Taylor, Aaron; MacArthur, Douglas; Sadr, Javid

Doing the work: embodied cognition, ecological psychology, and screen actor training

Theatralia. 2025, vol. 28, iss. 1, pp. 63-84

ISSN 1803-845X (print); ISSN 2336-4548 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): https://doi.org/10.5817/TY2025-1-4
Stable URL (handle): https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.82053

[**Theatralia** 28 / 2025 / **1** (63—84)]
https://doi.org/10.5817/TY2025-1-4

Doing the Work: Embodied Cognition, Ecological Psychology, and Screen Actor Training

Aaron Taylor, Douglas MacArthur, and Javid Sadr

Abstract

Regarding acting and its training as a situated activity, best apprehended through an ecological, embodied focus on mutually constitutive interactions between the actor's mind, body, and performance environment, in this work we formally examine the development of undergraduate actors' performative skills – and requisite mental and physical resources – within an undergraduate pedagogical training program in screen acting. In meeting the actor's basic responsibility – the achievement of performative reality effects – successful actors must concretely demonstrate several core competencies based on situation-specific, task-oriented activities – demonstrable skills amenable to practical instruction and assessment within the classroom as well as to theoretical scrutiny from a pragmatic psychological perspective. Our interdisciplinary research program details the instruction and acquisition of a core set of aptitudes essential to the screen actor's successful engagement with the constraints and opportunities of a demanding, medium-specific production environment.

Key words

craft discourse, ecological psychology, embodied cognition, reality effects, screen acting pedagogy

> Asking 'How do I prepare a scene?' is quite different from training. But how do you train an actor? We used to have these big conflicts: 'Do you work from the inside or outside?' etc. But the mind/body split is a philosophical error. I think a lot of actor training is based on somewhat faulty assumptions of how the human being works.
>
> (DAVIS 2016)

How might professional performance training in a post-secondary Drama programme contribute to a burgeoning actor's ability to meet the intensive demands of a professional film or television shoot? Actors are expected to mobilise their learned abilities to negotiate complex social relationships, technical constraints, task demands, script requirements, and affective contexts interactively to craft plausible human behaviour. Indeed, it is through their efforts to contend with these expectations that their achievement of verisimilitude is accomplished. But these necessary exertions entail a problem of their own. In Sandra Oh's words 'You don't want to be balancing these tasks at all! If you've trained, then [...] like an athlete [...] you just need to step into the flow' (OH 2016). But what abilities must a screen actor acquire to meet these paradoxical demands, and how might they be acquired? Performance training programs abound, from the most modest of certificate-granting endeavours to the most demanding of conservatory models. And yet very little scholarly research accounts for the extent to which instructional methods might achieve their desired results, nor what kinds of aptitudes allow them to work in the first place.

It is our contention that it is, in fact, possible to formally and empirically examine, in both theoretical and practical terms, how developing actors' mental and physical resources are employed *in situ*. Despite claims that labelling a performance as 'good' is merely a subjective judgment, we assert that successful actors must concretely demonstrate several core competencies based on situation-specific, task-oriented activities, much like other forms of practiced, skilled labour, including athletics, musicianship, and artisanal craft (see UTTERBACK 2016). Therefore, competent acting is, in fact, discernible and should be confirmable via the more or less consistent, accurate assessment of demonstrable skills.

Consequently, by way of a case study of an undergraduate course on screen acting offered through the University of Lethbridge's BFA Drama programme, we will discuss how performance training aids student actors' ability to cultivate the specific mind-body interactions required in a film or television production. In considering the exemplary tactics by Douglas McArthur in his senior-level Acting for the Camera course, we will examine a set of directly relevant exercises amenable to observation, analysis, and evaluation, each tied to specific pedagogical themes of actorly skill and aptitudes. Further, we assert that the acquisition of essential actorly resources is best apprehended through a focus on the mutually constitutive interactions between mind, body, and environment specific to screen acting. And while the thrust of our study focuses on screen acting pedagogy, the methods discussed here are bolstered by extensive, analogous theatrical practice and theory (cited throughout as well as taught

to students within our BFA Drama program), and should therefore be of considerable interest to teachers of screen and theatre acting alike.

Reality effects: screen acting, embodied cognition, and ecological psychology

Following the so-called 'cognitive turn' that arguably emerged in the late 1990s (HART 2006), Theatre Studies is steadily advancing considerations of how the cognitive sciences might be incorporated programmatically into acting training programs (see BLAIR 2008; BLOCH 2017; LUTTERBIE 2011; KEMP 2012; KEMP and MCCONACHIE 2018; MCCONACHIE and HART 2006). Comparably, Cinema and Media Studies has been slower on the uptake. Although occasional references have been made to these reciprocal interactions (see DELBRIDGE 2012), there have been little concentrated attempts to explain the activity of *screen* actors empirically through the lenses of *embodied cognition* and *ecological psychology*. In particular, for example, Gibson's (1979) approach to ecological psychology emphasises the direct, reciprocal, sensorimotor interactions between organisms and their environment, in concrete and tractable terms, while deemphasising more abstract and presumptive forms of intervening cognitive representations and processes.

Informed by core tenets of ecological psychology, we advocate, then, for the exploration of the 'action possibilities' within an actor's environment – the structure and features of the production environment that prompt, enable, and constrain the actor's expressive action (GIBSON 1979: 127). In addition, we posit screen acting as a *situated activity* – a form of highly specified, pragmatic, and relational behaviour interacting with a particularised production environment, and thus requiring a particular type of embodied cognition. Thus, we assert that actors' mental activity 'is grounded in the physical characteristics, inherited abilities, practical activity, and environment of thinking agents' (ANDERSON 2003: 126). Through these complementary psychological paradigms, we will address the acquisition of a core set of aptitudes essential to a screen actor's successful engagement with the affordances, constraints, and demands of a medium-specific production environment. We will demonstrate how these principles are tacitly adopted within the pedagogical methods and learning objectives adopted by MacArthur. Such grounding will be supplemented by reflective testimony drawn from a corpus of structured interviews we conducted with fourteen professional actors in 2016, as well as other recorded claims made by contemporary screen actors about their own working methods. Thus, we connect pedagogy to comparable practice (i.e., *craft discourse*) in a manner that gives mutually reinforcing explanatory credence to theory and praxis.

Unlike other cognitive media theorists interested in the narratological construction of and corresponding audience engagement with *characters* (SMITH 1995; PLANTINGA 2009), our focus, instead is on the expressive activity and training of screen actors – for whom characterisation is but one of a number of essential creative tasks.

Apprehending what screen acting is, ontologically and categorically speaking, is best understood by appreciating what screen actors (must know how to) *do*. We assert that screen actors train to acquire the mental abilities, physical skills, and emotional aptitudes necessary to meet their basic responsibility: the achievement of performative *reality effects*. These are the essential means by which actors allow us to apprehend the characters they portray – an achievement measured by the degree of plausibility with which an actor instantiates a character.

To be clear, of course, our interest throughout remains focused on forms and traditions of acting concerned with such verisimilitude and reality effects, as compared to a number of differing genre, Eastern, and avant-garde aesthetics and approaches. Correspondingly, our supporting testimonial statements are drawn from the corpus of interviews we recently conducted and from currently working professional actors. For a consideration of performance training in other historical or cultural contexts, noteworthy examples of research on evolving screen acting styles and their institutional origins include: the development of 'modern acting' in the studio era (BARON 2016); the influence of *noh* and *kabuki* on mid-century Japanese screen actors (BARON and CARNICKE 2008: 141–157); the influence of 'pictorial' stage acting on early film actors (BREWSTER and JACOBS 1997: 99–110); the cultivation of 'performance signs' across formats and media throughout 20th century early screen acting (DYER 1998: 130–134; SPRINGER and LEVINSON 2015); screen actors' adaptations to digital technologies (AITA 2012); the evolution of (and consistencies within) 'rhetoric and expressive technique' from late 19th century stage melodrama to classical screen realism and expressionism (NAREMORE 1988: 68–82); the integration of 'histrionic' and 'verisimilar' codes in the 1910s by the actors in D. W. Griffith's Biograph company (PEARSON 1992: 38–52); the sonic techniques necessary for sound acting (SERGI 1999); as well as the training methods adopted by early Soviet-era film programmes (KULESHOV 1991; PUDOVKIN 1968; HEDBERG OLENINA 2020: 105–174). Likewise, our primary interest here is in performance pedagogy, and thus our work is also distinct from the tendency in media studies research to emphasise close, formal analysis of actors' creative labour rather than its acquisition (e.g., AFFRON 1977; BARON and CARNICKE 2008; KLEVAN 2005; NAREMORE 1988; POMERANCE 2016, 2019, etc.).

As one relevant acting manual puts it then, '*believability* is [...] the foundation of the actor's craft' (O'BRIEN 1983: 129), and our own interview participants unanimously concurred – one actor succinctly asserting 'that the whole point of film acting is to act natural [...], to seem very plausible and very real' (ANONYMOUS 2016). Indeed, such craft discourse continually emphasises that all performance necessarily adheres to the dictates of verisimilitude to some extent. However, when we employ the terms 'believability' and 'plausibility', it is not to suggest that all screen performances are inherently 'realistic'. Indeed, realism is, principally, a style. In realist productions, a diegesis (a 'virtual world') is at least partly constructed via an actor's manipulation of embodied, material reality (the 'actual world'), but in a manner that occludes this manipulation through the actor's use of 'familiar, quotidian gestures,' resulting

in 'the otherwise "opaque" actor's craft now seeming "transparent"' (BARON and CARNICKE 2008: 181).

Instead, we make the more rudimentary assertion that an actor's most basic task is to create the illusion of otherness, convincing viewers that s/he embodies someone whom s/he is not. No matter how fantastical the actor's representation, we must attend to the crafting of *semblance*: the outward appearance of a character. Engaging in an act of virtual partnership with a performer, our agreement to participate in the performance's game of semblance completes the illusion the actor instantiates. Semblance's centrality to the achievement of reality effects is at the heart of any number of canonical, essentialist definitions of acting (see KIRBY 1972: 3; ROZIK 2002: 123). Little wonder that honorifics such as 'natural', 'genuine', and/or 'authentic', are employed so frequently in craft discourse as well as in ordinary language, and that the mimetic imperative is so often baked into the most influential of performance training methods. Pedagogically speaking, this 'realist paradigm' is the throughline running from Stanislavsky to Meisner to Hagen to Adler to Strasberg. And we can take note of the institutionalisation of this paradigm in the 1930s and 1940s via the emerging, predominant American screen acting training programs – both 'Modern' (e.g., the Actor's Laboratory) and 'Method' (e.g., the Actor's Studio) – with their shared emphasis on 'truthful' performance (BARON 2016: 48–55).

Crucial to the matter at hand is the consideration of the labour required to produce these reality effects. These effects are the byproduct of *involuntary*, *non-deliberative*, and/or *automated (i.e., 'effortless') expressive action*. We advance from a uniform premise of performance studies: that actorly verisimilitude is a byproduct of performers' exacting labour (see BARON 1999: 41–43; CARNICKE 2006: 21–22; MCDONALD 2004: 23–26; WEXMAN 1997: 160–161). The achievement of a reality effect arises from the considerable skill and effort on the part of the performer, who studiously labours to pull off the paradoxical illusion of 'acting naturally'. Interestingly, the camera's act of mediation permits us to recognise when performed behaviour is at its most 'genuine' – a condition of production frequently remarked upon by numerous practitioners (see CAINE 1997: 8). Conversely, an 'inauthentic' performance seems to be the product of affected labour. That is, it is the actor's *efforts* that are discernible rather than the illusion of unmediated figural presence.

The most intuitive way to grasp effort's salience is to invoke ordinary language references to 'inauthentic' performance – i.e., an actor's failure to achieve requisite reality effects. The preoccupation with 'bad' acting arises in craft discourse and is employed by the layperson via evaluative terms such as 'faking', 'lying', 'deception', and/or 'pretending'. The bad actor is said to have fallen 'out of character', which is to say they have been 'caught acting': disconnecting from the perceived authenticity of the virtual world they have been working to help create. Such uncoupling can occur when their 'transparent' acting becomes (unacceptably) 'opaque' – when their onscreen behaviour unintentionally seems like the product of affected labour. Again, this is not a tacit realist imperative: even a Brechtian alienation effect can be clumsily executed. The most adamantly anti-realist of actors still practice, rehearse, and employ cultivated

skillsets to expose the opacity of their constructed and deliberate performance choices. In short, the actor's efforts (as such) become discernible rather than the illusion of unmediated figural presence.

Acting for the camera: the basics

Turning now to the 'Acting for the Camera' class under consideration – a course for twelve students at an advanced stage of their degree progress – we will take note of how students' developing aptitudes are evaluated through structured performance exercises. Each exercise has either been created by MacArthur and/or has been adapted from a handful of other prominent actor training guides (see BARR 1997; SKAGEN 2016; TUCKER 2023). It should be noted that this training is also intrinsically grounded within several canonical theories and practices within Theatre Studies. The course is situated within a broader BFA Dramatic Arts program, and the screen acting training methods discussed have also evolved from several core, canonical theories of stage acting as schematised by notable practitioners. Instrumental to the training methods we address will be certain landmark principles developed by Konstantin Stanislavsky (1989), Uta Hagen (1973), and David Rotenberg (2021) that have migrated into the course and have proved conducive to preparing Drama students for performative work in a different medium.

More broadly, we assert that the extrapolated learning objectives not only hold true for any screen acting training course; they have important explanatory utility. The achievement of actorly reality effects is only possible through the successful acquisition of seven essential (and observable) skills: (1) knowing one's onscreen self; (2) crafting the reality of a scene's environment; (3) scaling one's performance; (4) personalising a text; (5) responsiveness to direction; (6) receptivity and presence; and (7) emotional availability. Each skill and the corresponding training methods used to impart them will be reviewed in turn, beginning with the first three 'basic' skills before moving to the remaining 'advanced' skills. Simultaneously, this craft discourse will be aligned with canonical research findings within studies on embodied cognition and ecological psychology.

1. Knowing your onscreen self

Acting manuals invariably remark upon the professional exigencies that require actors to have a thoroughgoing understanding of their own 'sell' and/or 'brand', which is essential for their procurement of apposite work (SKAGEN 2016: 37–39, 69–72; TUCKER 2023: 91–105). Refining terminology adopted by Skagen in his own workshops, MacArthur prompts students to distinguish between their physiognomic *silhouettes* (their physical appearance and the associations it is likely to generate amongst viewers) and their commodifiable *essence* (their distinctive personal 'brand' they mo-

nopolistically possess). Consequently, the learning objectives of this initial unit are for the student actors to:

(1) identify and develop a personal *'hit'* – i.e., a malleable screen presence predicated upon their own self-image – that affords them a suitable performative range (ROTENBERG 2021: 113–122), and...
(2) ...refine this hit via evolving expressive shifts prompted by real-time input from their instructor and peers.

In so doing, students come to recognise potential disjunctions and correspondences between their own self-perception and others' perception of their irreducible physicality.

The Skagen-derived exercise is dubbed *face-the-face*. Students stand in front of their peers, initially framed in medium closeup (which has proved most conducive to registering an actor's 'hit') and are simultaneously projected on a nearby monitor. To help a student overcome their initial wariness (especially for the more camera-shy), they might be prompted to tell a personal story (i.e., deliver basic, impromptu biographical details) or deliver a cold read of a random, neutral text (e.g., a magazine ad or news report). After the actor's classmates studiously register their peer's image, they identify performers, characters, or types their peer's countenance calls to mind. The student then expressively responds to these real time associations: they might shift their mien and test out expressive possibilities based on the proffered suggestions. In turn, their peers modify or build upon their initial associations. For homework, students subsequently review their own recorded exercise, view various scenes of other performers that resonate with their hit (being mindful of avoiding tendencies toward mimicry), and journal accordingly.

These exercises begin to train student actors to see themselves as viewers might, both in a literal, visual sense (e.g., in favour of what the camera and audience actually see, discarding one's familiar reversed/reflected self-image from a lifetime of mirrors and artificially flipped 'selfie' photographs; MITA et al. 1977) and in a social-perceptual, attributional sense (e.g., redirecting one's focus to others' external interpretations of one's actions, countering the typical actor/observer effect of reflexively producing superficial character judgments of others, from their observed actions, while attributing one's own behaviour to complex situational explanations; JONES and NISBETT 1972).

2. Crafting the reality of a scene's environment

Actors do not just help develop the diegesis' virtual reality by generating characters; they actively help to define its spatio-temporal parameters. In a sense, this responsibility is the most 'technical' of an actor's obligations, but it is still couched within other dramatic requirements discussed later (e.g., the need for the student actor to

be 'present' and in 'the moment,' etc.) Primarily, actors must ensure that they remain within the frame, focus, and demarcated lighting range. They must also aid the development of a viewer's sense of spatially – our ability to straightforwardly understand onscreen/offscreen dynamics (i.e., apprehend the location of out-of-frame objects and subjects across sequential time). In addition, they are tasked with using props in a manner that signals context simply (particularly in closeups which can be devoid of extensive environmental information), and help preserve continuity between shots. The actor's ultimate goals, then, are (1) to help audience apprehend the spatial and environmental dimensions of a scene's physical context, and (2) to retain both bodily and spatial awareness – i.e., meta-cognitively consider the visibility of their body within the frame.

Elementary exercises are first introduced in which actors acclimatise to the demarcated spaces within a set, develop a tacit awareness of a given framing, and practice establishing clear eyelines. Shortly thereafter, rudimentary scripted or semi-improvised scenes are employed to mobilise their awareness of these technical specifications. These *mostly improvised scenes* may only contain wordless action or, simply, minimal dialogue, but always involve specific directives, usually identifying the scene's context and a few elementary, physical directions. For example: 'You are holding a beagle as you arrive at a veterinary clinic where you have an appointment, survey with surprise fire damage to the building's exterior (out of frame), grip your squirming pooch, step over debris, and then note the vet (in another area offscreen) walking toward you'.

The skills acquired in this second unit are of a precise, practical nature:

1) Actors must develop a deliberate (but not mechanical) control over their eyelines, which are used to maintain on-screen/off-screen relations, particularly in shot/reverse-shot sequence, reaction shots, and eyeline matches.
2) The camera is acknowledged to be a virtual scene partner, but at whom one should studiously avoid looking at directly.
3) The actor must maintain continuity of movement across shots, learning how to repeat precisely an action first undertaken in a master shot for coverage (taken from different angles) and in reaction shots (here, a 'script supervisor' can be assigned to a student for assistance).
4) Blocking must be adopted in accordance with required framing choices (i.e., shot type, angle, movement), rather than being driven by what feels 'natural' or comfortable. And some types of movement must also be choreographically planned before filming to ensure one remains in frame – e.g., the choice to sit or stand within a take.
5) One must learn how to hit precisely demarcated marks (often taped on the floor) to remain framed, focussed and lit without indicating the presence of these marks (i.e., by glancing down to see them).
6) The actor might also signify environmental conditions (e.g., climate, temperature) through precise micro-movements (e.g., shortness of breath, a slight shiver, etc.).

Crucially, these precise movements cannot read as deliberated movements. As Patrick Sabongui (2016) puts it,

> If the director says, 'Don't turn upstage because then we lose you,' that's a negative. If your body in that open, vulnerable state hears, 'Nope', or 'Don't' or 'No', your body braces against negativity. So, instead, I translate that to, 'Release the need to turn away from the camera. Share this, instead, with Tom, your scene partner'.

The effortful, cognitive marking of a physical requirement is registered, however briefly, by the camera and exposed, quite visibly, as conscious exertion. Dave Brown (2016) observes that 'the audience is not going to see the mark. But what they will see is you searching for it or realizing that it's there'. With a careful sense of environmental awareness, then, the actor devises instinctive rather than deliberative ways to execute precise action and directed, directing looks.

3. Scaling performance choices

A related but, perhaps, even more prominent role a screen actor plays in prompting our comprehension of a diegetic situation is the means by which they specify the type and range of a scene's salient affective dimensions via the *scale* (or kinetic magnitude) of their performance choices. Actors must make technical adjustments to their performance's *material dimensions* (expressions, posture, movement, gestures and voice) to suit the cinematographic (lens choice), compositional (framing proximity), and sonic specificities (recording apparatus) of a given shot. What is more, these modulations also solicit our apprehension of the action's emotional valences. They allow us to accurately identify their character's frame of mind and concomitantly solicit our own corresponding feeling-states.

Another purely mechanical exercise adopted to activate and then internalise the actor's awareness of cinematographic, compositional, and sonic parameters is a series of *framing demonstrations*. Actors play out a scene of very simple expressive intimacy – simultaneously projected on a nearby monitor – and are then instructed to modulate the scale of their expressions, etc., as the framing adjusts from medium long shot to closeup or slowly dollies in. Following these introductory mechanics, neutral scenes are reintroduced so that the actor can employ scaling in more complicated dramatic instances. This step helps prevent actors from automatically defaulting to purely instinctive action without considering the constraints and affordances of the cinematic apparatus at work in a given shot. In modern theatrical terms, modulatory proficiency – adopted with the 'given circumstances' (STANISLAVSKI 1989: 54) of the production environment and diegetic circumstances in mind – circumscribes the instinctive drive of a 'magic if': an imaginary supposition that arouses feeling and compels action (STANISLAVSKI 1989: 50).

Combining these framing demonstrations and neutral scenes enables actors to contend with the intimacy of very closely positioned camera and/or microphone, ignoring the obtrusiveness of such equipment. Second, since lens choice, framing proximity, and recording levels entail their own forms of modulation, actors learn how to adjust the kinetic magnitude of the material dimensions constituting their performance choices within a particular shot (e.g., broad vs. minimal expressivity, large vs. small movements, loud vs. quiet volume, etc.). Finally, a scene's affective requirements also come into play here, and an actor modulates their performance choices accordingly, creating emotional resonance in concert with the relevant technical specificities of the apparatus. More will be said on this dimension later.

Acting for the camera: advanced skills

After accomplishing these rudimentary steps in the course's initial weeks – more or less in an iterative and sequential fashion – instruction shifts towards the acquisition of more complex learning objectives, which are acquired in conglomerative rather than accretive fashion. At this stage, MacArthur advocates employing holistic activities that approximate real-world working conditions on a film shoot. Such 'situated learning' (*sensu* LAVE and WENGER 1991) enables the necessary degree of effortlessness with which screen actors need to execute the requisite task-oriented activities of a high-pressure professional production environment.

The most robust of these activities is layered *scene work*. Students improvise around pre-scripted, stock film extracts (typically with dialogue) working through a situation's narrative arc. These extracts are uniquely selected to complement the 'hit' of individual students, and for their utility in enabling the acquisition of specific advanced skillsets. Upon being assigned a scene, students might explicitly be given reasons for its selection, or they might be encouraged to identify the tacit rationale themselves, articulating elements of the scene and assigned character that resonate with them. To facilitate their striving towards practiced ordinariness and ease of adjustment to skill acquisition, students are encouraged to improvise and/or select their own pre-existing scenes. As with earlier exercises, scene work is played out before a peer audience, simultaneously projected on a monitor, with each 'take' recorded. The emerging takes are compiled and reviewed by both the class and the actors and can be made available to scene partners for subsequent reflection. Ultimately, these scenes serve as the groundwork for a *mock production*. Towards the end of the course, students develop and produce a short film themselves (with the assistance of a production team of student or local filmmakers) to emulate real-time shooting circumstances. What follows, then, are descriptions of the four advanced skillsets acquired through this scene work.

4. Personalising a text

A screen actor must see themselves in a work. That is, they must cultivate an *analytical awareness* of their situation within a project based on their character's function, the narrative's genre, and the work's overall intentions. Such cognisance also entails mobilising their own technical resources and establishing empathic connectors to the character and the broader work. Utilising both technique and imaginative perspective-taking within a role, the end goal is adopting a sense of 'ownership' or 'investment' in the work that is undertaken. In Eric Hicks' words, 'my job is to be at the top of [a writer's] temple and to break it back down to the source. It's all about narrative and storytelling' (HICKS 2016). Thus, to be a 'storyteller,' actors must understand the requirements of a script and their own dramatic function within it on a scene-by-scene basis. They might be said to 'key into' the means by which their technical resources would allow them to feel and behave as a character within a given scenario.

Scene work here entails an investigative process beginning with a combination of self-reflection and book work. This preparatory work is rounded up by traditional scene analysis, breaking the scene into minimal units and establishing overarching objectives (STANISLAVSKI 1989: 121–137). In line with Hagen's counselling about developing points of comparison between themselves and the character they portray, a simulative form of 'identification' is also initiated through this analysis and bolstered by earlier face-the-face peer input. 'You must find your own sense of identity,' she claims, 'enlarge this sense of self, and learn to see how that knowledge can be put to use in the characters that you portray on stage' (HAGEN 1973: 22). To avoid an undue amount of self-projection, the actor's analysis can be tempered by thinking of a given scene's function in terms of its 'iconic' status in broader, culturally recognisable terms (e.g., 'first kiss, first touch, first time, last time, the goodbye', etc.) (ROTENBERG 2021: 129–133).

In-class work follows with a *personal story monologue*. Students are filmed performing a semi-scripted reflection piece that speaks to a line of personal connection with an assigned scripted monologue. Immediately thereafter they are filmed performing the scripted monologue, with the intention of carrying over relevant qualities exhibited in the previous personal story. The student then observes the recording of these two instances along with their peers. They take careful note of any notable disjuncture between the actor's initial, spontaneous expressiveness performing their own personal story vs. the scripted monologue. Shortly after this round of observations, students finish the cycle by actively trying to incorporate their peers' previous observational input in a final take.

Aside from bolstering the traditional script analysis capabilities acquired in earlier stages in their programme, the process of personalisation is an extended exercise in empathetic imagination. As we shall note shortly, this extensive analytical and preparatory work can obviate the Stanislavskian or (more intensely) Strasbergian emphasis on so-called 'affective memory'. According to the former's influential disciple, Evgeny Vakhtangov, affective memory is the psychic wellspring from which the actor draws

attenuated traces of emotion they have previously experienced in life, but *in situ* – during a performance (see VAKHTANGOV 2007). But without the essential preparatory work, in which the actor carefully takes note of generative aspects of emotional connectivity to an otherwise very different fictive personality, working from memory, as it were, can result in undue (and therefore unwantedly visible) labour when the time comes for the camera to roll. This necessary connection, then, is about 'finding yourself in the part' ahead of time, and is described by Meryl Streep as 'a deep recognition of something that you understand about this character that feels like you on some level' (Streep quoted in KGSM 2009). Through this recognition, the emergence of behavioural characteristics (business, tics, mannerisms, postural tendencies, recurring movements) arises from the effortlessness of tempered inclinations rather than the effortfulness of mechanical affectations. Extensive investigative analysis is paramount to the unforced manifestation of a represented character – especially one potentially markedly different from the actor's own self – rather than the laborious deployment of one's affective memory *in situ*. '[W]hen you perform as an actor, you will still have your I', as Robert Benedetti (2022: 119) puts it, 'but you will learn to let it flow into the new me of each role you play, even when that me is quite different from your everyday self'.

5. Responsiveness to direction

Patrick Tucker (2023: 173) puts the stresses of a professional shoot in plain language: 'Unlike in theatre, you cannot hope to get it right tomorrow [...] You have to be perfect – *now*'. The situated learning approach taken here is as much for the benefit of professional directors, then, as it is for actors. As screen actors practice their newfound scaling capabilities, they also incorporate requisite adjustments to new circumstances – including rewritten dialogue, the improvised actions of their scene partners and, notably, directorial instructions between takes – to facilitate rather than encumber the ease of modulation. To meet the high-pressure environment of a professional shoot, with its expectation of instantaneous (and often unrehearsed) proficiency, screen actors must achieve *adaptability* and *pliability*. They must be able to shift particular and/or preset ways of doing things and expand their range of potential performance choices in response to the following variables: (1) actual direction (i.e., specific asks that will affect action, scaling, pacing, emphases, business, and feeling); (2) scene partner performance choices (and requests before/between takes); (3) emergent circumstances and/or subtext issuing from behavioural nuances unfolding within a take; (4) the aforementioned requirements of the technical apparatus; and (5) new dialogue or action brought on by in-production script changes.

We assert that meeting this expectation of directorial responsiveness is more often than not empirically verifiable, and not simply a matter of a collaborator's subjective preferences or tastes. Conscientious directors frequently take on the role of 'side

coaching' (before or between takes) to encourage and solicit the precise degree of desired 'commitment' from performers. The analogy to the development of athletic performance is apt. 'I need you to give me 100% here', is an instruction applicable to both sport and screen cultures; both activities are task-oriented enterprises requiring quantifiably scalable activities. Such directorial influences occur alongside a myriad of other external influences, prompts, and constraints as, within a Gibsonian ecological framework, organism (actor) and environment (production setting) operate in an interactive, perceptuo-motor loop (GIBSON 1979: 8).

For these reasons, the importance of undertaking approximated *scene work* is at its most pronounced here. Initially, an assigned scene will be performed in a 'direction-less' manner – i.e., exclusively through student actors' initial choices. An emphasis on the actor's initial autonomy is crucial to the medium specificity of screen acting in that an actor must be prepared to be self-directed since there is little to no rehearsal period prior to a shoot (as mentioned above). Immediately thereafter, the scene is repeated with specific alterations requested. Some elements of improvisation are encouraged in order to 'naturalise' (i.e., enable the ease of) the actor's requisite adjustments. In subsequent takes, then, actors are asked to acclimatise their performance in accordance with the affordances and constraints posed by technical adjustments, altered dialogue, new sets of actions, blocking alterations, scaling adjustments, requested character shifts, etc. In general, scene work here is a helpful secondary step towards performing in a full production with a complete script. However, it has equal if not greater utility for the high-stakes climate of an audition and/or callback. Here, the actor faces short-term bursts of unanticipated, specific directions issued by a casting director, equipped with only piecemeal diegetic information: brief sides (extracts from an unseen script) usually provided less than 24 hours in advance, or even on the spot for a cold read.

In the end, screen actors must acquire three situated skillsets that allow them to operate successfully in an ecological relationship with a fast-paced and demanding production environment – one with little time for preparation and even less tolerance for errors. (1) They must be able to modify initial and/or instinctive performance choices quickly and repeatably across multiple takes. (2) They must exhibit immediate and unquestioning responsiveness and openness to explicit, direct, assertive, (even 'insensitive') instruction. (3) They will come to appreciate the importance of flexible *preparation* over rigid *planning*. As Lynne Adams (2016) cautions, 'I don't plan...because very often when you get on set, what you've prepared in your head and what's actually going on are two different worlds all together'. Training, then, is indispensable, so that '[you] just trust [your]self one hundred percent that [you] don't need to plan a damn thing and when [you] go in there; things just happen [...] And they're always so much better than the stuff you could ever plan' (HICKS 2016). As a consequence of this adaptability and pliability, the trained screen actor – 'lost in the moment' – can effortlessly accomplish the desired reality effect (SZARABAJKA 2016).

6. Receptivity and presence

What is it, then, to be 'in the moment' as a screen actor? Lynne Adams (2016) describes this familiar phrase as a performative flow state in which 'you allow the intelligence of your body to override any intelligence in your head'. We articulate this phenomenon in terms of a screen actor's acquisition of requisite *receptivity* and *presence*. These qualities are best understood as a specialised form of executive functioning monitoring in which one balances the technical requirements of performed actions with their spontaneous emergence. Of all the necessary actorly skills, these are the characteristics in which *effort* is, perhaps, most salient.

Due to the concentrated and proximal attention of the camera, actors must undertake their mechanically scrutinised and subsequently magnified behaviour without signalling this activity as laboured, foreordained 'performance'. The camera's scrutiny is a medium-specific condition quite distinct from the performance context of a theatre. Not only are proxemics and enlargement factors, but the absence of spectators (aside from essential crew members) and the pinpointed focus of mechanised observation can be felt as quite alienating compared to the co-presence of live audience members, with their roving (rather than fixating) gaze. If the achievement of presence entails, to some degree, intimate connection with others, how is this executive function monitoring accomplished in conditions of such pronounced absences? To make matters even more challenging for the screen actor, these fundamental privations extend to the frequent absence of key stimuli: absent scene partners, non-existent environmental features in a volumetric capture system, etc.

What is necessary to attain, then, through self-regulation, is the optimal level of arousal required for optimal task performance (YERKES and DODSON 1908: 481) – the essential thrust of the Yerkes-Dodson law being that, for best performance of any given task, an ideal amount of arousal is required, neither too much nor too little. Receptivity and presence, then, are at the very heart of a reality effect: attuned by careful arousal regulation, actors ensure the viewers' awareness remains on the scene's unfolding dramatics rather than an apprehension of its construction. Therefore, the primary goal for the aspiring screen actor is to achieve a paradoxical state of *relaxation* even amidst the taxing conditions of a production environment. The aforementioned achievement of the honorific 'authenticity' literally requires the actor to make what they are doing look easy.

Correspondingly, the experience of such a flow state, of being in the moment, is often described by professional screen actors in almost beatific terms. 'It's sort of a warm feeling', says Keith Szarabajka (2016), 'like you're a conduit for something else and something has taken you over and is sort of guiding you... like you're connected in a heightened universe'. Or, take Rotenberg's cybernetic metaphor: 'Being present is the state wherein all the data inputs around you register and touch your heart' (ROTENBERG 2021: 8). For Rotenberg, being present is a non-negotiable starting place for an actor: 'If you can't get present, you can't act' (ROTENBERG 2021: 2). While his assertion smacks of absolutism, his insistence on presence – which we assert

involves the regulation of an actor's ideal degree of arousal – is nevertheless a maxim worth following. That is, cultivating the ability to 'be in the moment' enables one to (more or less) *effortlessly* attune to the serendipitous unfolding of one's immediate circumstances. The sense of presence such 'prepared relaxation' affords entails maximal *receptivity* to the evolving affordances of the environment and those within it. Don McKellar (2016) recalls an early breakthrough moment: 'I [accidentally] bumped into a chair and fumbled with something... I didn't plan to bump into it, but I was physically open to the idea of responding to that when it happened. And that's the first time I felt that I was physically prepared to embody this nerdy character'.

Attaining optimal receptivity and presence requires the most thoroughgoing instruction, and the affiliated classroom exercises are designed in a compounding fashion. Preparatory work is centred around the cultivation of *active listening*. Even before an initial read of their assigned sides, students are asked to cover their lines and to try predicting what their characters' responses would be to the preceding lines of dialogue uttered by their scene partners. During the exercise, their peer-observers simultaneously go through the same predictive measures and offer their own guesses. Students then assess any gap between their predictions and the actual scripted line and adjust their ensuing delivery to account for the differences. After this, the scene can then be run in a semi-improvised way without the script, animated by the energising dichotomy of what they simultaneously wish to say (effortlessly) vs what they must say (effortfully). Relaxing into the latter condition is served by the impulses carried over from the former.

Settling into a natural state of alertness is then bolstered by a subsequent active listening exercise that fosters one's spontaneous reactivity to others. Students are assigned partners and assigned a *short, pre-scripted monologue*. After discussing together the facts and circumstances of the scene, one actor (positioned out of frame) will read the monologue as expressively as possible to their scene partner, who is framed in CU and projected on a nearby monitor. Their authentic reactions – derived from actively listening to their scene partner – are recorded and subsequently scrutinised. Given the centrality of shot/reverse-shot sequences and reaction shots to the grammar of film and television, this exercise is particularly indispensable.

Improvisational inclinations are retained in layered *partnered scene work* that follows. After a brief, initial read-through, partners work through their scene while framed in a long shot or medium shot that serves as the master shot for the exercise.

1) Immediately before filming begins, they are asked to articulate their primary objectives in the scene, with the aim of guiding their subsequent performance choices and instinctive (re)actions. In keeping with the importance Uta Hagen places on scene entrances (in which actors engage in a three-step activity grounding them within the diegesis even before the camera begins rolling), students are asked to answer the following questions: 'What did I just do? What am I doing now? What's the first thing I want?' (HAGEN 1973: 96). The answers to these questions are put into action, in tune with the character's experience and state of being (HAGEN 1973: 99). Adopting a characteristic movement or gesture in

response to the question, 'What am I doing now?' (e.g., nervously straightening a tie) is essential.
2) Their subsequent improvisations are then based around their recollection of the gist of their scripted exchanges, which helps to activate reflexive responses to their scene partners' lines.
3) A second run is attempted, scripts in hand, allowing for the retention of their previous improvisatory intentions – not to mention the acquisition of a crucial auditioning skill: looking at and connecting with a scene partner while speaking a line of dialogue, and only glancing down to read the next one quickly just before its delivery.
4) After a few more attempts, scene partners take turns running the scene again with only one of them remaining in frame – an expanded, off-book version of the above reaction shot monologue exercise. In between takes, some students might require further specific direction through exploratory consideration, self-reflection, and/or suggestions of different intentional possibilities.

By the end of these exercises, students' work on assigned scenes will be bolstered by intention without corresponding tension. Such relaxed receptivity and presence amounts to several empirically observable accomplishments instrumental to achieved reality effects. The first is a greater degree of attentiveness and corresponding focus on one's environment and those within it. Second, active listening without the corresponding tax of anticipation (of lines to come) or goal-oriented hearing (waiting for one's turn to respond) is enhanced. Finally, students hone their ability to retain responsiveness in the dearth of actual stimuli – the sharpening of an imaginative sense equipped to navigate a medium limned by unavoidable absences.

7. Receptivity and emotional availability

David Rotenberg (2021: 33–34) speaks of the necessity for screen actors to 'swing' between primary 'states of being'. His language connotes a lack of conscious control in which actors allow an elementary and governing emotion to 'vibrate' within them rather than strive to produce a transient feeling state. These primary states have a degree of iconicity in that they are broadly recognisable and yet untrivial or non-clichéd if issuing from the genuine materiality of a distinctive subjectivity – i.e., emerging from a fully realised character rather than an actor. With surprising uniformity, all fourteen actors we interviewed rejected the Strasbergian tradition of 'conjuring' an emotion through affective memory. 'Rather than sneak a look at a picture of your grandmother in your pocket', Adam Beauchesne (2016) asserts, 'it's actually far easier to become emotional [by] forgetting about your own experiences, forgetting about who you are and just living that moment'. Another dimension of receptivity, then, is the development of screen actors' emotional availability and their preparedness for vulnerability – a final key to their achievement of a reality effect.

As with the receptivity-centred objectives, layered preparatory and scene work is employed, enabling student actors to access requisite emotional states instantly and repeatably – an acute requirement not comparably expected in stage acting. 'Let's go again while we still have the light,' is an instruction likely to chill the pulsing heart of a stage performer more accustomed to gradually cultivated, one-and-done histrionics. In conjunction with the above personalisation activities, then, students '*affectively prep*' before the cameras roll and employ the same layered, partnered *scene work* also described above. Classroom techniques are employed as follows:

1) As previously noted, dependence on affective memory *in situ* is inadvisable (because effortful and therefore distracting hence detectable as 'work'). But students are still prompted to recall analogous personal incidents as part of their preceding script analysis, itemising what they might comparably know or have experienced in their own lives.
2) Correspondingly, they are asked to imagine (or explicitly describe) particular sensations felt while within an emotional state, being careful to localise it within a specific lived experience.
3) Metacognitively, they *might* also track or chart (an approximation of) their own 'emotional effector patterns' – mouth/nose breathing tendencies, muscle activation, facial expressions – exhibited whilst feeling (BLOCH et al. 2002: 225–227). But such tracking is effortful, even with repetitive, patterned practice. Instead, they are more typically asked to simply recall or, better, undertake a specific action from within their assigned scene's circumstances that helps to generate requisite emotion (e.g., wrestling with a stuck door before entering a tense scene).
4) Still, the ability to withdraw quickly from a heightened emotional state (and then reproduce precisely it shortly thereafter!) is just as important as entering it. And so, care is given to prevent residual stress via specialised instructions on exiting emotional states through conscious changes to one's physicality (i.e., adjust breathing, tension, posture, speed of motion, etc.).

From there, students shift into various takes of their assigned scene. As with their cultivation of presence, they develop attentiveness and focus on their scene partner intently to help manifest a requisite emotion, and side-coaching between takes is used to provide suggestions – particular to the needs and personality of each student. This layered training would seem to align with the James-Lange/Schachter-Singer theory of emotion, i.e., that the physical, somatic components of emotional response precede the associated 'cognitive' processes, likewise reminiscent of certain 'outside-in' approaches to acting and emotion production (JAMES 1884; LANGE 1912; SCHACHTER and SINGER 1962). James (1884), in particular, emphasised not only the temporal precedence of the physical, physiological aspects of emotional response (i.e., prior to cognitive awareness and evaluation) but the power of intentionally engaging somatic and behavioural activity in order to initiate or alter emotional experience.

Several vital, concrete emotional skills emerge from these interwoven exercises. First, student actors are able to produce necessary affective states quickly, genuinely, and repeatably. Second, they learn to suppress their desire to lapse into easily detectable mugging or 'face acting', allowing natural, intuitive, and compelling responses to emerge. Third, they are able to 'enter' and 'exit' a specific emotional state, and modulate it in various ways, without undue labour. Finally, more globally, they cultivate the meta-cognitive skill of relaxing into a ('primary') state of being – what Elly Konijn might call a craft-oriented 'task emotion' – that allows them to assume a required state despite or without trepidation, hence the frequent label of this condition as 'vulnerability': a preparedness to be 'exposed' (KONIJN 2000: 33–34).

Acting is not magic

A considerable degree of uncertainty surrounds the execution of screen acting. This mystique is typically expressed through the 'reverie approach': endemic popular, craft, and even scholarly rhetoric positing acting as fundamentally mysterious, unsystematic, and/or ultimately inexplicable behaviour (HOLLINGER 2006: 4). Returning to Meryl Streep, her remark, 'I really have no way to talk about what we are talking about' (Streep quoted in HOLLINGER 2006: 4), exemplifies this widespread discursive vagueness. With a paucity of descriptive language plaguing even the most gifted of practitioners, there is clearly a need for more refined conceptual vocabulary. Further, there is an even greater need to appreciate screen acting as a situated, grounded, and task-oriented activity – eminently trainable with the end goal of refining a finite number of empirically discernible skills (enumerated herein). In expressing appreciation for one's favourite performer, one may default to vagaries such as 'X-factor', 'natural talent', or the ineffable 'It'. But to do so is to disregard the identifiable aptitudes cultivated by consummate professionals – including those who identify and nurture these abilities. To that end, interdisciplinary research in embodied cognition and ecological psychology can provide us with useful language to discuss essential processes of screen acting. In so doing, we hope to enhance a broader understanding of and appreciation for its decidedly unmagical enchantments.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the talented University of Lethbridge students who have enrolled in 'Acting for the Camera' over the years for their perennially inspiring and engaging artistry.

Bibliography

ADAMS, Lynne. 2016. Telephone interview (26. 4. 2016). Interviewed by Douglas MacArthur, Javid Sadr, and Aaron Taylor.

AFFRON, Charles. 1977. *Star Acting: Gish, Garbo, Davis*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977.

AITA, Sean. 2012. Dance of the Übermarionettes: Toward a Contemporary Screen Actor Training. In Aaron Taylor (ed.). *Theorizing Film Acting*. London/New York: Routledge, 2012: 256–270.

ANDERSON, Michael L. 2003. Embodied Cognition: A Field Guide. *Artificial Intelligence* 149 (2003): 1: 91–130. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/S0004-3702(03)00054-7.

ANONYMOUS. 2016. Telephone interview with professional Canadian actor (25. 4. 2016). Interviewed by Douglas MacArthur, Javid Sadr, and Aaron Taylor.

BARON, Cynthia and Sharon CARNICKE. 2008. *Reframing Screen Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.104480.

BARON, Cynthia. 1999. Crafting Film Performances: Acting in the Hollywood Studio Era. In Alan Lovell and Peter Krämer (eds.). *Screen Acting*. London/New York: Routledge, 1999: 31–45.

BARON, Cynthia. 2016. *Modern Acting: The Lost Chapter of American Film and Theatre*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

BARR, Tony. 1997. *Acting for the Camera*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1997.

BENEDETTI, Robert. 2022. *The Actor in You: Twelve Simple Steps to Understanding the Art of Acting*. Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2022.

BLAIR, Rhonda. 2008. *The Actor, Image and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience*. London/New York: Routledge, 2008.

BLOCH, Susana, Pedro ORTHOUS and Guy SANTIBAÑEZ-H. 2002. Effector Patterns of Basic Emotions: A Psychophysiological Method for Training Actors. In Phillip B. Zarrilli (ed.). *Acting (Re)considered*. London/New York: Routledge, 2002: 219–238.

BLOCH, Susana. 2017. *Alba Emoting: A Scientific Method for Emotional Induction.* CreateSpace, 2017.

BREWSTER, Ben and Lea JACOBS. 1997. *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

BROWN, Dave. 2016. Telephone interview (28. 4. 2016). Interviewed by Aaron Taylor.

CAINE, Michael. 1997. *Acting in Film: An Actor's Take on Movie Making*. New York: Applause Books, 1997.

CARNICKE, Sharon M. 2006. The Material Poetry of Acting: 'Objects of Attention', Performance Style, and Gender in *The Shining* and *Eyes Wide Shut*. *Journal of Film and Video* 58 (2006): 1/2: 21–30.

DAVIS, William B. 2016. Telephone interview (5. 5. 2016). Interviewed by Aaron Taylor.

DELBRIDGE, Matt. 2012. The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception and the Actor Performance Captured in the Gaming Landscape. *Animation Practice, Process & Production* 2 (2012): 1–2: 137–149.

DYER, Richard. 1998. *Stars*. London: BFI Publishing, 1998.

GIBSON, James J. 1979. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1979.

HAGEN, Uta. 1973. *Respect for Acting*. New York: Macmillan, 1973.

HART, F. Elizabeth. 2006. Performance, Phenomenology, and the Cognitive Turn. In Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart (eds.). *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and Cognitive Turn*. London/New York: Routledge, 2006: 29–51.

HEDBERG OLENINA, Ana. 2020. *Psychomotor Aesthetics: Movement and Affect in Modern Literature and Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

HICKS, Eric. 2016. Telephone interview (18. 4. 2016). Interviewed by Douglas MacArthur, Javid Sadr, and Aaron Taylor.

HOLLINGER, Karen. 2006. *The Actress: Hollywood Acting and the Female Star*. London/New York: Routledge, 2006.

JAMES, William. 1884. What is an Emotion? *Mind* 9 (1884): 34: 188–205.

JONES, Edward E. and Richard E. NISBETT. 1972. The Actor and the Observer: Divergent Perceptions of the Causes of Behavior. In Edward E. Jones et al. (eds.). *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behaviour.* Morristown: General Learning Press, 1972: 79–94.

KEMP, Rick and Bruce MCCONACHIE (eds.). 2018. *The Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance and Cognitive Science*. London/New York: Routledge, 2018.

KEMP, Rick. 2012. *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Performance*. London/New York: Routledge, 2012.

KGSM MediaCache. 2009. Meryl Streep: I think I am who I say I am. Video interview. YouTube [accessed on 1. 10. 2024]. Available online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PBW_8YM09I&t=0s.

KIRBY, Michael. 1972. On Acting and Not-Acting. *The Drama Review* 16 (1972): 1: 3–15. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/1144724.

KLEVAN, Andrew. 2005. *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation.* London: Wallflower Press, 2005.

KONIJN, Elly A. 2000. *Acting Emotions*. Transl. by Barbara Leach and David Chambers. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000.

KULESHOV, Lev. 1991. The Training of the Actor. Transl. by Ron Levaco. In Jeremy Butler (ed.). *Star Texts*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991: 51–65.

LANGE, Carl H. 1912. The Mechanism of the Emotions. Transl. by Benjamin Rand. In Benjamin Rand (ed.). *The Classical Psychologists*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1912: 672–684.

LAVE, Jean and Etienne WENGER. 1991. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

LUTTERBIE, John. 2011. *Toward a General Theory of Acting: Cognitive Science and Performance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

MCCONACHIE, Bruce and F. Elizabeth HART (ed.). 2006. *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and Cognitive Turn*. London/New York: Routledge, 2006.

MCKELLAR, Don. 2016. Telephone interview (1. 5. 2016). Interviewed by Aaron Taylor.

MITA, Theodore H., Marshall Lev DERMER and Jeffrey KNIGHT. 1977. Reversed Facial Images and the Mere-Exposure Hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 35 (1977): 8: 597–601. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.35.8.597.

NAREMORE, James. 1988. *Acting in the Cinema*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

O'BRIEN, Mary Ellen. 1983. *Film Acting: The Techniques and History of Acting for the Camera*. New York: Arco Publishing, 1983.

OH, Sandra. 2016. Telephone interview (28. 4. 2016). Interviewed by Douglas MacArthur, Javid Sadr, and Aaron Taylor.

PEARSON, Roberta E. 1992. *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

PLANTINGA, Carl. 2009. *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

POMERANCE, Murray. 2016. *Moment of Action: Riddles of Cinematic Performance*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016.

POMERANCE, Murray. 2019. *Virtuoso: Film Performance and the Actor's Magic*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2019.

PUDOVKIN, V. I. 1968. *Film Technique and Film Acting*. Transl. and ed. by Ivor Montagu. London: Vision Press, 1968 [1933].

ROTENBERG, David. 2021. *Act: The Modern Actor's Handbook*. Toronto: ECW Press, 2021.

ROZIK, Eli. 2002. Acting: The Quintessence of Theatricality. *Substance* 31 (2002): 2/3: 110–124. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/3685481.

SABONGUI, Patrick. 2016. Telephone interview (22. 4. 2016). Interviewed by Douglas MacArthur, Javid Sadr, and Aaron Taylor.

SCHACHTER, Stanley and Jerome SINGER. 1962. Cognitive, Social, and Physiological Determinants of Emotional State. *Psychological Review* 69 (1962): 5: 379–399.

SERGI, Gianluca. 1999. Acting and the Sound Gang. In Alan Lovell and Peter Krämer (eds.). *Screen Acting*. London: Routledge, 1999: 126–137.

SKAGEN, Peter. 2016. *Screen Acting Trade Secrets: How to Succeed in Hollywood without Really Acting*. Calgary: Poubelle, 2016.

SMITH, Murray. 1995. *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

SPRINGER, Claudia and Julie LEVINSON (eds.). 2015. *Acting*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press,2015.

STANISLAVSKI, Constantin. 1989. *An Actor Prepares*. Transl. by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. London/New York: Routledge, 1989 [1936].

SZARABAJKA, Keith. 2016. Telephone interview (4. 27. 2016). Interviewed by Aaron Taylor.

TUCKER, Patrick. 2023. *Secrets of Screen Acting*. London/New York: Routledge, 2023.

UTTERBACK, Neal. 2016. The Olympic Actor: Improving Actor Training and Performance Through Sports Psychology. In Rhonda Blair and Amy Cook (eds.). *Theatre, Performance and Cognition*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016: 79–92.

VAKHTANGOV, Yevgeni. 2007. Eight Lectures on the Stanislavski 'System'. In Jean Benedetti. *The Art of the Actor*. New York: Routledge, 2007: 128–136.

WEXMAN, Virginia Wright. 1997. *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

YERKES, Robert M. and John D. DODSON. 1908. The Relation of Strength of Stimulus to Rapidity of Habit Formation. *Journal of Comparative Neurology & Psychology* 18 (1908): 5: 459–482. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1002/cne.920180503.

Prof. Aaron Taylor, PhD

University of Lethbridge, Drama Department
4401 University Drive, Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 3M4, Canada
aaron.taylor2@uleth.ca
ORCID: 0000-0002-5827-0703

Aaron Taylor is Professor of Cinema and Media Studies in the Drama Department at the University of Lethbridge. He is the editor of *Theorizing Film Acting* (2012) and co-editor of *Screening Characters* (2019), and the author of numerous articles on screen acting. He was a University of Lethbridge Board of Governors Research Chair (2019–2023) and is currently Board of Governors Teaching Chair (2025–2027).

Douglas MacArthur, MFA

University of Lethbridge, Drama Department
4401 University Drive, Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 3M4, Canada

Doug MacArthur is Associate Professor of voice and acting in the Drama Department at the University of Lethbridge. He has participated in numerous stage productions as an actor, voice coach, and director, and has been featured in several independent short and feature length films. Recently, he has been engaged in creative research pertaining to the Roy Hart approach to voice training.

Javid Sadr, PhD

University of Lethbridge, Department of Psychology
4401 University Drive, Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 3M4, Canada
sadr@uleth.ca
ORCID: 0000-0003-0557-5842

Javid Sadr is Assistant Professor of Psychology and Associate Member of Neuroscience at the University of Lethbridge. His research has included the study of visual/social perception, such as face perception, movement, identity, and attractiveness; neuroimaging; and computational techniques.