

- Comedy" from *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 127–152. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.
- 10 Virginia Wright Wexman, "Masculinity in Crisis: Method Acting in Hollywood" from *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage and Hollywood Performance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 160–179. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.
- 11 Andrew Higson, "Film Acting and Independent Cinema" from *Screen* 27.3 (1986): 110–132.
- 12 Pamela Robertson Wojcik, "Typecasting," from *Criticism* 45, no. 2 (Spring 2003).
- 13 Donald Bogle, "The 1950s: Black Stars" from *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mummies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 159–183. © 1973, 1989, 1994, 2001 by Donald Bogle. Reprinted by permission of The Continuum International Publishing Group.
- 14 Rudolf Arnheim, "In Praise of Character Actors" from *Film Essays and Criticism*, translated by Brenda Benthien (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 52–54. Reprinted by permission of The University of Wisconsin Press.
- 15 David Thomson, "The Lives of Supporting Players" from *Film Comment* (Nov/Dec 1989), 32–34. Reprinted by permission of the author.
- 16 Patricia White, "Supporting Character: The Queer Career of Agnes Moorehead" from *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, edited by Corey Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 91–114. © 1995 by Duke University Press. Reprinted by permission of publisher.

Movie Acting,

The Film Reader

General Introduction

There is much popular discourse about stars and film roles—in film reviews, fan magazines, gossip, entertainment news programs, fashion magazines, biographies, autobiographies, and more. But despite the attention to actors, there is little popular discussion of *acting* in movies. Beyond stating that a particular performance is good or bad, most popular writing, including reviews and criticism, does not describe in any detail the specifics of what an actor does on screen in terms of physical or vocal technique, training, or theory of acting.

Until recently, acting has also been largely neglected in scholarly writing on film. While the actor is central to the majority of films made, and certainly to those feature films taught in undergraduate and graduate courses and enjoyed by the general public, academic film studies have tended to disregard discussions of film acting. This neglect can be seen in David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's *Film Art: An Introduction*—the bible of most introductory film courses taught in the US—which devotes a chapter each to film editing, cinematography, and sound, but only mentions acting in passing as an aspect of mise-en-scène, and then treats it largely as an issue of blocking, or moving the actor from one camera set-up to the next. Likewise, other introductory texts, such as Pam Cook and Mieke Berrink's *The Cinema Book* or Robert Kolker's *Film, Form, and Culture*, only touch on acting briefly, electing in the former to discuss on-screen performance solely in terms of the extratextual star text, or circulation of the star's image, and, in the latter to reductively state that "A performance is created by the film's structure, its mise-en-scène, and editing . . . film acting is part of the continuity style" (Kolker 2002, 78).

This neglect of acting can be attributed to several different causes. In part, acting has probably been marginalized within film studies precisely because of its seeming dominance within popular discourse on the movies. In addition, the tendency in popular discourse toward evaluative criticism in film reviews or internet discussions goes against the ethos of academic film criticism, which typically eschews qualitative judgments of films in favor of ideological or formalist critique.

In addition, film acting can seem transparent and resistant to description or analysis. First, it can be very difficult to describe acting—to characterize what an actor does with his or her hands, voice, or smile. Though most of us feel we know a good performance from a bad, few of us can articulate exactly what an actor does to create a performance; we are either convinced by it or not. Second, because much film acting—at least in Hollywood—tends to favor "invisible"

naturalistic styles, and because Hollywood acting generally occurs within the star system, film acting is often perceived as not being acting at all. As Leo Braudy writes, "[S]tage acting is still popularly considered to be superior to film acting. An actor who does a good job disappears into his role, while the bad (read 'film') actor is only playing himself" (Braudy 1999, 423). Thus, since performance and persona are seen as inseparable, descriptions of acting in film tend to be descriptions of an actor's persona across a body of work, or an analysis of type, rather than close descriptions of individual performances.

Moreover, within film studies there has been a bias against the more theatrical elements of film and a tendency to focus on the distinctively cinematographic. On the one hand, despite the fact that film acting differs markedly from acting in theater—precisely because of its dependence on specifically cinematic techniques of editing, framing, etc.—acting has been lumped together with other "theatrical" aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, such as sets, costumes, make-up, and lighting. Paradoxically, on the other hand, film acting has been seen as merely an effect of cinematic technique. In other words, while the actor is viewed as part of the *mise-en-scène*, and linked to theatrical components, his or her performance is viewed as an effect of framing, sound, and, in particular, editing—a composite created during post-production. These contradictory views contribute to the perception that film acting isn't really acting.

Acting in early film theory

These views of film acting as simultaneously "invisible," an aspect of *mise-en-scène*, and largely an effect of editing have their roots in early film theory. Initially, as Charles Musser points out, when films were first made, there was not yet a category of the film actor. Early cinema has been famously described by Tom Gunning as a "cinema of attractions" linked to novelties, amusements, and modes of display and spectacle, rather than narrative. Early film included actors from theater and vaudeville, entertainers from the circus, boxers, dancers, and non-actors caught in actualities or put on screen for staged events (Musser 1987; Musser 1990, 3; Gunning 1990). Rather than acting, their activity on film was understood as a form of modeling, or posing (DeCordova 1990, 34ff.). Even as film narrative developed and the category of the film actor and then the star came into being, theorists felt a strong need to distinguish the categories of stage acting and film acting.

For instance, in his 1916 *The Film: A Psychological Study*, Hugo Münsterberg distinguishes between film and theater by citing film's ability to transcend the limitations of real time and space, and thus create forms that mirror internal mental processes rather than objective reality: "[T]he photoplay tells us the human story by overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely space, time and causality, and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely attention, memory, imagination, and emotion" (Münsterberg 1970, 74). For Münsterberg, much of the appeal of cinema rests in its ability to manipulate objective reality through framing and editing techniques such as flashbacks, which function like memory, or crosscutting, which allows for a division of interest, or the close-up, which focuses attention. With respect to film acting, Münsterberg claims both that the photoplay is "further away from physical reality" than the stage drama and that the film actor "stands nearer to life" than the stage actor (Münsterberg 1970, 75–76). This seeming inconsistency depends upon two claims about film acting. On the one hand, Münsterberg emphasizes that film distances us from the body of the actor through photography and editing; and thus flattens reality and "sacrifices . . . the space

values of the real theater" (Münsterberg 1970, 77). On the other hand, he suggests that, due to techniques like close-ups, film acting can be less external than stage acting—the actor employs smaller gestures—and thus more naturalistic and transparent.

Though writing after the advent of sound, in his *Theory of the Film*, Béla Balázs evinces a preference for silent cinema over sound film because he views silent cinema as being at a further remove from mere recorded reality than sound film. Similar to Münsterberg, he celebrates early film's difference from theater and views film's ability to show details in close-up as allowing a greater range of expression. As a result, he privileges small facial expressions and "mute expression" as the essence of film acting:

The film first made possible what, for lack of better description, I call the "polyphonic" play of features. By it I mean the appearance on the same face of contradictory expressions . . . In the silent film, facial expression, isolated from its surroundings, seemed to penetrate to a strange new dimension of the soul. It revealed to us a new world—the world of microphysiognomy which could not otherwise be seen with the naked eye or in everyday life . . . The silent film has here brought an attempt to present a drama of the spirit closer to realization than any stage play has ever been able to do. (Balázs 1952, 64–65, 73)

Balázs attributes much of the power of film acting to the close-up, and seems at times to suggest that the close-up enables access to some unmediated truth: "However disciplined and practically hypocritical a face may be, in the enlarging close-up we see even that it is concealing something, that it is looking a lie" (Balázs 1952, 62). While the "lie" of a close-up requires an extremely subtle performance—an actor conveying two or more emotions simultaneously—Balázs' description of the "polyphonic play of features" relegates much of the power of this performance to framing and editing techniques that show the "secret language of dumb things" (Balázs 1952, 47).

In a different vein, Walter Benjamin also highlights the difference between film acting and stage acting in his famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin emphasizes the fragmentary nature of film acting as opposed to stage acting insofar as the performance is "composed of many separate performances," filmed out of sequence, filmed from varying angles, and selectively edited, so that the film "need not respect the performance as an integral whole." In addition, Benjamin furthers Münsterberg's claim about the film actor's lack of presence as a defining characteristic. He argues that because the film actor's performance is mechanically reproduced—and not presented live and in person—both the actor and the audience relate differently to the performance. The film actor cannot adjust his performance to the audience; it exists without him as an inorganic mechanically reproduced record of multiple fragmentary performances, and is neither changeable nor interactive. Thus, the audience can subject the film actor's performance to "tests" from a critical distance rather than be absorbed by the "aura" of the actor or the character he portrays. And, most importantly for later Marxist and psychoanalytic theories of identification, Benjamin states, "the audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera" (Benjamin 1969, 230, 228). In other words, without the live presence of an actor, film viewers identify with the eye of the camera that records the performance rather than the performance itself.

Each of these early theorists perceive film acting as different in kind from stage acting, and suggest that film acting is inseparable from film editing and framing. Münsterberg and Balázs view the effects of close-ups and other cinematic techniques as providing greater access to

character interiority, and allowing more subtle gestures than stage acting. By extension, they suggest that performances on film allow for greater possibilities for identification. By contrast, Benjamin suggests that the destruction of the aura in mechanical reproduction allows the viewer a more distracted and potentially critical view. In each case, it is the film's technique of showing the actor that influences the style of acting, and cinematic technique—whether framing, editing or, more broadly, mechanical reproduction—that seems to determine the effects of the performance. In these accounts, the role of the film actor is not easily distinguished from that of other props, or “dumb things” Balázs describes. Indeed, summing up this view in 1933, Rudolf Arnheim bluntly described the actor as a “stage prop chosen for its characteristics and . . . inserted at the proper place” (Arnheim 1933: 176).

Of course, the strongest proponents of this view of film actors as “props” can be found in Soviet film theory. Going beyond theorists who view cinematic effect as producing a different kind of effect from stage acting, Soviet directors actively promote a re-conceptualization of acting for film. Sergei Eisenstein, for instance, states:

The Moscow Art Theatre is my deadly enemy. 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 1969, 65)

Against naturalistic, Stanislavskian stage techniques, Soviet directors view proper cinematic acting as reliant on the Kuleshov effect and *typage*. The Kuleshov effect proffers the principle that, in the absence of an establishing shot, a viewer will infer a spatial relation between discrete shots. In other words, when presented with a series of shots, viewers assume or construct a relationship of space, time and/or narrative among them. The principle is based on the so-called Kuleshov experiment in which the Soviet theorist Lev Kuleshov took a single shot of an actor's “inexpressive” off-screen glance and intercut it with various objects—a plate of soup, a child playing, a coffin. According to Kuleshov, depending upon which shot was linked to the actor's face, viewers read wildly different emotions into his “inexpressive” glance (Kuleshov 1974: 200).¹ The Kuleshov effect clearly emphasizes the Soviet reliance on montage and implicitly denies the actor's power over his performance.

The theory of *typage* advocated by Kuleshov, Eisenstein, and Pudovkin eliminates the need for the trained actor altogether. Arguing that “real things in real surroundings constitute cinematographic material,” Kuleshov states that “imitating, pretending, playing are unprofitable, since this comes out poorly on screen” (Kuleshov 1974, 56, 63). For example, he relates, “If you need a tall, stout man, but your actor is thin, and you pad your thin actor with cushions, and the like . . . the results on screen will be obviously false, theatrical, a prop, a game.” Therefore, he claims:

Because film needs real material and not a pretense of reality—owing to this, it is not theater actors but “types” who should act in film—that is people who, in themselves, as they were born, constitute some kind of interest for cinematic treatment. That is, a person with an exterior of character, with a definite, brightly expressive appearance could be such a cinematic “type.”

(Kuleshov 1974, 6364)

Typage favors non-actors and “real” people over trained actors, and assumes that meaning and expression will be created contextually through juxtaposition of a physical type with other montage elements.² In fact, under the rules of *typage* the filmed non-actor may not even know what roles he plays. For instance, according to a famous Eisenstein anecdote, when he cast non-actors in *Ten Days*, “Everyone wanted to play the Bolsheviks and no one wanted to play the Mensheviks. . . . [So] we gave the actors the text of an inflammatory speech and they spoke it with great fervor. After this we added titles that said the exact opposite” (Eisenstein 1988, 198). The theory of *typage*, then, reduces acting to a specialized form of *typage* acting combined with editing and intertitles.³

The disappearance of the actor in formalist and Screen theory

While early film theory aims to describe or proscribe the essence of film acting, and distinguish it from stage acting, later film theories largely disregard the role of the actor altogether. In 1970s *auteur* theory, for instance, emphasis is placed on the director's world-view and acting is for the most part dismissed. In one of the most striking statements of the actor's irrelevance for the *auteur* theory, Peter Wollen refers to the actor's contribution, along with that of the producer and cameraman, as so much “noise”:

This concept of “noise” needs further elaboration. It is often said that a film is the result of a multiplicity of factors, the sum total of a number of different contributions. The contribution of the director—the “directional factor,” as it were—is only one of these, though perhaps the one which carries the most weight. I do not need to emphasize that this view is quite the contrary of the *auteur* theory and has nothing in common with it at all. What the *auteur* theory does is to take a group of films—the work of one director—and analyze their structure. Everything irrelevant to this, everything non-pertinent, is considered logically secondary, contingent, to be discarded. (Wollen 1969, 104)

Certainly, some *auteurs* might acknowledge the contribution of certain actors to a director's overall style or world-view—such as the role played by the ensemble of actors in Preston Sturges films or the distinction between Sturges's use of Joel McCrea and Eddie Bracken.⁴ But Wollen's characterization of acting as “irrelevant,” “secondary,” “contingent,” and “to be discarded” in *auteur* theory seems true to the tendency of most *auteurs* to ignore the collaborative role of actors in favor of asserting the director's shaping vision.

Genre theory, similarly, neglects acting. Rather than a focus on individual authors, such as directors or actors, or even individual films, genre theory examines broad trends among groups of films. As Rick Altman points out, on a textual level, these trends might be semantic, involving iconography, mise-en-scène, or character types; or syntactic, involving the organization of semantic elements in plot structures, ideology, or other deeper structures (Altman 1999). Certainly, modes of performance differ sufficiently among melodrama, the Western, comedy, *film noir*, and the musical to enable genre theorists to characterize acting style as a defining feature of genre; yet, for the most part, genre theorists have attended more to visual style, narrative structure, thematic opposition, and historical context than on performance. As a result,

differences in performance style have been conflated with differences among character types (contrasting the Western hero and the *film noir* hero, for instance) or structural elements (allowing that musicals require musical performance, whereas melodrama would by definition not include a musical number).⁵ The work that has been done on acting and genre has tended to focus on a few stars in certain genres, such as slapstick comedy, creating what Henry Jenkins and Kristine Brunovska Karnick refer to as a “cult of personality” around stars like Chaplin or Keaton, rather than provide an analysis of the acting conventions of a particular genre more generally (Jenkins and Karnick 1995: 149).⁶ There are exceptions, of course, but much work remains to be done on acting and genre.

As film theory shifted increasingly toward semiotic and then psychoanalytic models in what has come to be called *Screen* theory (named after the crucial journal site where much of the discussion took place), discussion of acting was subsumed into discussions of identification and the actor’s role was again largely conceived as an effect of framing and editing. Work by Christian Metz, Jean Louis Baudry, and others built on Benjamin’s claim that the viewer identifies with the camera as a mode of primary identification and only cited the actor as a feature of secondary identification, in his role as a character with whom the audience could identify. But psychoanalytic theory views identification as less an effect of performance, or even the particulars of a role, than of point-of-view shots, which create a relay for the viewer’s gaze within the film. Metz, for instance, claims that the spectator might identify with the character or even the actor, as an *other*, but, due to the imaginary status of the cinema, ultimately “the spectator identifies with himself, with himself as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as the condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject.”⁷ With its emphasis on suture, and the viewer’s identification with the camera, *Screen* theory treats the filmed human form as a textual place marker, a figure through whose eyes the viewer might situate himself or whose off-screen gaze conjures a lack, an empty space or absent person, to be fulfilled through editing.

Laura Mulvey’s famous intervention in the psychoanalytic debate around identification in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” served to remind us to take into account the gender of filmed bodies as sites of spectacle, narrative agency, and point-of-view shots (Mulvey 1974). But Mulvey’s interest in film performance was still focused on a character’s role in the narrative (active vs. passive) or moments of heightened performance, and especially musical numbers that would emphasize the female character’s to-be-looked-at-ness. Still, despite the fact that she did not discuss acting explicitly, Mulvey’s contribution is not to be overlooked: her analysis of the gender politics of performance and spectatorship underpin much contemporary work on acting and stardom.

The actor rediscovered

Since the 1970s, a few trends in film theory and criticism have challenged the precepts of *Screen* theory and opened the door to considerations of film acting. One of these has been the development of star studies within the broader rubric of cultural studies. Associated initially with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which was formed in 1964 as an intellectual center and a site of postgraduate research, cultural studies developed into a wide-ranging school of thought that was especially influential in Britain and America in the 1980s and 1990s. Cultural studies, as practiced at the Centre, was very influenced by British Marxist

and socialist theory, especially the work of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, and E. P. Thompson, all of whom viewed popular culture as an important and worthy object of study, particularly as a site of working-class struggle. Cultural studies views culture and popular culture not as something distinct but as part of everyday life, and including areas not previously considered culture like shopping, going to bars, and dating. In this, cultural studies is influenced by the semiotic strain of *Screen* theory, which views all aspects of life as sign systems, but rather than an emphasis on the text, cultural studies directs its interest in decoding signs and languages more strongly at the ways in which people use culture, how ideology functions, and how people resist ideology. Cultural studies tends, therefore, to address issues of reception and pleasure, and especially pleasure understood as resistant practice. Where *Screen* theory tended to ignore history or context, cultural studies embeds its analysis of cinema in cultural and historical contexts, to better understand cinema’s ideological function, negotiations, and contradictions.

Richard Dyer’s influential book *Stars* emerged out of the cultural studies framework and established the theoretical principles that have guided most studies of film stars to date. Dyer considers both the “sociological” and semiotic components of film stars, their status as social phenomenon, considered both at the levels of production and consumption, and their status as image and sign. Dyer defines the star’s image as a “structured polysemy, that is, the finite multiplicity of meanings and affects they embody and the attempt to structure them so that some meanings and affects are foregrounded and others are masked or displaced” (Dyer 1979, 3). His consideration of this “structured polysemy” attends not only to studio publicity and other deliberate attempts to produce the star image, but also to the extratextual circulation of the star image in fan magazines, photographs, scandal, gossip, and other modes of consumption and reception. While largely interested in the actor as icon or sign, Dyer includes performance as an aspect of how we read stars as signs, and offers some concrete descriptive parameters for analyzing acting on film. In addition, he considers the potential role of the actor as *auteur*, in cases where the star can be seen as the primary shaping vision behind a work, and suggests that star image and performance style need to be taken into account in any theory of authorship, insofar as texts tend to be constructed around the star’s image and fashioned by the star’s performance.

Since the publication of Dyer’s book, film studies and cultural studies have developed a deep and impressive body of work on the film star. However, star studies have not been inclined to deal extensively with acting *per se*. Star studies—including my own work in *Guiltly Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna*—are apt to focus on a star’s extratextual circulation, fandom, type, and ideological meaning without necessarily attending in any exact and descriptive way to what the actor does on screen to produce him or herself as a type, and without situating the actor in larger acting traditions. Most star studies will make some attempt at analyzing performance traits of an individual star; but rather than analyze individual performances in terms of acting style, these analyses tend to extract particular mannerisms or gestures that are repeated across a body of films as a feature of the star’s persona.

Rather than conventional theories of acting, most star studies have been influenced by performance studies as an interdisciplinary area of study. Performance studies developed in specific contrast to theater studies and more traditional discussions of acting; and tends, therefore, to discuss performance through anthropological and other theoretical models linked to everyday performance and ritual rather than offer concrete discussions of film acting or its theatrical predecessors.⁸ The notion of performance allows us to widen our conception of film acting to include not only traditional schools of acting, such as Stanislavskian or Method-based

styles, but also modes of performance from other media, such as radio, vaudeville, circus, or drag shows. Performance includes cultural codes of body language as well as unique gestures and mannerisms attributed to the individual actor's idiolect, or personal employment of body language and other sign systems. Thus, for instance, my analysis of Mae West does not include any discussion of conventional theories of acting, but does include discussion of West's borrowings from vaudeville, burlesque, female impersonation, and African-American musical styles, as well as descriptions of the subtle and utterly idiosyncratic gestures and intonations that make up the camp and ironic West idiolect.⁹

In addition to cultural studies and performance studies, another key turn in film theory that has generated new work on film acting has been a new historicism in film studies. At the height of *Screen* theory, there had been a sharp ideological divide between those practicing film theory and history, but a new generation of scholars emerged, concurrent with the rise of cultural studies, who brought history to bear on theory, and, likewise, brought theoretical perspectives to historical investigation. This new generation of scholars, including Tom Gunning, Miriam Hansen, André Gaudreault, Thomas Elsaesser, and Charles Musser, were well versed in *Screen* theory, but, like contemporary scholars associated with cultural studies, they questioned the elision of history in semiotic and psychoanalytic theory and the concomitant construction of a theoretical spectator, who was seen to be passively dominated by a hypnotic and all-powerful cinematic apparatus. Like cultural studies, the new theoretically informed historicism seeks to place film in its cultural and historical context, but where cultural studies tends to investigate contemporary practices and pleasures as sites of resistance, these historians look to earlier moments, including not only silent cinema but also earlier theorists like those associated with the Frankfurt School, to provide possible models of resistance and alternative practices.

This new historicism in film studies challenges developmental models of film history that reduce cinematic history to a series of "firsts" in an evolutionary march toward classical style. Scholars examine early cinema's aesthetics, modes of production, exhibition, and reception as offering alternatives, or roads not taken, rather than be viewed as "primitive;" failures or bumps along the road. In terms of acting, these newer histories aim to get past taken-for-granted ideas about silent cinema being dominated by "stilted" or theatrical acting that had to be overcome to achieve classical invisibility; and try instead to understand the technological and institutional reasons for the different style, and its aesthetic appeal. Offering particularly deep analysis of acting in the silent era, historicist approaches to acting—represented in this volume by the work of Charles Musser, Roberta Pearson, Lea Jacobs, and Ben Brewster—provide models for further scrutiny of different historical periods and national styles.

Issues and topics in acting

The combined influences of cultural studies, performance studies, and historicism in film theory have led to renewed interest in film acting, and there has in recent years been an increasing number of publications on film acting, including many books and essays represented here. While there has been increasing attention to acting and other aspects of performance, there is not yet a clearly defined field of study. First, although there is a great deal of work on acting, much of it occurs under various sub-fields of film studies, such as star studies, queer theory, race and ethnicity studies, histories of silent film, performance studies, and interdisciplinary studies of the relationship between theater and film, as well as more conventional theories of acting. These

various sub-fields are not always pitched to the same audiences and are not always read in conjunction with each other. Thus, taking examples from this anthology, a reader interested in D.W. Griffith or the history of silent cinema may read Roberta Pearson's book *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films*, but may not be aware of Patricia White's insightful comments on character acting in her book *Unhitched: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability*; and a reader interested in theories of acting may look at James Naremore's *Acting in the Cinema* but may not consider Donald Bogle's work on African-American stereotypes in *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* to be relevant for a discussion of acting.

In addition, and related to the dispersal of ideas described above, studies of film acting have not themselves been theorized in the way that, for example, genre studies have. While discussions of acting inevitably invoke various theories of acting, such as the principles of Stanislavski or Delsarte, scholars of acting do not typically reflect upon their own practice to ask "What constitutes the field of study of acting?" or "What do we talk about when we talk about acting?" Just as genre theory has benefited from reflecting upon its own practice, to clarify what constitutes genre and genre theory, studies of acting would benefit from a consideration of the field of study, not least to help underscore how wide-ranging our conception of acting might be.

In sorting a field of study, one could approach the topic from many angles. We could, for instance, consider which topics and issues in acting stem from other more clearly defined fields of study, such as genre, authorship, stardom, and history. Alternately, we could attempt to categorize the work already done on acting to determine what issues and topics have arisen. But it seems to me that in order to capture the variety and distinctness of acting as a field of study, it is necessary to consider the questions that have not yet been asked as well as those that have, and not to limit those questions to areas of study with which we are already familiar. In what follows, I have attempted to tentatively raise questions that seem to me to be key to understanding acting. I have grouped these into five large issues: *ontological questions*, *stylistic questions*, *questions of authorship*, *historical questions*, and *ideological questions*. Some of these questions overlap with other areas of study, some have been covered in previous film writing, and some may suggest areas of study for future scholarship. There is some repetition among categories and there are likely to be gaps and omissions.

1 *Ontological questions*. This cluster of questions relates to many of the questions raised by early film theory and includes additional questions about the status and meaning of film acting today. Broadly, under this rubric, we could ask, "What constitutes film acting?" How is film acting different from stage acting? To what degree is film acting a function of what an actor does with his voice, face and body and to what degree is it technologically determined? What are the specifically cinematic components of acting? How do editing, framing, and sound effect or produce film performance? What exceeds the cinematic? To what degree does an actor's technique or idiolect shape the film experience? When and how can aspects of persona and performance outweigh the function of close-ups and other cinematic techniques? To what degree do extratextual factors affect film performance? Is film acting inseparable from conceptions of stardom and type?

2 *Stylistic questions*. This category aims to consider specific modes of acting in films rather than ontological questions about the meaning of acting. Questions here all fall under the larger question of "What are the differences among acting styles?" What, for instance, constitutes realism? How have concepts of realism been altered by historically changing tastes? How does

phantomime differ from melodramatic gesture? How do we appreciate the difference between Stanislavskian realism and Method-based realism when looking externally at performances? What non-realist modes have been employed in film? What are the differences in performance style for various genres? Is there a particular mode of acting employed for *film noir* vs. the Western? Should we consider the requirements of special effects in action sequences as part of an acting style? Can musical performance or martial arts be considered acting? What differences are there in performance style among different national traditions? Is there a different style of acting in Bollywood vs. Hollywood or France vs. Japan? How do we categorize an actor's individual idiolect? What differences are there in the style of acting employed by character actors vs. stars? Do actors in ensemble pieces act differently than actors in more hierarchical films? How does film acting change when film styles change? For instance, is 1970s acting different from acting in the 1950s or 1990s?

3 *Questions of authorship.* This category builds on *auteurist* approaches as well as star studies to ask, "Who is responsible for a film performance?" To what degree does a star function as author? If films are star vehicles, who is driving the car? To what degree do ensembles, such as those associated with Preston Sturges, John Cassavetes, or Paul Thomas Anderson, function as authors? To what degree do directors shape performances? To what degree should cameramen, editors, sound designers, or lighting technicians be said to create a performance? How important is casting and the role of the casting director? How did the shift from the studio system to producer package deals affect film performance? What effect do extratextual materials, such as gossip or scandal, have on our understanding of a film performance? To what degree is a film text modified by extra-cinematic practices of fandom such as imitation, copying, and consumption (Stacey 1994)?

4 *Historical questions.* This very broad category would include questions about various historical contexts through which acting is produced and received. Looking at various histories, such as histories of technology, institutional histories, labor history, art history, world history, and more, we would ask, "How have historical changes altered film acting?" In thinking about technology, for example, we might ask how changing technologies, such as digital imaging, have affected film acting (even eliminating the need for it in *The Hulk* or the role of the Collum in *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*). How did acting alter in its transition from live theater to silent cinema, and from silent cinema to sound film? How does ADR (automatic dialogue replacement) affect performance? Alternately, we could consider how institutional shifts in the industry have altered performance. How, for example, have actor contracts changed since the demise of the classical studio system? What are the effects of globalization on film performance? What are the influences of different national traditions on each other in multinational productions? Has there been a loss of national cultural specificity in performance with the globalization of film stars from Hong Kong or Australia? Or, in terms of art history, we might ask how film acting has been influenced by postmodern aesthetics. Was there such a thing as Pop acting? Is there a modernist performance style?

5 *Ideological questions.* Though ideological questions lurk in all these categories, here the emphasis is primarily on the ideological effects of film acting. Under this category, we would ask, "What does film acting mean?" What is the value of film acting? What values do we attach to acting and actors? How does film acting reflect or alter our ideas about human identity? How do actors and acting reflect or modify our perception of love and other human relationships? Should the demographics of film casts reflect the demographics of society? How have filmic representations of race, sexuality and gender shaped our understanding of

persons and politics in the real world? How do stars reflect, contradict or negotiate dominant ideologies? Do alternative reception practices, such as camp or cult fandom, constitute resistance to the dominant ideology? Are different acting styles, or different conceptions of realism, produced by ideological shifts in the culture?

As these questions—which are by no means exhaustive—suggest, the possible field of study for film acting is enormous. Some of these questions may seem to exceed the boundaries of what is conventionally considered film acting. My point in raising such wide-ranging questions is that, as long as we are talking about films made with human bodies and/or voices, film acting is central to most questions we would ask about film. At a minimum, we should recognize that film acting touches upon numerous areas of inquiry and provides a means of exploring areas such as technological change, genre, and institutional history, from a new perspective.

Contents of the book

The essays collected here respond in various ways to many, though not all, of these questions. Some essays are influenced by cultural studies, performance studies, and historicism. Others represent relatively rare discussions of acting in formalist, ontological, or popular discussions of film. The first section of the book, "Ontology of the Film Actor," includes essays that take up the question, "What constitutes film acting?" In different ways, these essays address the ways and degree to which film acting differs from stage acting: how film acting is shaped by cinematic techniques such as framing, editing, and sound; the meaning and function of type; and the role of the star as constitutive of certain kinds of filmmaking and of our understanding of film texts. The next section, "The Creation of the Film Actor," takes an historical approach to the question of what constitutes an actor. The essays here offer detailed analysis of the construction of film acting as a profession and mode of performance from the silent era into the classical studio era; and include institutional and aesthetic history. The section on "Style and Technique" examines four distinct styles of performance—the work of silent star Lillian Gish in the film melodramas of D. W. Griffith; generic modes of performance in early sound comedy; Method acting in 1950s cinema, especially Marlon Brando's role in *On the Waterfront*; and non-realist performance modes in independent cinema. The final section, "Character and Type," emphasizes the ways in which acting both reflects and is constitutive of ideas about identity, and offers historical and textual investigations of type and typecasting not only in the work of stars, including African-American stars, but also in the work of character actors.

This book does not include essays by key theorists of acting such as Kuleshov, Pudovkin, Brecht, Stanislavski, or Strasberg. This deficiency, in part, reflects a deliberate choice on my part to include essays that offer theoretically and historically informed descriptions of actual film performances and practices, rather than proscriptive ideals. In addition, I decided not to include them because I felt that these essays are already relatively well known and have been published in numerous other places. And, furthermore, many of these theories and ideas are discussed in some detail throughout the book in individual essays.

Readers may be disappointed to discover that the essays here do not, for the most part, deal with acting styles in countries other than America. This bias is an unintended product of editorial choices that, to a degree, reflect the partiality of published scholarly work on acting. Ideally, this narrow focus allows one to consider changing conceptions of acting in the American context.

Of course, in neglecting other national traditions, such as Japanese or Indian cinema, the book misses out on investigating different approaches to film and cross-cultural comparisons of acting styles and theories. Similarly, the essays here predominantly apply to film acting from the silent era through the classical period and do not address the ways in which film acting has changed in post-classical and postmodern cinema. And, other than one essay on African-American stars, the essays here do not address issues of race, ethnicity, multiculturalism, or colonialism. It is my hope that this collection inspires future work on acting in these and other areas.

These gaps aside, this collection offers wide-ranging, perceptive, and informative essays on film acting. Offering varied approaches and a broad mixture of subjects, they provide a fascinating glimpse of how far-reaching and varied discussions of film acting can be. Taken together, they offer students and others interested in film acting an overview of key issues and topics in the history of film acting, as well as nicely detailed analyses of specific actors, roles, styles, and practices. As all of these essays demonstrate, film acting is no longer a topic to be neglected.

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Notes

- 1 There is some dispute as to whether the Kuleshov experiment actually took place. At a minimum, Pudovkin, who worked together with Kuleshov on it, disagrees about the content of the shots. The original footage does not exist and there is no evidence that it was shown to a naive audience. See Holland 1989 and Kepley 1986.
- 2 While Soviet theorists argued for a particular style of acting suited to one conception of realism, much Hollywood lore about acting unwittingly adopts a similar view of the actor's role. In the perhaps apocryphal tale of Spencer Tracy's advice to a young actor—"Just say your lines and don't bump into the furniture"—or in accounts of actors being told to make a gesture or walk in a certain direction without being told why, one can hear traces of Soviet theory and the idea that what constitutes acting on screen in as much an effect of cinematic technique and post-production as it is what the actor himself does.
- 3 For more on *typage* and *typecasting*, see my essay "Typecasting" in this volume.
- 4 For an *auteurist* analysis of romantic comedy that takes into account the unique contributions of individual actors and performances as well as the guiding vision of the director, see Harvey 1987.
- 5 On the exclusion of performance from the field of genre study, see DeCordova 1995.
- 6 Karnick and Jenkins's anthology does include a sub-section on performance, and includes chapters not only on stars such as Mae West and Buster Keaton, but also on early slapstick. Jenkins's book, *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* also provides an important contribution to the study of genre and performance, and portions are reprinted in this volume.
- 7 See Metz 1977, 49; Jean Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus," and "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," in Baudry and Cohen 1999, 345–355 and 760–777. See also the following essays on suture in

- 8 Braudy and Cohen 1999, 118–164; Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor Code of Classical Cinema," William Rothman "Against 'The System of the Suture,'" Raja Sikerman "On Suture," and Nick Browne, "The Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of *Siggecoach*." The concept of suture emphasizes that the viewer is situated in a film and made to forget the cuts and negations that are inherent to film through continuity editing, and especially through shot-reverse shots and point-of-view shots.
- 9 Key original texts for performance studies include Goffman 1959 and Turner 1988.
- 10 Other studies of West that address these issues include Curry 1996, Hamilton 1995, and Leider 2000.