a disastrous social affair, such as the interrupted wedding in *Love in Bloom*. This sequence often involves an engagement dinner given in honor of the leading lady and attended by characters from both worlds. Initially, the playfulness and spontaneity of the comic stars is accepted by the other guests as a refreshing novelty. Soon, their enthusiastic reception pushes the clowns toward broader and broader performances. Joe Cook in *Rain or Shine* showers the dinner guests with spaghetti, while W. C. Fields in *Her Majesty Love* tosses pastry across the table, alarming other diners. Bert Wheeler in *Dixiana* does a ballancing and juggling act with fancy china and crystal, smashing it against the floor, while Robert Woolsey in *Everything's Rosie* engages the guests in the old shell game and takes all their money. The leading lady's embarrassment at the clown's performances, usually followed by the revelation of her disgraceful ties to show business, gives these sequences a melodramatic edge. Their consequences for the romantic couple colors our perception of what otherwise might be read as pure comic spectacle. Performance has intruded too abruptly into the narrative space, and, as a consequence, not only the comic stars but also the upwardly aspiring female lead must be expelled; expressive performance must be suppressed in favor of rigid conformity to plot demands. The irreconcilability of these two spheres allows only two possible resolutions: either the leading lady must reject the stuffiness of high society and return to show business or she must break totally with the realm of exotic performance and enter completely into the space of narrative accountability.

Comic romance serves as an interesting intermediary category between the comedian comedy and the screwball comedy traditions. While the plots of films like *Poppy* and *Her Majesty Love* follow the same story conventions as screwball comedies like *You Can't Take It with You* (Columbia, 1938) or *Bringing Up Baby* (RKO, 1938), their performance style is fundamentally different. The screwball comedy owes relatively little to the vaudeville aesthetic, representing the translation of theatrical farce into classical Hollywood narratives. While the comic romance still contains some nonintegrated performance sequences, specifically those centered around the star clowns, screwball comedy always endows impersonations or performances with narrative consequences. Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert impersonate a bickering married couple in *It Happened One Night* (Columbia, 1934); this scene, however, contributes to the plot development in a way that Wheeler and Woolsey's performances in *Dixiana* generally do not. The characters' ability to act as a married couple prefigures their own union at the film's conclusion. Stage-trained performers like Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant melded directly into their characters, with casting designed to maximize the match between performer and assigned role. Screwball comedy, moreover, maintains a high degree of stylistic consistency between the film's performers, while comic romance is characterized primarily by the thematization of multiple styles, the radical separation between comic and dramatic performers. For the most part, the screwball comedy tries for a style of performance that is less naturalistic than the dramatic segments of the comic romance and less exaggerated than the comic sequences.

"Like a playful child": the anarchistic comedy

If the revue and showcase films display the performance skills of various entertainers, the anarchistic comedy is constructed as a vehicle for a particular comic personality; it consistently creates opportunities for a comic star or team to demonstrate the full range of their abilities. Comic director Norman McLeod has characterized the development of such a film project as "a high class job of carpentry"; the stars' repertoires of existing stage business provided raw materials that could be assembled into a flimsy narrative structure.[9] This reuse of already familiar material ensured that the comic performer remained imperfectly integrated into any particular character role. Certain sequences (Eddie Cantor's blackface numbers, Harpo's harp solos, Bert Wheeler's female impersonation, W. C. Fields's golf or pool tricks) stand apart from the rest of the film, marked as star turns inserted into the narrative with only the most transparent attempt at motivation. These moments invite comparison with previous films and thus direct attention away from their context within this particular story. In *Ali Baba Goes to Town* (Fox, 1937), Eddie Cantor resorts to blackface, jive, and jazz when his efforts to communicate with a group of Nubian slaves prove unsuccessful, while he poses as an "Ethiopian Beauty Specialist" in *Roman Scandals* (United Artists, 1933). The resulting numbers are totally anachronistic and have next to nothing to do with the plot; they do, however, showcase Cantor's trademark singing style and incorporate jazz performers and tap dancers. Audience members often expressed dissatisfaction if these specialties did not appear in a particular vehicle, expecting their repetition regardless of narrative context.[10]

Individual scenes are conceived as set pieces, opportunities for performance, with their narrative significance often added as an afterthought. Story information is compressed into tight units of intrusive exposition at the beginnings and ends of scenes; the bulk of each

sequence is spent on largely unmotivated and unintegrated comic performance. Unlike the previous categories, however, anarchistic comedies do not create a fixed separation between narrative space and performance space. The comic performers act within the diegesis, entering narrative spaces so they may be transformed into an impromptu stage for their clowning. Frank Krutnik writes of these films:

> It is as if the comedian—the disruptive element in the smooth functioning of the genre—has been dropped into the fictional world by accident, and, like a playful child, proceeds to toy with its rules. The comedian refuses to act "straight"—unlike the other characters in the film—or is incapable of doing so. . . . Thus two sets of expectations come into conflict: the comedian "interferes" with the ostensible fiction, the fiction "constrains" the comedian. It is the play between the two which is responsible for much of the comedy.[11]

The Marx Brothers in *Monkey Business* are almost literally "dropped into the fictional world by accident," having stowed away on a luxury liner inside barrels of kippered herrings. By this somewhat unorthodox means, the brothers enter a world with which they would ordinarily have little contact. The captain and his men try to capture the stowaways, resulting in a series of chase scenes in which the various clowns burst into new rooms and disrupt the other passengers' ongoing activities. Running across the ship's ballroom, the brothers pause long enough to play a short musical piece and bow to their astonished audience, before darting away again. Harpo stumbles onto a children's puppet show and assumes a puppetlike persona, integrating himself into the entertainment; he draws first the ship's steward and then the captain himself into the Punch and Judy act. Harpo and Chico seize control of the barbershop, shaving away a customer's mustache in their attempts to "even it up a little," while Groucho takes command of the captain's quarters and devours his lunch. Trying to sneak past customs, each of the brothers impersonates Maurice Chevalier with varying degrees of success. Every nook and cranny on the ship poses new possibilities for comic appropriation; divorced of its usual functions, the ship becomes an ideal space for the Marx Brothers' performances and each plot action provides new opportunities for the display of their virtuosity.[12]

Moreover, the comic stars exist almost entirely outside of the restraints of stable characterization. Characters have names and social positions, serve particular narrative roles, yet they offer little competition for the stars' engaging personalities. In extreme cases, as when Wheeler and Woolsey, cigar, glasses, and all, are inserted into historical settings in *Cockeyed Cavaliers* (RKO, 1934) and *Silly Billies* (RKO, 1936), the films play upon a tension between their extratextual personae and their narrative roles. The comic stars are literally reduced to icons in the films' opening credits, where caricatures of the central performers rely upon certain familiar facial and costume details (Groucho's cigar and painted mustache; Harpo's fright wig and horn; W. C. Fields's red nose, top hat, white gloves, and cane; Robert Woolsey's glasses; Eddie Cantor's owlish eyes; Joe E. Brown's big mouth) to evoke audience's extratextual knowledge of their familiar personae. While additional character information particularizes that persona to the needs of a specific narrative, this information is minimal and may be disregarded later, if the characterization interferes with the filmmakers' desire to introduce a particularly entertaining sequence. Little in the common man characters Eddie Cantor plays in his films justifies his ability to suddenly burst into song and dance or don

blackface. At such moments, established characterization simply dissolves to allow Cantor the performer to emerge. One might contrast that fluidity between characterization and performance to the complex narrative motivations surrounding Marlene Dietrich's stage appearances in films like *Morocco* (Paramount, 1930) or *Blonde Venus* (Paramount, 1932).

Anarchistic comedies places a relatively low value on expressive coherence, openly creating disjunctures between character and performer or allowing for fairly abrupt shifts in performance style. In the course of a single scene in *Monkey Business*, Groucho Marx adopts the style and rhetoric of a patriotic stump speaker, a dance instructor, a gangster, a quiz show host, a little boy, and a flirtatious woman, all while remaining one step ahead of a mobster and his seductive moll. This "expressive anarchy" creates space as well for the performer to break character and confront the audience directly, as Groucho does in almost all of his films, though the performers generally display far less consciousness of the audience than do the stars of revue or showcase films.

"Taking one's place in the social order": the affirmative comedy

Steve Seidman and Frank Krutnik have advanced a model of the comedian comedy that sees the clown's antics as signs of "identity confusion" and "behavioral disfunction," an inability to integrate into adult society.[13] The comedian comedy, they argue, depicts the comic protagonist's efforts to work through these personality difficulties and gain social acceptance.[14] The normalization of the character's conduct is mirrored by a normalization of performance; the performers are more fully assimilated into their narrative roles as the characters fit more perfectly within their social roles. Such a model of the comedian comedy implies not a contestation between performance and narrative but rather a final subordination of performance to plot demands. The comedian's virtuosity must yield to the demands of a character role; "expressive anarchy" must be transformed into "expressive coherence." Such a model seems inadequate to classes of comic films that either maintain a radical separation of performance-centered stars and plot-centered actors (as in the showcase film or to a lesser degree, the comic romance) or make the demands of character and story subservient to spectacle and showmanship (as in the anarchistic comedy). There is, however, another group of early sound comedies more closely conforming to the Seidman-Krutnik model. Perhaps best represented by the films of Joe E. Brown, the affirmative comedy contrasts sharply with the anarchistic comedy both in its thematic of social integration and in its emphasis upon plot and character over spectacle and performance.

Joe E. Brown's comedies depend less upon extended sequences of comic performance than upon small bits of character business. Even in films like *Circus Clown* (Warner Brothers, 1934) or *Six Day Bike Rider* (Warner Brothers, 1934), where Brown must perform onstage, these performances are heavily determined by their story situations and have direct consequences on future plot actions. In *Circus Clown*, Brown plays Happy Howard, the son of a famous circus performer. Happy, like his father, aspires toward stardom under the big top. Periodically, the film shows Happy rehearsing on a trampoline, allowing Brown to display his acrobatic abilities. These moments of performance are so closely bound with the protagonist's personal goals that they read as reflecting the developing abilities of Happy Howard the character, not the already well-developed talents of Brown the former circus performer. Similarly,

Happy's appearances in the circus ring later in the film enact the character's efforts to gain professional recognition and romantic acceptance; such actions are so rich in narrative interest that the audience is inclined to forget the virtuosity of the clown who performs them (even in remarkable scenes where Brown plays both Happy and his father). The opening of *Six Day Bike Rider* establishes the rivalry between Harry St. Clair, a vaudeville performer, and Wilifred (Joe E. Brown), the baggage clerk at the local railroad station. When Harry performs stunts on his bicycle during the variety show, Wilifred insults him from the audience and is challenged to come onto the stage to show whether he can do any better. Blindfolded, Wilifred performs such stunts, much to the embarrassment of his girl friend, and ends up riding his bike into the orchestra pit. Again, this performance is thoroughly integrated into the story action, serving to alienate Wilifred from his fiancée and to intensify his hostility toward the film's antagonist. This performance thus motivates his subsequent decision to enter the six-day bike race and to challenge St. Clair for the hand of the woman they both love.

Unlike other performers who played essentially similar characters in all of their films, Brown adopted various personae: fast-talking young playboys (*Broad-Minded*, First National, 1931), bespectacled buffoons (*Six Day Bike Rider*, *You Said a Mouthful*, *Local Boy Makes Good*, First National, 1931), gangling athletes (*Alibi Ike*, Warner Brothers, 1935; *Elmer the Great*, First National, 1935; *Sit Tight*, Warner Brothers, 1931), and ill-fated braggarts (*Son of a Sailor*, Warner Brothers, 1933; *Earthworm Tractors*, Warner Brothers, 1936). Brown adjusts his limited vocabulary of grimaces, gawks, and guffaws to the particular needs of each role. Brown more fully submerged his own personality to the demands of characterization than any other early sound comedian. As a result, Brown, like the classical silent clowns, can move from comedy to pathos, where such a shift would be impossible for a performer like Groucho Marx. Frequently, the films ask us to share Brown's pain at his inability to gain social acceptance and his temporarily frustrated ambitions, as in a sequence in *Circus Clown* when Brown is unjustly fired from the show. The film lingers on a close-up of Brown's tear-streaked face as the circus train pulls away into the night, leaving him alone and dejected on the open road.

Moreover, Brown's comedies develop a high degree of stylistic consistency. Brown's body movements and vocal mannerisms are certainly broader and more stylized than other cast members, making his character appear eccentric, clumsy, and ill-adjusted to his social environment, yet those gestures shed insight onto his characters. We find here none of the more radical breaks with naturalistic performance style that we associate with other film clowns. Brown remains oblivious to the presence of the camera, avoiding not only direct address but also the frontal staging so common in early sound comedy. The internal monologues in *You Said a Mouthful*, modeled after a similar device in *Strange Interlude* (MGM, 1932), are the exception that proves this rule. Here, Brown steps momentarily out of the story action, the background movement is suspended, and he strikes a thoughtful pose. The camera pulls into a tight close-up, while Brown's voice on the soundtrack reveals his character's thoughts. Groucho Marx parodies *Strange Interlude* in *Animal Crackers*, using the device to comment on the constructedness of the plot and to engage in his familiar wordplay; Brown's internal monologues, like those in *Strange Interlude* itself, reflect the character's thoughts and convey plot information; they are not a reflexive gag. As the narratives progress, Brown adjusts his acting style into closer conformity with the other characters, frequently concluding with sequences where he displays the physical prowess and social grace previously denied his characters. The normalization of Brown's performance becomes a measure of his character's

social integration; earlier moments of stylization and expressive incoherence are read as signs of the comic protagonist's social immaturity rather than as moments where the performer's personality surfaces. The relative restraint and coherence of Brown's performances may be the product of the limited range of his performance skills. Whatever its origins, this style of comedy, with its high emphasis upon the integration of comic performance into character and narrative development, proved far more compatible with the norms of the classical Hollywood cinema than the other classes of comic texts described above. The comedian comedies of the late 1930s and 1940s (the vehicles of Joe Penner, Abbott and Costello, Bob Hope, Danny Kaye, and Red Skelton) follow Joe E. Brown's example rather than adopting the anarchistic comedy model. Even anarchic performers like the Marx Brothers or Wheeler and Woolsey were forced to restrain the more excessive aspects of their performances and to integrate their comic routines more fully into the plot progression. The gag sequences in *Monkey Business* thwart plot development, interrupting and derailing the gangster subplot, rendering its actions ridiculous (as when Groucho acts as a sports announcer providing running commentary on the final fist fight); similar sequences in *A Day at the Races* further narrative purposes, as when the Marx Brothers create disturbances to allow Allen Jones to sneak the horse away from its stable or to block efforts to investigate Dr. Hugo Hackenbush's credentials. What is read as performance virtuosity in the early Marx Brothers films comes in their later works to signify the characters' eccentricity, with the sudden shifts of performance registers restrained by a greater attention to character motivation.

Each subgenre described above represents a different strategy for reconciling the competing demands of the vaudeville aesthetic and classical Hollywood narrative. The revue film resolves the contradiction by abandoning narrative altogether, offering the film as a substitute for a stage presentation, as a text made of nothing but performances. The showcase film introduces a minimal degree of plot development, yet interrupts the narrative periodically to allow extended sequences of performance that have little or no direct bearing on the storyline. The comic romance transforms the problematic relationship between performance sequences and causal narrative into a dominant thematic concern, depicting the shifting styles of individual performers as a process of class assimilation and posing eruptions into pure performance as a threat to the romantic couple's happiness. The anarchistic comedy provides perhaps the most unstable balance between performance and plot, with each scene transformed into a battleground between these two competing forces. Here, stories exist to be disrupted and overwhelmed by excessive performances, while narrative destabilization is experienced as a liberation of the comic performer's creative potential. By contrast, the affirmative comedy subordinates performance almost totally to the demands of characterization, with the comic star's movement from performance excess to stylistic restraint reflecting the character's increased integration into the social order.

[. . .]

Notes

1 Richard deCordova, "Genre and Performance: An Overview," in *Film Genre Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 130.

2 Patricia Mellencamp, "Spectacle and Spectator: Looking Through the American Musical Comedy," *Cine-Tracts* (Summer 1977), 28–35. See also Jim Collins, "Towards Defining a Matrix of the Musical Comedy: The Place of the Spectator Within the Textual Mechanisms," in *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 134–145; Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); John Mueller, "Fred Astaire and the Integrated Musical," *Cinema Journal* 24.1 (Fall 1984): 28–40; Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), see especially 59–89.

3 Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979), 38–98.

4 Steve Seidman, *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in the Hollywood Film* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research, 1981), 15–57.

5 James Naremore, "Expressive Coherence and the Acted Image," *Studies in Literary Imagination* (Spring 1986), 39–54.

6 Mueller, "Fred Astaire and the Integrated Musical."

7 See Altman, *The American Film Musical*, for a useful discussion of the process by which genre definitions are established. My methodology for developing these definitions closely resembled the practices he describes.

8 Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 372, lists *The Big Broadcast* as an exemplar of the show musical based on its syntactic and the semantic components, though I would argue that its performance style fits more closely with the showcase film.

9 Gerald Weales, *Canned Goods As Caviar: American Film Comedy of the 1930s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 92.

10 Charles Lee Hyde, Grand Theater, Pierre, South Dakota, wrote of *Duck Soup*: "Good entertainment but lots of disappointed people. . . . The usual music furnished by the harp and the piano was missed. Another example of how dumb smart people can be. Would any exhibitor have made a picture with the Marx Brothers in it and kept the harp and piano out?" "What the Picture Did For Me," *Motion Picture Herald*, February 17, 1934, 65. Similar complaints were heard from other exhibitors.

11 Frank Krutnik, "The Clown-Prints of Comedy," *Screen* (July–October 1984), 52–53.

12 A *Motion Picture Herald* ad for the film (May 9, 1931) foregrounds the brothers' performance sequences as a key selling point for the film: "Groucho has a brand new crop of rapid-fire nonsense. Mute Harpo wangs the harp and chases the blonds. Chico, the tough guy, prowls his omnivorous way. Zeppo provides the one sane spot in the lunatic Marxian universe. The buffooning brothers are invading an unsuspecting Hollywood for this opus."

13 Krutnik, "The Clown-Prints of Comedy," 52–53; Seidman, *Comedian Comedy*, 79–141.

14 Seidman, *Comedian Comedy*, 146.

Masculinity in Crisis

Method Acting in Hollywood

10

VIRGINIA WRIGHT WEXMAN

> 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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11 Film Acting and Independent Cinema

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 –

I saw a bear (stimulus)
I ran (response)
because I was frightened (implication).

(In Bresson's exhortation, 'Let the cause follow the effect, not accompany it or precede it.')[3] Meyerhold's actor must concentrate upon developing a visually expressive physical dynamism, which in terms of cinema acting still seems useful, despite the behaviourist undertones of the training.

The *Acting Tapes* deal specifically with the two acting traditions as distinguished here – the naturalist tradition of Stanislavsky, the Group Theatre, the Actors' Studio and the Method; and the anti-naturalist tradition of Meyerhold and Kuleshov, Brecht and Bresson. This means that the tapes are more concerned with institutions, forms of training and performance conventions, than with acting as a sign-system capable of producing specific meanings in specific contexts.

The second way of thinking about film acting is, however, directly concerned with the semiotics of acting: the meaningfulness of acting signs produced in various systems of difference and identity, under the particular conditions of the institution of cinema.[4] As soon as one starts considering acting in these terms, it becomes clear that acting signs are caught up in a polysemic production of meaning and pleasure, crucially dependent upon the moment of viewing. As such, the intentions of a particular acting strategy (in the context of the (inter)textuality of a film) do not have any necessary relationship to any particular predetermined effect. As John Caughie argued at the NFT event, it would be wrong to operate upon a rigid distinction between the ideological efficacy of naturalist and anti-naturalist acting, where naturalism automatically means empathetic identification = bad, and anti-naturalism automatically means distantiation = good. Formal devices (and in this respect acting functions as a set of formal devices) cannot be assumed to have a fixed ideological effect in all circumstances. Thus Brecht, in his essay 'Against George Lukacs', agrees with those who 'did not believe in such things as "the" method. They knew that many methods were necessary to attain their goal.' Later in the same essay, Brecht writes:

> We must not derive realism as such from particular existing works, but we shall use every means, old and new, tried and untried, derived from art and derived from other sources, to render reality to men – in a form they can understand.[5]

As an example of the way in which an acting style may produce quite unintended effects, Caughie pointed to the way in which the Method school of naturalist film acting may in fact drift into self-reflexivity, signifying a power of presence and an inner truth which may actually *exceed* the requirements of narrative. Thus, the gestures of Marlon Brando in *The Godfather* tend to exceed narrative motivation – to exceed that which is narratively required of character. Intended as a display of descriptive, realistic detail (ethnicity, authority, etc), it may actually be read as a display of the actor as such. In such cases, the dialectic of control/egotistic self-expression tends to draw attention to the actor's mastery (of actorly skills, of self-control . . .), the ability to generate beguiling but superfluous gestures, and to string out narratively redundant actions – so that to watch Method acting is to be fascinated by the obsessive nature of the performance, rather than by the signified or the represented of the action. Further, this spectacle of mastery too easily articulates a masculinity which is

hardly appropriate to all roles. The other side of this dialectic is the tendency to draw attention away from the exigencies of character or role and towards the actor's persona in terms of a mysterious inner truth. In other words, the attempt to 'portray reality' is blocked by the imprecision, irrelevancy and distraction of naturalism's trivial verisimilitude.[6] On the other hand, it should be recognised that there will always be a certain ambiguity, coincidence and redundancy of meaning built into any acting strategy.

These considerations suggest that at the level of a semiotics of acting, the distinction between naturalism and anti-naturalism, or between 'the natural' and 'the stylised' is actually not very useful. More useful is the distinction made by Barry King at the NFT event[7] between four levels or categories of acting performance, thus specifying the material site of production of acting signs:

the facial
the gestural
the corporeal (or postural) and
the vocal.

However the actor may think about these different categories, for the spectator they function as signs, which are themselves caught up in two distinct meaning systems.

First, we can note that the four categories are all, including the vocal, physical categories; consequently, the meaningfulness of each category, the extent to which they register, is, in part, dependent upon physical type (e.g., long face, large body, high-pitched voice . . .) calling up specific cultural connotations. John O Thompson has argued that such types are at one level *givens*, or *positivities*: their meaningfulness is relatively autonomous of any system of difference.[8] But at another level these types are further pitched into the play of meaning through the system of physical differences scattered across a film. Thus the meaning of a physical type is constituted partly in terms of positive *identity*, and partly in terms of its *difference* from other types.

Secondly, there is a differential system of movement/stasis of the face, the gesture, the body and the vocal chords. Again, there is an external (or extra-textual) and an internal (textual) level of meaning produced here. 'Externally', there is both a highly conventionalised cultural coding of movement (as in Delsarte's codification of melodramatic gestures, or the gestures of Peking opera) and a much more ambiguous though still readable cultural codification of 'everyday' gestures signifying different emotions or states of mind (e.g., raised eyebrows as a sign of surprise). 'Internally', further meaningful differentiations can be produced, between minimal and frenetic movement, between precise control and looseness or ambiguity of movement, between economy and superfluity.

The exact range of these various intersecting fields of meaning in any particular film will depend on several other factors: casting decisions; the skill of the actor; the persona of the actor; the nature of character and role;[9] make-up and dress; *mise-en-scène*, camerawork and montage.

I now want to consider, in a relatively programmatic way, the practice of film acting in relation to independent cinema, under six headings:

1 the economy of the voice;
2 the economy of face/gesture/body – 'doing nothing';

3 precision of movement in relation to the camera's field of vision;
4 fragmenting character and externalising emotion – identity and identification;
5 stylisation and distantiation in the cinema;
6 continuity and systematisation of work with actors – the ensemble.

There is, however, a major problem in attempting to address independent cinema as if it were a unified sector, or a unified practice. In what follows, I have not attempted to deal with the current problems of funding facing independent film and video workers, or with the different sites of 'independent' film and video practice, and how these affect the aesthetics, politics and ideologies of oppositional and interventionist work. What follows is a polemical call for a more imaginative cinema of ideas, which embraces both fictional and documentary forms – and crucially a cinematic practice which thinks seriously about the acting strategies it mobilises.

The economy of the voice

Cinema is too often characterised as simply a *visual* medium, which is clearly inadequate. On the other hand, British theatre is too often characterised as simply an oratorical medium, which is not only in itself inadequate but has also produced a particular style of theatrical voice-training inappropriate for film-work in most cases. The stylisation and class-specificity of that training allows for only a very limited range of uses of the voice in British cinema, where it has been used primarily 'to enunciate and project text or dialogue'.[10] As has often been noted, this has resulted in overly theatrical scripting of films, with the burden of 'intended meaning' (the 'message' of the film) loaded on to dialogue, at the expense of a visually complex cinematic form. Obviously this is crudely put, but it does signal the need for a different approach to script-writing, *mise-en-scène* – and the vocal level of acting. Useful though they may be in certain circumstances, it is important not to fall back on conventional English theatrical speech patterns when different vocal work may be more meaningful. Brecht's practice of using the voice in a gestic manner[11] suggests that it is important to work on different speech patterns, speeds of delivery and rhythms, on different tones and accents, and on the varying possibilities of conversational speech, song, reading, oratory, etc. In part, this is a question of developing a precise and economic use of the voice in relation to the microphone rather than the acoustics of the theatre.

Various cinematic references offer examples in which the voice has a quite different signifying practice to that demanded of the English theatrical actor: the meaningfulness of Method acting's vocal strategy is as much dependent upon a *redundancy* of linguistic units as it is upon the clear articulation of a verbal message; Bresson consistently uses a distantiating flat vocal tone, a voice without conventional intonation or emphasis; certain British independent films have also adopted unconventional vocal strategies (e.g., *In the Forest, A History and the City, At the Fountainhead*). Developing a strategy which requires a 'complex listening' on the part of the spectator does not necessarily mean resisting theatrical conventions completely. *Darkest England*, for instance, in part depends upon the class connotations of different English theatrical voices: it is near-parodic in its use of these representational conventions.

Before leaving the category of the vocal, it is important to consider the voice in documentary, another key aesthetic and ideological practice within British cinema, including

the independent sector. Thirties documentaries such as *Housing Problems* (1935) established the generic convention of the voice-over; but it was a convention with specific relations of power built into it. *Housing Problems* has a key voice, which introduces the film and each of the various other speakers of the film to the audience; in that sense it is the voice of authority – and of course it is the voice of a white male upper-middle-class Southerner.

During World War II documentarists cast different voice-types for the voice-overs of their films, seeking more 'populist' voices (e.g. in Humphrey Jennings' wartime films or *Desert Victory*).[12] Authority was now blended with trustworthiness and familiarity, and these three categories have been crucial to the development of the documentary genre on television, where similar vocal strategies have been used for voices-over, with a similar relationship between the voice of authority (e.g., the newscaster) and other voices of the programme, mediating their more 'partial', since less authoritative, 'information' to the viewer at home. Recent documentary programmes produced in the independent sector have attempted to use the voice in different ways. Two recent *Eleventh Hour* films from Newcastle's Trade workshop, whose vocal strategies are reminiscent of Rotha's films of the mid-'40s, have been particularly interesting in this respect. Both *Farewell to the Welfare State* and *Mothers Don't Forget* resist the use of any single voice of authority, having instead a montage of voices, some of which are identified as the voices of people interviewed in the course of the programmes, but others of which split the function of *Housing Problems*' single voice of authority, presenting 'impartial' information across a number of voices. More specifically, differently gendered voices are used, as well as voices specifying different regional, racial and class accents. In addition, *Farewell to the Welfare State* uses a very specific modulation of the voice – consistently deep (women as well as men) and consistently quiet (as opposed to strident). It is this sort of attention to the voice, both in relation to its cultural connotations and the formal relations of different voices, that the independent sector as a whole must develop.

The economy of face/gesture/body – 'doing nothing'

> The things one can express with the hand, with the head, with the shoulders! . . . How many useless and encumbering words then disappear! What economy![13]

If British actor-training is voice-specific, it is also inadequate in its attention to facial, gestural and corporeal movement (and non-movement), particularly in relation to the requirements of cinema. From Kuleshov on, film directors and film actors have felt that the gestural requirements of cinema are different to those of theatre, calling for a different training. In part, this reflects a belief that it is cinema's 'natural' propensity to be a photographically realistic medium, a belief in the 'essential' (ontological) realism of cinema, and a desire to have as naturalistic a performance as possible, stripped of all theatrical mannerisms and stylisations, which are believed to look wrong on the screen. Yet consider, on the other hand, the highly stylised performances of Kuleshov's actors in *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*; the expressionistic acting used by Eisenstein in his films, but particularly *Ivan the Terrible*; and the use of music-hall performers such as George Formby and Tommy Trinder in certain British popular films. Clearly, in certain circumstances, stylised and mannered performance is useful – and just as clearly there is not a perfect fit between Kuleshov's theory and practice.[14] He writes 'stylization in the cinema simply does not work'[15]

– but it does not work because he makes a distinction between 'theatrical fake' and 'real material'. Where an ambiguity of reality and illusion is to be played upon in the film, stylisation may well work.

At the same time, even within a stylised acting practice, physical movement must still be economic, and regulatable. Kuleshov again:

> In order to give maximum expressiveness to the symbol, one must exploit the given plane of the screen with optimal economy – in other words, there must not be one piece of superfluous space on the screen, and if you show something which cannot occupy the whole surface, then all excess must be eliminated.[16]

This applies as much to acting as to any other aspect of *mise-en-scène* (and indeed is developed by Brecht as a key facet of his 'epic' acting strategy for the theatre), and involves stripping away all that is not required within the scene or image. Whether in a stylised acting practice, or in a naturalist acting practice (although of course naturalism is just as much a style as any other acting practice), there are moments when one or more actors are required to *'do nothing'*, thus calling for a minimalist style of acting (although still calling for work and concentration): shots involving characters waiting, or watching, or thinking, or day-dreaming, where the key to the success of the scene is the absence of movement or expression (which is expressive in itself; of course). It's interesting to note that it is precisely this minimalism that English theatrically trained actors find most difficult about acting for the camera. Indeed, as Barry King has pointed out, within the ideology of the acting profession, such requirements seem like an abuse of or failure to appreciate the talents of the actor – in King's term, it seems like a process of de-skilling.[17]

Bresson is perhaps the director who has most rigorously developed the skill of getting his 'models' (as he prefers to call his non-professionally trained actors) to do nothing:

> It is not a matter of acting 'simple', or of acting 'inward', but of not acting at all.

For Bresson, this is bound up in a metaphysics of the subject (the actor/character as subject); a search for an inner truth:

> Unusual approach to bodies. On the watch for the most imperceptible, the most *inward* movements.[18]

But once again, we may note a slippage between intention and effect. While we may agree with Bresson that 'it is the flattest and dullest parts that in the end have the most life',[19] from a materialist point of view it is not a revelation of some 'inner truth' which is remarkable, but the extent to which this 'minimalist naturalism' becomes *strange*, in the Brechtian sense, drawing attention to the actor-character's performance of everyday events, perhaps de-familiarising the everyday. This is certainly one of the effects of the use of a similar acting style in the films of Straub-Huillet. Further, as Nick Burton suggested at the Phoenix Arts workshop, from the point of view of directing actors, it may be useful to think in terms of stripping an action of all extraneous details, but then continuing to re-work the action (rehearse it) until it becomes deliberately, but almost imperceptibly, strange. This is perhaps comparable to Eisenstein's approach which, at one point, he describes precisely in terms of 'the elimination of all that is accidental' but then adds that he wants to elevate those elements

that remain 'to the highest level of expressiveness'.[20] As in Kuleshov's films, the economy of the acting is produced in the relation between the removal of unwanted gestures, and the exaggeration and intensification of those that remain. Thus in *Ivan the Terrible*, Eisenstein 'makes the acting strange' by strongly stylising facial, gestural, corporeal and vocal movement. Whether Bresson or Eisenstein, the principal remains the same: a regulation, an economy of movement/non-movement (control/excess). For Bresson and Kuleshov, the achievement of economic acting is crucially dependent upon the actor/model's *automatic* and *mechanical* performance of actions. For Bresson, this task of 'recovering the automatism of real life' is a question of good directing: working with models in such as way that they do not think about what they are saying or doing: 'Radically suppress *intentions* in your models'.[21] (Again, this is open to both a materialist and a metaphysical reading.) For Kuleshov, automatic performance of acquired skills is a question of rigorous and systematic training, and he compares the good actor to the good driver:

> The whole secret to driving a car lies in its being driven automatically; that is, one does not consciously think about when it is necessary to change gears, as all of this is done mechanically and instinctively. . . . The qualified film actor, whose entire technique is calculated to give an efficient reading of his screen performance, is the result of precisely this same sort of training.[22]

But it is worth bearing in mind a warning from Brecht:

> We get empty, superficial, formalist, mechanical acting if in our technical training we forget for a moment that it is the actor's duty to portray living people.[23]

Brecht, in his later writings, continually stresses the need to not simply make strange, to distance the spectator, and refuse empathy, but to create a tension between pleasure and instruction, between empathy and critical distance, between the strangely revealing and the natural. . . .

The theatrical training of actors in Britain is particularly unsuited to the development of minimal, economic facial, gestural and corporeal aspects of acting. If the voice is dominant, there is another strong element in the discourse of British theatrical acting which sees good, professional acting in terms of work with props, 'business' – that is, quite the opposite of doing nothing. British theatrically trained actors thus tend to 'overact', to project voice and gesture within the theatre space. That professionalism comes to constitute 'actorliness'.[24] For the cinema (or TV) it thus becomes necessary to develop ways of concentrating on underacting, on minimal vocal and gestural movement, and the ability to appreciate, professionally, silence, stillness and duration. Within the Stanislavskian tradition, a form of concentration has been developed around the use of objects: in training and in rehearsal/performance the actor works with objects (the *Acting Tapes* focus on the example of Brando's work with Eva Marie Saint's glove, in a scene from *On the Waterfront*) in order to take his/her mind off the fact of acting, to forget the presence of the audience, to erect the fantasy of the fourth wall of the stage space. (An American critic, quoted in the *Acting Tapes*, writes of the Moscow Arts Theatre, 'The acting is so good we are convinced it is not acting.')[25]

Aside from the fact that we may want the actors to be self-critical of their performance *as a performance* rather than completely engrossed in their character, we might also note that this

work with objects may bring in to the visual space (on to the screen) objects which are there for the benefit of the actor, and not the benefit of the spectator. This potential excess of 'added' actions and objects may well be a useful way of breaking the illusionary effect of naturalism (quite to the contrary of Stanislavsky's intentions) and drawing attention to performance, to actorliness; it may contribute to the redundancy of detail productive of a realistic effect;[26] it may have a symbolic effect within the space of the fiction, where the object or gesture functions as an exterior sign of the interiority of the character (as in the case of Brando and the glove). But where this use of props either suspends the narrative in a pandaemonium of detail, or foregrounds the relationship of actor/subject and prop/object, this would be a very weak means of drawing attention to the relationship between the characters in a space (if what we are after, for instance, is the relationship between character A silently watching character B eating at another table in a restaurant). In other words, to do nothing effectively, and economically, may require a quite different form of concentration on the part of the actor. This suggests that it is more important to concentrate in this case on what you *are doing* (silently watching . . .) in the scene/shot, rather than using an object to escape the scene as a moment of acting, by concentrating on some superfluous action.

Precision of movement in relation to the camera's field of vision

One might suggest that in acting for the cinema (or TV), the problem is not trying to forget that there is an audience present observing your every move, but in trying to establish who or what is to be addressed at the moment of delivery, in the absence of an audience. The key here is obviously to articulate the performance in relation to the camera, or, to be more precise, the camera's field of vision. Crucially, what determine the scope of the actor's facial, gestural and corporeal register are the details of framing, angle and distance of shot and focus within the overall framework of the montage. Again, Kuleshov provides the starting-point. Ron Levaco has described his concern for the

> relationship of actor movement to cutting and composition. He strove to make his actors aware of duration as movement – a first principle of the cinema that is still valid, namely that screen action always has to conform to the imperatives of cutting, to the montage of a particular sequence as conceived by the director. . . .[27]

In order to achieve as precise movements as possible in the relationship between actors and camera, Kuleshov developed a series of exercises for his actors, enabling them to develop an ascetic codification of body and gesture, a semiotically complex choreography. But crucially that choreographic training is developed in relation to a three-dimensional conceptualisation of the camera's field of vision. Kuleshov refers to this as a spatial grid, or a spatial metric web. In effect it is a pyramid turned on its side, where the apex corresponds to the lens of the camera – although it would make more sense to use the analogy of a *cone*, rather than a pyramid. While Kuleshov's writings on how the spatial web is to be used make interesting reading, it is probably more useful as a conceptual device than as a model for actual exercises, a way of thinking the camera's field of vision three-dimensionally.

On the other hand, it should be recognised that the spatial grid metaphor takes for granted the place and function of the camera-eye, and Kuleshov's system depends upon and

reproduces a centring of the subject perspectivally. This corresponds to classical cinema, which is founded upon spectator identification with the look of the camera. As Ben Brewster has put it, in commenting on Brecht's distrust of the cinematic institution: 'acting is, as it were, directed at that ubiquitous place, there is no oblique view.'[28] If a sense of distantiation is to be achieved, it may be necessary to refuse that system which centres the subject, and to somehow prise open, rather than close down, the apparently natural conjunction of camera-identification and character-identification. As Brewster puts it,

> in the theatre there are always as many points of view as there are seats, and some of these points of view can be quite oblique, so the play is not directed at each spectator in the same way. . . . In the theatre my viewpoint remains my own from a particular place in the auditorium, looking at a performance as well as at a fiction. It is this identification with the camera that . . . makes it difficult to separate the objects being shown from the process by which they are being shown, that is, the particular performance.[29]

One possibility which might be developed as a means of wresting apart camera-identification (film performance) and character-identification (acting performance) is the strategy of *abusing* Kuleshov's metaphor of the spatial grid: refusing the desire to perform actions centrally for the eye of the camera (central to the camera/spectator's field of vision), deliberately producing oblique views of action, stressing the position and process of the look at the actor. (Certain dance films might serve as a model here, and perhaps some of the work of Maya Deren – though certainly, the films of Bresson, Straub-Huillet and Kuleshov at moments work in this way.) In effect, this is a question of exploiting off-screen space, at the margins of the camera's field of vision. (Of course, the same sorts of effects might be achieved in the montage – that is, in the mapping together of different looks, different points of view at the same action.)

Fragmenting character and externalising emotion: identity and identification

For the actor, there is, additionally, the problem of how to prepare her/his part, given the extreme fragmentation of the film-making process (scenes shot out of sequence, etc), and the necessity to respond to events, views and people where they are not actually in the field of vision of the actor (reacting to the camera, in the place of the absent co-respondent is a shot-reverse shot structure, for instance). There are various strategies by which a sense of continuity and coherence might be achieved. Rehearsals and shooting schedules could, of course, be reorganised; alternatively, one might consider the script as the site of coherence, the framework which holds together the various fragments of the film-making process, and within which character is constructed. But in each case, there is a tension between the attempt on the part of the actor to hang on to character as a coherent sense of identity and the need in shooting to actually develop only a minimal aspect of character, a discrete fragment. Within a 'Brechtian' practice, such a tension could be worked on as immensely fruitful and productive, but within the naturalist tradition it is inevitably constructed as a problem: from Stanislavsky on, the centre of coherence and identity has been the acting subject, or rather the role into which the actor attempts to transform her/himself. But immediately this tradition is developed

within the cinema, a further tension arises – because the centre of coherence and identity for cinema is not so much the acting subject, or the inner truth of the character, but the eye of the camera.

What is important for a radical film practice is to acknowledge these tensions between fragmentation and coherence, separation and identity, and between the camera-I and the acting-subject – rather than attempting to develop for the actor a psychologically rounded identity prior to constructing character and action for the camera. What is important, in the final analysis, is not the inner feelings of the actor, but how the image of actor-as-character and the performed gestures look on the screen; the important question to ask is 'does the visible action demonstrate the necessary points?' (A question which, incidentally, cannot be answered by recourse to the script alone as the site of coherence.)

Thus, rather than adopting as the starting-point an assumption of psychological unity and coherence, and acting as the embodiment of character, it may be more useful to start from a training which sees acting as the production of visual and aural signs – that is, which sees the body, its physical characteristics and its economy of movement, as a field of discourse. This suggests that the anti-naturalist training of actors – and especially the strategy of externalising emotions – may be more appropriate to *all* forms of cinema acting: the conditions of cinema demand that emotion be read *visually* from facial, gestural and corporeal signs, and *aurally* from vocal signs both diegetic (lip-synch, etc) and extra-diegetic (voice-over as a means of signifying character interiority, etc). Brecht, for instance, writes:

> Everything to do with the emotions has to be externalised; ie it must be developed into a gesture. The actor has to find a sensibly perceptible outward expression for his character's emotions, preferably some action that gives away what is going on inside him.[30]

Acting, in this framework, becomes not the enactment of a coherent, psychologically complex character, but a montage of gestures (or 'gests'), each one refined for the requirements of the shot (the eye of the camera), rather than the supposed inner consistency of the character. This is precisely the implication of Kuleshov's montage experiments, but also of Bresson's reference to actors as models for the montage, and Hitchcock's statement (reputedly) that 'actors are like cattle'. Brecht, again:

> The coherence of the character is in fact shown by the way in which its individual qualities contradict each other. . . .
>
> Splitting such material into one gest after another, the actor masters his character by first mastering the 'story'. It is only after walking round the entire episode that he can, as it were by a single leap, seize and fix his character, complete with all its individual features. . . .[31]

Brecht's gestic technique is comparable to Kuleshov's semiotic range of facial expressions, gestures and choreographies of the body. What Kuleshov can add, because he is talking about the cinema, is that 'people performing organised efficient work appear best on the screen.'[32]

Stylisation and distantiation in the cinema

> The actor: 'It's not me you are seeing and hearing, it's *the other man*'. But being unable to be wholly *the other*, he is not that other.[33]

Brecht's strategy of distantiation is a means of establishing a critical distance between the performance of an action and the reading of that action, the process of making sense of it. It is a means of foregrounding the ideas, or the ideological processes at stake in the action, rather than encouraging the audience to become inextricably bound up in the psychological predicament or emotional state of the character performing the action. It is a means of linking the individual to the social as well as, or rather than, to the 'inner self', and the discrete action to its historical context. This distance is achieved in part through the stylisation of speech, movement, posture. The intention is to perform actions in such a way that the actions themselves, and the issues at stake, are open to question, open to criticism. Thus, compare Brecht commenting on Stanislavsky's theatre:

> What he cared about was naturalness, and as a result, everything in his theatre seems far too natural for anyone to pause and go into it thoroughly. You don't normally examine your own home, or your own feeding habits, do you?
>
> There is a complete fusion of the actor with his role which leads to his making the character seem so natural, so impossible to conceive in any other way that the audience has simply to accept it as it stands.[34]

The actor must demonstrate an action as if it were an ideological statement, in such a way that the audience feels obliged to form an opinion, to take sides in relation to the action. For Brecht, good acting is that which makes familiar characters and actions strange and astonishing again: not the reassurance of conventional documentary's recognition effect, but the *shock* of recognition. As Brecht puts it, 'everyday things are thereby raised above the level of the obvious and the automatic.' Or Bresson: 'an old thing becomes new if you detach it from what usually surrounds it.'[35] In general, Brecht suggests, there are two conditions necessary for the achievement of these sorts of effects. The first requires that the actor should resist complete identification with the role and attempt to develop a form of demonstrative acting. Secondly, as Ben Brewster has argued, it is crucial for Brecht that in theatre there is a *co-presence* of audience and actors, in order that

> a distinction be maintained throughout the performance between the actors and the parts that they are fictionally playing. . . . One can identify with the actor, which implies a separation from the role, and then identify with the role and that implies a separation from the actor.[36]

Brecht's epic theatre exploits these conditions, producing a constant oscillation between identification and non-identification, an oscillation which is central to his view of acting:

> The contradiction between acting (demonstration) and experience (empathy) often leads the uninstructed to suppose that only one or the other can be manifest in the work of the actor. . . . In reality, it is a matter of two mutually hostile processes which fuse in the

actor's work; his performance is not just composed of a bit of one and a bit of the other. His particular effectiveness comes from the tussle and tension of the two opposites, and also from their depth. . . .[37]

In cinema, however, no such co-presence of actor and audience is achieved. On the contrary, much of the fascination of narrative cinema is derived from the *present-absence* to the spectator of the actor/persona/character.[38] Hence distantiation cannot be achieved by the same means in theatre and in cinema. Classical cinema, as Brewster notes, has produced a style of acting, or more specifically an institution of star-making, which uses the cultivation of persona as a means of achieving an almost seamless coincidence of actor/persona and character (or narrative role), that is, between star-image and narrative image. But it is only an apparent seamlessness: there is a tension at the heart of the process, since 'naturalistic presentation is consistently broken within the commercial system in the interests of the star-system.'[39] Ostensibly, Hollywood depends upon a form of screen acting 'where the performer is just supposed to "be", his or her technique invisible',[40] but the institution of the star-system means that Hollywood constantly runs the risk of foregrounding the actor's persona, potentially against the grain of the narrative. There is always a certain disarticulation at stake, the identity of character is never entirely present or coherent.

It is at the site of this tension that it seems useful to think through the possibilities of distantiation *in the cinema*, despite – or rather, *because* of – the state of presence *and* absence. Within the cinema, the actor is present only as *image*; this image can be stylised to such an extent that it falls out of the flow of the narrative, halting that flow and resisting the struggle to contain it *as* character, *in* role: momentarily, it functions precisely as an image. A radical cinema performance might usefully exploit the split in identification between the image (the actor as persona), and the narrativisation of the role. In addition, it is still possible in cinema to separate out narrative role (the signified) from the performance of narrative actions (the signifier). King, for instance, defines naturalism as in part a system in which particular movements by the actor of face, gesture and body are to be read as natural to the narrative character, as his or her own movements (and not, therefore, the movements of an actor).[41] Therefore a distantiating acting strategy might also attempt to execute such movements in such a way that they do *not* seem to be the natural movements of the character, producing a 'strange' lack of fit. I now want to detail various means by which these separations, these distances, these split identifications might be achieved.

First, there is the possibility of playing on the casting of actors according to or against 'type'. I would suggest that casting decisions involve a combination of relating the professional skills of the actor to the style of performance required, and relating the actor as a 'type' to the conception of narrative role. Casting on the basis of 'type' is itself at least a twofold concept. First, there is the question of the physical look of the actor, in terms of facial and corporeal characteristics as more or less culturally coded signs (and to this we may add the vocal sound of the actor). Secondly, although clearly the first feeds into the second, then the question of *persona*, which brings into play such ambiguous concepts as charisma, personality, presence, aura, etc. In these senses, recognition of type involves a signification of the actor as always already an ideological construction: 'look' and 'persona' function as signs of both interiority and social status, establishing the actor as a relatively complex social and psychological type, a complexity which is brought into play in the narrative development of the film. The extent to which this has any impact on the way in which the film and the performance are read will depend on the extent to which the audience 'knows' the actor from other roles, or other extra-filmic discourses, the range of facial, gestural, corporeal and vocal movements brought into play, the details of make-up and costume, and narrative determinations of character.

It is worth noting that different types of film draw on these implications of type-casting in different ways – but also that, as John O Thompson has argued, there is a certain typicality in all acting: 'individuality', the fully rounded character, always involves a sense of typicality, or what Thompson calls category-meaning.[42] The conventional British documentary tends to foreground type in terms of physical look (and vocal sound) while the naturalist narrative film tends to foreground type in terms of persona. Both extremes involve a sense of the actor as 'document', but the former is assumed to be a more 'objective' form of document, while the latter implies a more 'subjective' documentation of the 'inner self'. It is also worth noting that *all* actors 'possess' a persona, and not just Hollywood stars.

One means of using 'type' to create the desired distance, the desired oscillation between identification and separation, is, as Simon Watney pointed out at the NFT event, to exploit the effects of *mis*casting (or casting against type). Watney's starting point was a quotation from Andrew Britton:

> The very concept of 'mis-casting' may well serve to naturalise the explicit appearance of ideological contradition rather than its successful elision, just as the sense that an actor is 'ideally cast' may indicate that the critic is underwriting the projects of the film.[43]

On the other hand, as Watney pointed out, the sense of an actor being 'mis-cast' does point to an ideological tension in the film, between the meanings brought into play by the actor as 'type', and the meanings brought into play in the narrativisation of role and character. Clearly it would be possible to exploit this tension as ideologically productive. (It is worth comparing this to a comment in parenthesis by Brecht: 'It often helped the educational effect to have bad actors instead of good ones.')[44]

Another means of using 'type' is the possibility of developing the line of 'stereotyping', or what Eisenstein called 'typage'. That is, casting *according to* 'type', but on the basis of a sort of intensification of the category of the type in question. In part this is the strategy discussed earlier of using exterior signs as signs of both interiority and social status, a strategy which draws on a usually implicit and fairly crude semiotics of the body ('as if all cooks were fat, all peasants phlegmatic, all statesmen stately',[45] or as in the case of Eisenstein's films of the '20s, as if all capitalists were grotesquely bloated). The usefulness of this strategy (and it contributes to a radical reading of, for instance, *Coronation Street*) is the extent to which it reveals character to be *constructed*, as opposed to natural: character can thus be recognised as an ideological category, separate from (but tied into) the body of the actor or the details of the narrative and role. The type thus functions as a gestic summation of ideological traits; the strategy insists that character be read precisely as *image*, and not as 'real' (indeed it seems unreal and yet still functions adequately as actant within the narrative). Caught up in the paradox of present absence, the actor/persona/character has been pushed more and more into the realm of the image, it has become more ideal, less tangible – and yet at the same time it is so heavily coded that it has become almost leaden, almost concretely tangible ('the characters are no more than cardboard cut-outs . . .'). What seems useful here is the tension between real person and image, between the tangible and the intangible. The

possibilities of such an approach can be seen in Eisenstein's films of the '20s, of course, but also in the casting and acting of contemporary British independent film-maker Richard Woolley's *Telling Tales* and *Brothers and Sisters*. Think also of the effects of casting Bernard Miles and Brenda de Banzie opposite James Stewart and Doris Day in Hitchcock's 1956 version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*.

A second way of playing on the disjunction of identification with the actor/persona, identification with narrative role, and identification of the performance of the actions, is in terms of developing that eminently post-modern strategy of parody. Mark Nash pointed to the usefulness of parody at the NFT event, but perhaps the most pertinent description of the potentialities of parody in general is provided by Peter Wollen:

> First, parody has an emancipatory aspect. It is always doubly coded. It is read alongside, through and apart from its 'target'. It depends on a complicated interplay of identity and difference, accepting the authority and priority of the 'target' text, converging with it, yet at the same time, separating itself from it, diverting, detracting, rebelling and subverting. Imitation, influence and allusion blend in, but parody constantly veers towards the hybrid; towards the *graft*, both compatible and incompatible with its apparent model. The model itself is subject to a kind of *dehiscence*, a peeling apart (to steal another favourite term from Derrida) which leaves it entire yet divided, releasing it for a new form of understanding, of re-inscription.[46]

It is this process of double coding that is important for our purposes: identity *and* difference, convergence *and* separation, compatibility *and* incompatibility, entire *yet* divided. Each set of terms seems to make sense in relation to Brecht's theory of distantiation, and the possibility of developing it as a practice for the different conditions of the cinema – and, of course, Brecht is famous for his radical plagiarism, in itself a form of parody. Note also the way in which the new inscription of the 'original' provides a new form of understanding of it, a changed meaning: a new political space is opened up (in film acting terms, between image, role and performance of actions). The impact of parodic acting can be seen in a stunning moment in *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, when Bev Francis parodies the posing routines of other body-builders.

What lay behind Nash's interest in parody was an argument that if British independent cinema is to progress, then it must draw on the most useful aspects of film, TV and stage acting as already developed in Britain. In fact, one might suggest that all well-executed British theatrical acting as it has been taken up in TV and film works as parody, particularly of assumptions about class. King suggests that repertory acting in general involves a form of behavioural imitation,[47] and we might suggest that, by a process of inadvertent parody, the British theatrical tradition as taken up in film and TV work underlines or acknowledges that sense of *imitation* (specifying, in gestic manner, the specificities of the British class system at the level of representation). Nash's own example was to see the acting in Ealing comedy as a form of parody. Consider, for instance, that of Alec Guinness in *The Lavender Hill Mob*. Guinness' character is a petty-minded, ineffectual, asexual bank clerk. That is, a stereotype of the bank clerk mentality. Guinness' performance of the actions of the role, however, both ties in with this stereotype, converges with it, identifies (with) it, but at the same time *exceeds* what is necessary to represent it. Each sign of the bank clerk is exaggerated, but in an almost imperceptible way (hence, perhaps, its success as a comic performance). Each facial

expression (the *subtly* knowing smile in the opening sequence in a South American bar) each gesture (twee and hesitant but highly controlled hand movements) and posture (tight, diminishing, highly repressed, but methodical) becomes a sign in itself, escaping the narrative body, foregrounding the performance, but also the stereotype, as such.

A third strategy for achieving distantiation in the cinema is that adopted by Straub-Huillet in their films. Moving away from the exigencies of typage, and the various ways of (ab)using or parodying it, but still clearly dependent on questions of casting and direction, their films seem to *refuse* the presence of either actor or character, thus unbalancing the sense of present-absence: performance is consistently de-stylised, producing a radical non-presence of the actor. This process can be seen, for instance, in the de-dramatised, non-charismatic (i.e., non-theatrical) acting in their film *Class Relations*. Here the actors refuse the conventions of emphatic gesture and voice; they operate mechanically, such that identification with character in an empathetic sense is almost impossible, and we can relate to them only as figures formed in the ideological conditions of the society which the film establishes.

A fourth strategy is found regularly in at least those films of the melodrama genre described as 'Brechtian' (e.g., the films of Losey, Sirk and Minnelli in the 1950s). The performances of certain male actors stand out as exemplary in these films – notably Stanley Baker (in Losey's *The Criminal*, though also in his work for other directors – in *Helldrivers* and *Violent Playground*), Kirk Douglas (in *Two Weeks in Another Town*) and Robert Stack (in *Written on the Wind*). The productivity of such acting depends not only on the stylisation of movement, but also on the economy of the performance: the tension created between periods of minimal, apparently expression-less and emotion-less acting (the static, as it were), and sudden explosive bursts of facial, gestural and postural movement. Highly controlled acting here functions as the signs of repression, the body not just restrained, but visibly *strained* (the same would be true of the voice); the outbursts function as the return of the repressed, the out of control. For the spectator, this style of acting may have the effect of producing a double, and contradictory, presence of the performance, a performance which may become self-reflexive. The strategy is comparable to Barthes' comments on 'the grain of the voice' – for our purposes, the voice which, over and above any articulation of linguistic utterances, signifies its own materiality, its own performance (the voice, for instance, of Alpha 60 in Godard's *Alphaville*).

In one way or another, each of these strategies involves a form of vocal or choreographic stylisation (or de-stylisation, which amounts to the same thing), playing on the paradox of present-absence as a means of achieving a distancing effect. This seems close to Brecht's theory of the *gest* (gestus), the attempt to 'get to the gist of things' by pin-pointing with a gesture, in a physical dynamism of ideas. Although it would be wrong to collapse the idea of a gest solely into a gesture (in the sense of a physical movement of an actor, as I am using the term here), clearly some gestures will work gestically. In order for the physical gesture of an actor to work gestically, it must both make sense within the narrative text, as the 'natural' action of a character, and point *outside* the text, to make some point about the social context and meaning of the action. It must work as a moment of summation, not just of narrative development, but also of the ideological conditions pertaining at that moment. Thus the suicide of a young unemployed man in *Kuhle Wampe* is not just the death of the 'heroine's' brother, not just another episode in the unfolding of the plot – but, at the same time, a comment on the conditions of unemployment in Germany in 1931. It is a gesture which

In his discussion of Brecht's epic theatre, Walter Benjamin suggests that one of its most significant achievements is 'making gestures quotable'.

> Quoting a text implies interrupting its context. It will readily be understood, therefore, that epic theatre, which depends on interruption, is quotable in a very specific sense. That its texts are quotable would be nothing very special. But the gestures used in the process of acting are another matter.[48]

All acting is made up of gestures, but while Brecht talks about breaking acting down into its component parts, naturalism attempts to hold gestures in place, to mould them into a coherent whole – the unity of character. Brecht's theatre thus draws attention to the way in which a character/actor may use a gesture *here*, but may lift it out of that context, and use it also *there*. To quote a gesture in this way will tend to make the gesture as such stand out – acting is revealed as a montage of gestures; but, further, the process by which meanings congeal to the gesture will be 'revealed'. Quoted outside its initial context, the gesture takes on a different meaning; out of context, the gesture may be recognised as precisely a gesture, and no longer the natural action of a real living character. To quote a gesture in this way establishes it as sign, and constitutes an interruption at the level of language; it also, of course, impresses upon us the connotations of the gesture.

But gestures are constantly quoted by spectators of 'naturalist' films also. Certain gestures stand out in classic Hollywood films: the form cannot contain them, the narrative cannot exhaust their meaning. They become eminently quotable *as gestures*. For instance, part of the pleasure of the Western is the extent to which each successive film quotes the familiar gestures and posture of the cowboy drawing his gun to shoot down the hero/villain. But the gesture is also quoted outside the cinema by many spectators (not just in children's games, and perhaps even by those who have never even seen a Western!). Does such quoting reconstruct the gesture as *gestic*? Perhaps, insofar as we thereby wrest it from its narrative place, it becomes recognisable as a *sign*, and not just a narrative action: it thus draws attention to the construction of meaning, and the conventionality of the representation. Perhaps it is also gestic insofar as the quoting of the gesture is rarely to specify a precise moment of narrative action in the film in which the gesture was last seen (though it must in part involve that meaning), but tends to establish a particular image or construct of heroic masculinity – in other words, to stand as a summation of a particular aspect of patriarchal ideology.

A style of acting which deliberately draws attention to the *skilful* execution of actions will consistently tend to produce gestures which exceed the narrative demands of a performance. As John Caughie pointed out at the NFT event, this was exactly the aim of Brecht's theatre practice. Brecht called upon his actors to deliberately break the power of the naturalist illusion by perfecting the performance of a gesture in itself, so that the audience could come to appreciate, in a critical way, the skill of the actor *as an actor*. Thus, in addition to becoming involved in the story and the predicaments of the characters, and in the ins and outs of the ideological problematic of the play, the audience also become connoisseurs of acting skills, in a mood of 'relaxed' appreciation. In this respect, it is interesting to read Lee Strasberg's reaction to the acting skills of the Berliner Ensemble: he is *astonished* by the realism of their performance, and full of admiration for the skill with which the actors perform the most basic tasks, the way in which they just do things (to perfection): he experiences no sense of

'actorliness', and at the same time he is fascinated by particular gestures, or, strictly, *gests* (the peeling of potatoes, the plucking of a real chicken) which are extended beyond their particular plot significance so that they come to have a 'higher' meaning which *encapsulates* the ideological moment of the action.[49]

As a comparison, Caughie also discussed the acting of Buster Keaton,[50] in whose films, he argued, gestures are presented in such a way that the audience again appreciates them as marvellous acting skills, over and above any narrative function they may have. And in citing the use of gestures in Method acting, Caughie noted that, while the intention may be different (attempting to achieve a completely naturalist performance), the effect may be the same: drawing attention to the skills of the actor, a certain actorliness, a bravura performance. In other words, naturalism may itself have an anti-naturalist effect!

The gesture which exceeds could clearly be accommodated in the framework of most of the 'distancing' strategies outlined above, and certainly the potential contradiction between the desire for a naturalist effect and the desire for skilfully executed actions can be exploited as a useful means of making strange. There is also clearly a potential contradiction between the call above for *both* the gesture which exceeds *and* an economy of movement in front of the camera: this is intentional. The means of finding a space for these contradictions within the film text is to construct the text as montage rather than as organic unity, allowing for a heterogeneity of possibilities, of effects. Perhaps the most productive work is that which produces a tension between 'the natural' and 'the strange', an acting strategy which is capable of constantly drawing the spectator into the story but repeatedly pushing the spectator away to a position of critical appreciation.

Thus, where 'classical naturalism' demands a coherent text, seamless, without contradictions, resolvable within its own terms, the strategy of montage can precisely play on the productive contradictoriness of the text. Montage can also be a means of drawing attention to the complexity, the contradictoriness, the ideological constructedness of character, made up of fragments, of separate gestures. In such a text it may be appropriate to draw on and develop a variety of 'incompatible' acting styles and approaches to casting and characterisation. At *the Fountainhead*, for instance, uses three different actors to play the same character: an English actor, an actor from the Berliner Ensemble (i.e., Brechtian trained), and the 'non-actor' on whom the character was based. More recently, and perhaps more surprisingly, there is the case of *Revolution*, which Pam Cook and Richard Combs have described as a form of epic cinema. Two strategies in relation to acting are important here: firstly, the use of two quite distinct acting styles (British theatrical acting/Method naturalism) to set up the opposition between oppressors and rebels (and between the past and the present); and secondly, a refusal to organise the plot around the development of character. Character is not established as psychologically rounded and developing with the narrative; rather, it is established only in terms of what is necessary for each specific event. Event thus displaces personality as the focus of attention.[51]

Continuity and systematisation of work with actors – the ensemble

Stanislavsky, Kuleshov, the Group Theatre, Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, Fassbinder and Oshima (and *Coronation Street*?) all developed their work in the context of ensembles. British

independent cinema, on the other hand, has in the main been marked by an extreme instability and discontinuity of work, making it difficult to build up a close working relationship with actors, or to develop appropriate, systematic and rigorous forms of training. Even if directors wanted to follow a Bressonian line – preferring *not* to work with the same actor-models more than once, in order to achieve the required effects of automaticity and non-actorliness (non-theatricality) – continuity of work would be important in order to gain experience of *directing* actors. A Kuleshovian style of acting would clearly be almost impossible to achieve without a period of intense physical training and long rehearsal periods. But it is not just a matter of physical training that is important: there is also the world-view of the actor, and her/his attitude towards each project. In part, ensemble work is a means by which actors can retain some control over their work – without becoming Bresson's unthinking models, or Hitchcock's cattle. Further, Brecht noted that his epic style of acting 'demands a considerable knowledge of humanity and worldy wisdom and a keen eye for what is socially important'. And Benjamin notes that this orientation towards knowledge 'in turn determines not only the content, but also the *tempi*, pauses and stresses of (the actor's) whole performance.'[52] How then to establish the conditions for ensemble work? Perhaps by arguing for adequate funding of longer rehearsal periods; perhaps, as Adam Ganz suggested at the NFT event, by employing actors, as well as film-makers and administrators as members of film and video workshops. . . .

Notes

1 In addition to those acknowledgements made in the text, I would like to thank all those involved in the Phoenix Arts and NFT events, and especially Val Baxter, Nick Burton, James Swinson and Mark Nash.

2 See also John O Thompson, 'Beyond Commutation – a Re-Consideration of Screen Acting', *Screen*, Sept–Oct 1985, vol 26 no 5, p 75.

3 Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, New York, Urizen Books, 1977, p 51.

4 See Lev Kuleshov, 'Art of the Cinema', in Ron Levaco (ed.), *Kuleshov on Film: Writings of Lev Kuleshov*, University of California Press, 1974; Barry King, 'Articulating Stardom', *Screen*, Sept–Oct 1985, vol 26 no 5; John O Thompson, op cit; John Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, pp 91–108; Richard Dyer, *Stars*, London, BFI, 1979; and Stephen Heath, 'Film and System: Terms of Analysis, part II', *Screen*, Summer 1975, vol 16 no 2, pp 101–107.

5 Bertolt Brecht, 'Against Georg Luckacs', published as 'Popularity and Realism', in Francis Frascina and Charles Harrisson (eds), *Modern Art and Modernism*, New York, Harper and Row, 1982, pp 231 and 228.

6 See Michael Patterson's account of Peter Stein's work with actors, in Patterson, *Peter Stein – Germany's Leading Theatre Director* (Directors in Perspective), Cambridge University Press, 1981.

7 See also Barry King, op cit, p 29.

8 John O Thompson, op cit, p 65.

9 For a discussion of the terms 'actor', 'character', 'actant', 'persona', and 'role', see Barry King, op cit, pp 38–41; and Stephen Heath, op cit, pp 101–107.

10 Mark Nash and James Swinson, 'Acting Tapes', *Framework*, no 29, 1985, p 82.

11 See e.g. his article 'The Question of Criteria for Judging Acting', in John Willett (ed), *Brecht on Theatre*, London, Methuen, 1978, pp 53–56.

12 See John Ellis, 'Victory of the Voice', *Screen*, vol 22 no 2, 1981.

13 Robert Bresson, op cit, p 64.

14 See Ron Levaco, 'Introduction', in Levaco, op cit, p 11.

15 Lev Kuleshov, op cit, p 61.

16 Ibid, p 63.

17 Barry King, op cit, p 33.

18 Robert Bresson, op cit, pp 49 and 19 (my emphasis).

19 Ibid, p 35.

20 Sergei Eisenstein, 'Montage in 1938', *Notes of a Film Director*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1959, p 81.

21 Robert Bresson, op cit, pp 32, 8.

22 Lev Kuleshov, op cit, p 67.

23 Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, p 234.

24 See Barry King, op cit.

25 Quoted in Constantin Stanislavski, *Stanislavski's Legacy*, (trans E. R. Hapgood), Theatre Arts, 1968.

26 See Roland Barthes, 'The Realistic Effect', in *Film Reader* no 3, February, 1978.

27 Ron Levaco, op cit, p 10.

28 Ben Brewster, 'The Fundamental Reproach (Brecht)', in *Cine-Tracts*, Summer 1977, vol I no 2, p 48.

29 ibid. Compare Lev Kuleshov, op cit, p 79.

30 Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, p 139.

31 Ibid, pp 196 and 200.

32 Lev Kuleshov, op cit, p 99. See also Richard Combs' discussion of the Donald Sutherland character in *Revolution*, in 'Landscape after Battle, or Revolution's History Lessons', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1986, vol 53 no 626, p 69.

33 Robert Bresson, op cit, p 24.

34 Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, pp 237 and 235.

35 Ibid, p 92; and Robert Bresson, op cit, p 26.

36 Ben Brewster, op cit, pp 46–47.

37 Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, pp 277–278.

38 See John Ellis, op cit.

39 Ben Brewster, op cit, p 49.

40 Richard Combs, op cit, p 69.

41 Barry King, op cit, p 29.

42 See John O Thompson, op cit, p 67.

43 Quoted in Simon Watney, 'Katherine Hepburn and Cinema of Chastisement', *Screen*, Sept–Oct 1985, vol 26 no 5, p 53; see also Watney's discussion of these issues, ibid, pp 53–56.

44 Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, p 132.

45 Ibid, p 242.

46 Peter Wollen, *Komar and Melamid*, exhibition catalogue, Edinburgh Fruitmarket Gallery, 1985, p 39.

47 Barry King, op cit, p 30.

48 Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, London, Verso, 1983, p 19.
49 See Robert H Hethmon (ed), *Strasberg at the Actor's Studio* (tape-recorded sessions), London, Jonathan Cape, 1966, pp 383–395.
50 See also Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, p 56: 'The actor Chaplin, incidentally, would in many ways come closer to the epic than to the dramatic theatre's requirements.'
51 See Pam Cook, review of *Revolution*, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1986, vol 53 no 626, pp 67–68, and Richard Combs, op cit, pp 68–70.
52 Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, p 95; and Walter Benjamin, op cit, p 11.

PART FOUR

CHARACTER AND TYPE

Introduction

Film actors have decried typecasting almost since the beginning of filmmaking. For instance, silent-film actress Louise Brooks viewed typecasting as a measure of Hollywood success but also as a limitation of the system: "I just didn't fit into the Hollywood scheme at all. I was never, neither a fluffy heroine, nor a wicked vamp, nor a woman of the world. I just didn't fit into any category . . . You see, I didn't interest them because I couldn't be typed" (Kobal 1986, 46). Where Brooks described type in terms of roles, classical British actor Eric Portman linked typing to stardom and the actor's personality. He wrote, "So, personality can make you a film star. Whether you are a film actor or not, will depend on your histrionic talent . . . Still, if you have only a little talent, and a lot of personality, you may succeed—as a type. This means you will always be cast for the same parts. Your film life will, then, not be a long one" (Cardullo *et al.* 1998, 97). Bringing home Portman's threat, silent-film star Mary Pickford, explaining why she left the screen, suggested the dangers of being successfully typecast:

> "I didn't want what happened to Chaplin to happen to me. When he discarded the little tramp, the little tramp turned around and killed him. The little girl made me. I wasn't waiting for the little girl to kill me. I'd already been pigeon-holed . . . I could have done more dramatic performances . . . but I was already typed."
>
> (Brownlow 1989, 135)

For these actors—and I could cite many more—typecasting represents commercial, mass-production instincts that are opposed to artistry and disenfranchise the actor who wishes to perform more complex roles.

However, while the assumption seems to be that typecasting is a sign of an actor's limitation, a concession to commercialism, and the antithesis of art and originality, we also expect actors to stick to type and often reject actors' efforts to play against type. As with typecasting, critics and audiences will frequently view an actor's efforts to play against type as evidence of the actor's lack of talent—because the actor is unconvincing in the new role—or as gross commercialism—insofar as the role is assigned to a money-making star rather than a better-suited but lesser-known actor. In line with this view, in the book *Starring John Wayne as Genghis Khan! Hollywood's*