

At The Moment of Creation

An exploration of how directors know and assess screen performance

by

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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Abstract

This Doctor of Creative Arts project consists of a major creative work, *Gingerbread Men*, a 29 minute film, an additional creative work attached as an appendix, *10 Days to Die*, an 87 minute feature film, a set of filmed research interviews presented on DVD, *Research Interviews*, approximately 70 minutes and this exegesis *At the Moment of Creation*.

This doctoral project is an enquiry into how directors read, know and assess the actors' performance on a film set while the camera is rolling. The major creative work, *Gingerbread Men*, serves as an experimental tool to explore the manner in which a film's visual style impacts on the nature of the actors' performance and in particular as a method of understanding where agency lies for the creation of the characters in that film. Research prior to the production of *Gingerbread Men* led to the selection of the long-take, single shot per scene filming style as a means of forcing myself, as the director, to only be able to make decisions regarding the actors' performance on set at the moment they were being created and not in the editing suite, as is typical in modern filmmaking. *10 Days to Die* then experiments with the clash between these two filming styles in a feature film context, however this is only lightly touched on in the exegesis.

The exegesis explores particular aspects of film directing to better understand how the role of the director impacts upon the methods used to know and assess the actors' performance. In looking at the role of the director on a film set, how directors perceive themselves as an audience for the actors' performance, what directors and actors consider are indicators of an unsatisfactory performance and how recent discoveries in cognitive science and neuroscience further our understanding of people's ability to distinguish facial emotional expressions and the manner in which directors know and assess the actors' performance are investigated and discussed.

The exegesis concludes that knowing and assessing the actors' performance is a complex higher level function that relies heavily upon tacit knowledge, embodied

knowledge, acute perception, empathetic projection and emotional experience in distinguishing authentic complex human behaviour.

Acknowledgements

A paper that combined the Literature Review and the Framing the Creative Work chapter was presented as a peer reviewed paper at the Australia, New Zealand Communication Association (ANZCA) conference held at Old Parliament House, Canberra, in July of 2010. The paper titled *SELECTING A DIRECTORIAL METHODOLOGY FOR A CREATIVE PRACTICE FILM* was subsequently published in the conference proceedings and is available at the following URL <http://www.anzca.net/conferences/conference-papers/94-anzca10proceedings.html>

The film produced as the major creative work, *Gingerbread Men*, was triple blind peer reviewed and screened at the Australian Screen Production, Education and Research Association (APSERA) conference held at RMIT University, Melbourne, in July of 2008. The screening was followed by a short discussion.

The feature film *10 Days to Die*, which is submitted as an appendix, was screened at the Gold Coast Film Festival in November 2010.

I would like to warmly acknowledge the unrelenting support, faith, and inspiration given to me by my primary supervisor Associate Professor Gillian Leahy. Supervising me has not been an easy or straightforward task primarily because for the entire duration of my candidature I have lived at significant distances from Sydney and UTS. For the first period of my candidature I lived in Canberra and for the last period I lived on the Gold Coast. Dealing with the tyranny of distance between us raised several difficulties most notably not being able to have regular supervisory meetings, and having to resort to email and telephone conversations in order to stay in touch. Throughout all of this Associate Professor Leahy guided my research with considerable poise, aplomb and a keen eye for when I was veering off course. For her commitment and faith in me I shall be eternally grateful.

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Preface

I love actors and I love working with actors. I have always considered myself an actor's director.

By this I mean that as a director my primary focus is working with actors to explore the emotional and psychological possibilities of their characters and the narrative of the story I am telling, rather than placing the visual and montage aspects at the centre of my filmmaking practice. When I am on set, those times when my attention is centred on watching the actors' perform are the most enjoyable.

Since graduating from the directing program at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) in 1987 I have continually sort to broaden my knowledge and understanding of acting and directing so as to enhance my ability to direct actors. Over the many years since 1987 I have generally found that information regarding directing actors falls into similar groupings. Most texts, both industry and scholarly, either focus on acting, blocking or rehearsal techniques, or on analysing the finished performance in films using one of the many cinematic theories. While the many directing texts predominantly discussed directorial practice from script development and pre-production, through to production and post-production.

The more I read the more I came to realise that one aspect of directing actors, the process of perceiving and assessing an actor's performance on set while the camera is rolling, was under represented in all forms of film literature. Yet for me this is a significant moment in the whole directing process. Knowing how to cast, rehearse, and block actors are all important aspects of directing, but if a director cannot properly assess an actor's performance on set while the camera is rolling then all the rest matters little. Learning how to perceive and assess an actor's performance was not something I learned at film school. When working with the people who taught me to direct actors we would discuss the actor's performance, but rarely did we discuss how to perceive that performance, understand it, and importantly *know* it.

My interest in this aspect of directing actors lead to this exegesis and the other work that makes up my submission for the Doctor of Creative Arts degree. It is strongly recommended that at least two of the DVDs that accompany this exegesis, *Gingerbread Men* and *Research Interviews* are viewed before reading this exegesis. Chapter One frames *Gingerbread Men* as the major creative work and Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five draw heavily on the research data that came from the interviews contained in the *Research Interviews*. Therefore, watching these two DVDs will greatly inform the reader. The third DVD is a feature film *10 Days to Die* and is only discussed in a minor way, but is an additional example of my creative work.

My primary supervisor Associate Professor Gillian Leahy and I discussed how to best approach the thorny question of the terminology used in this exegesis. Should I use the terms ‘good’ performance or ‘bad’ performance, ‘good’ director or ‘bad’ director? The words ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are problematic and can be so loaded. However, out in the industry actors and directors predominantly use words such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ when describing an actor’s performance or directors.

At the Moment of Creation is an exegesis that explores how directors read, know, and assess the performance of actors on set while the camera is rolling. It is primarily intended for film students and novice directors and it is my sincere hope that the research and ideas discussed are of interest and use to them, as well as to more experienced directors, film academics and scholars in general.

Introduction

At the Moment of Creation investigates a very specific duty of the film director. It asks the question: How does a director read and assess an actor's performance on set while the camera is rolling? It does not investigate how directors direct actors, techniques they use to adjust or shape performance or differing approaches to film directing in general, as research has shown that these areas of directorial practice are well covered in existing literature.

This Introduction weaves together an introduction to the ideas canvassed in the exegesis along with the literature review

One of the major points this exegesis will argue is that the assessment of performance, taking even less time than it takes the actor to create the performance, is commonly regarded as the sole responsibility of the director. Of particular interest is that critical period after the director calls 'cut', the actor stops acting, the camera is turned off, and the cast and crew transition from 'take' mode to a more relaxed work mode – but anticipation hangs in the air. Suddenly it is the director who is under the intense scrutiny of the cast and crew. Time is critical and the pressure upon the director is intense. The moment of directorial adjudication has arrived, and everyone is looking at the director and waiting to see whether they call 'print' or 'let's go again'. Generally, 'print' indicates the director is satisfied with all aspects of the take, including the performance. 'Let's go again' usually signifies there is some kind of shortcoming; be it a technical fault with the camera, lighting or sound, or something was not quite working with the actor's performance. If the fault is with the performance the director will normally speak to the actor and another take is filmed. This fine tuning of the performance continues with additional takes filmed until the director is satisfied with the actor's performance. The director calls 'print', and the crew move on to setting up the next shot.

The amount of time the director takes to evaluate the actor's performance is often perceived by both cast and crew as a measure of the director's calibre. Directors must be self assured, and confident of what they have seen and heard. If a director appears indecisive, or apprehensive, if they seek input from a cast or crew member to help them make a decision regarding the actor's performance they can easily lose the confidence and faith of the cast and crew. As Bettman (2003) says:

If you [the director] seem hesitant, or if your solutions are not up to the problems, those on whom you are depending on for support—the assistant director, the cinematographer, or the producer—will not hesitate to supercede you and take control of the film, whether out of jealousy, fear or necessity. (Bettman 2003, p. xviii)

Francis Ford Coppola recounted a story to Eleanor Coppola (1993) about a time when he was sitting on the toilet during the making of *Godfather I* (1972). Two crew members walked into the bathroom, and not knowing that the director, Francis Ford Coppola, was there began talking about how lousy the film was and how the asshole director did not know what he was doing. Coppola lifted his feet off the ground in case the crew members recognised his shoes. Regardless of the camaraderie that may exist on set among the cast and crew, the director, by the very nature of their position, is in many ways alone.

To answer the research question, which is predominantly focused upon the naturalistic style of modern screen performance that has evolved from the teachings of Konstantin Stanislavski, this exegesis draws on the writings and knowledge of some of western cinema's most notable directors and actors, as well as specialists who have examined the practice of directing and especially the directing of screen actors. It also uses the work of theorists in the areas of performance studies, cinema studies, tacit knowledge, creativity studies, cognitive science, neuroscience, embodied knowledge, psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, phenomenology, and empathetic projection to examine the multiplicity of elements involved in a director knowing and assessing an actor's performance. Although in some regards these might be seen by some as competing epistemologies the exegesis argues that they are, to a worthwhile extent, useful approaches that shine a light upon directorial practice from a different angle.

In addition, on screen interviews with Australian directors and actors were recorded (which appear in the *Research Interviews* DVD in the appendix that accompanies this exegesis) in order to fill a gap that exists in the literature concerning the very specific details that the research question seeks to explore. Furthermore, I also draw up my own experience of having directing over 120 hours of nationally and internationally broadcast television drama, my producing and directing numerous short films and (recently and in part) a feature film, and over sixteen years of teaching directing to undergraduate and post-graduate students at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS), the University of Canberra, and Bond University.

Chapter One frames the major creative work *Gingerbread Men*, which is a 29-minute fiction film that I wrote, produced, directed, production managed and edited specifically for this Doctorate of Creative Arts (DCA). The rationale behind the visual style of the film is discussed in detail and this is used to highlight the impact the director's choice of visual style has on how they collaborate with the actors to determine the performance, and how this effects the actors' creative agency. The chapter argues that the use of the long-take, single shot per scene technique truly tests the director's ability to correctly assess an actor's performance on set in a way that standard Hollywood multiple shot continuity style coverage does not because it relies so heavy on editing to reconstruct an actor's performance.

Chapter Two explores how the director functions on set, and how the very requirements of the duty and position of the director place them in a creative situation that is unlike that of any of the other key creative personnel in the cast or crew. For all the other creative aspects of filmmaking, such as production design, cinematography, editing and blocking of actors' movements, the director works collaboratively with other members of the cast and crew. However, when it comes to knowing and assessing an actor's performance it is expected that the director does not collaborate. This creative isolation, for what is a critical aspect of the filmmaking process, forces the director to locate the centre of their knowing

solely within their own being. No other member of the filmmaking team is expected or required to work in this way.

Chapter Three discusses the perception amongst some directors that they are an audience for the actor performance much like a general cinema audience. This conviction stems from their ability to suspend disbelief while they are watching the performance and, consequently, is used by some directors as a significant gauge for their knowing and assessing an actor's performance. This chapter goes on to argue that the many factors that construct the director's unique knowledge of the narrative, the character and the actor make it impossible for the director to witness the actor performance in anyway like a general cinema audience. As Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argued, assumption-free observations are not possible.

Chapter Four draws heavily on the recorded research interviews with Australian directors and actors to examine what can be learnt about knowing and assessing an actor's performance from performances that are deemed as *not* working. How directors discern that a performance is not working reveals a great deal about their directorial practice, and those elements of actor performance that they perceive as open to evaluation. This chapter argues that for many directors the single most important factor that aids them in determining the quality of an actor's performance is their own uncontrolled emotional and psychological reaction to the performance and how *honest* the performance felt. Their assessment only sometimes includes acute perception of the external actions of the actor. This chapter also reveals the great difficulty some directors have in articulating just how they know if a performance is either working or not working.

Chapter Five explores how directors come to *know* an actor's performance, because knowing is a prerequisite for assessing. This chapter draws heavily on the work of Naremore, Baron, McDonald and Carnicke to highlight how, until recently, film scholarship paid little attention to screen performance. Consequently, this is an area currently underdeveloped in film scholarship and a sophisticated language for assessing performance is still being developed. It then turns to new discoveries in neuroscience, mirror neuron theory, cognitive science, and embodied knowledge in an attempt to shine a light from a different

perspective and further demystify how directors firstly know and then assess an actor's performance. Finally this chapter calls on directors to move beyond their own intra-body experiential assessment technique as a way of assessing actor performance, and challenges them to adopt a multifaceted methodology that includes the acute perception of the external behaviours of actor performance in a conscious way.

In conducting the research for this exegesis it became clear that when directors speak about how they direct they often use phrases such as, 'there are no rules' or 'this is the way I do it, other directors do it differently'. Sydney Pollack, one of the great directors and actors of the twentieth century, had his own way of working that he neither thought was unique nor better than any other. It was just his way. "When you come to something as personal as a film, you make choices that you trust or believe in. Sometimes you're right and sometimes you're wrong ... It's as simple as that. There is no formula for it" (Pollack quoted in Stevens 1997, p. 21). Pollack recognised that not all directors worked the way he did.

As an actor, I worked with Woody Allen, and he didn't do anything the way I do it. He's got his own way of working, and it works. It's great. He didn't tell me how to do it. I kept waiting for him to say what to do or how to do it, but that's not what he does. He does it in the writing and in the casting, and then he watched for when it's right, and says, "Okay, print that." (Pollack quoted in Stevens 1997, p. 25)

Woody Allen 'watched for when it's right', and then printed the take – simple. But how did he know when the performance was right? Why was the previous take 'not right' or 'not right enough'? How significant were the differences between the 'not right' take and the 'right' take? What set of criteria did he use to gauge whether or not it was 'right'? Did intuition play any part in his decision-making? And what is intuition when applied in this manner? Has Allen always known how to read an actor's performance, or is reading an actor's performance a high-level skill that he has consciously or unconsciously developed over many years? Indeed, has Allen's ability to assess an actor's performance and know when it is 'right' improved over the years, or is it much the same as when he wrote and directed *Bananas* (1971)? However, it must also be noted that not all

directors have a positive influence on the work of actors. Salvi makes this point very clear when she quotes Dustin Hoffman.

In 1999, Dustin Hoffman came to the School of Film, Theatre and Television at UCLA to speak to the student body, which was primarily filled with actors and directors. When the issue of working with directors came up, he shared his own experiences and described how, after a shot, he and the other actors often turned to each other for feedback because it is abundantly clear that the director is useless to them. (Salvi 2003, p. 14)

This, in turn, calls attention to the professional relationship that exists between the director and the actor, and the creative processes that occur on the set while the film is being made. For as Baron says, “Carnicke’s essay ... also establishes that film directors do in fact work with actors in a variety of different ways: put in the simplest of terms, sometimes directors see actors as collaborators, other times they treat them like puppets” (Baron, Carson & Tomasulo 2004, p. 3). However, overall, it is well accepted that filmmaking is a collaborative creative process. Generally when making a film directors work in close collaboration with the cast and crew. One of the key findings that came from the sixty interviews that Seger and Whitemore conducted with some of Hollywood’s most successful writers, producers, directors, actors, production designers, cinematographers, editors and composers is that filmmaking is a collaborative art:

In today’s Hollywood the production of a major motion picture is not the work of one ‘auteur’ director. Nor is it the result of the latest whim of a box-office superstar who helps draw the audience to the theatre. These perceptions are quite popular in the press and in certain film schools. They are wrong. (Seger & Whitemore 1994, p. 2)

The truth is that by the time the film appears on the screen it is the product of the collective effort of talented people who have sometimes laboured for years to bring it to life (Seger & Whitemore 1994). After all the writing, planning, negotiating and deliberations one of a director’s major duties is to critically assess what occurs in front of the camera at the moment of creation – when the sets, the props, the lights, the wardrobe, the camera and the actors all come together to create a unique moment in the film that the camera records.

To comprehend how directors assess an actor's performance it is crucial to understand how directors know when the actor has created a performance that meets the requirements of the character and the narrative. Knowing precedes assessing. Through my research into how directors move between their conscious and unconscious knowing of an actor's performance I have uncovered the roles that professional intuition, mirror neurons, and embodied knowledge play in enabling directors to interpret facial expressions, body language and emotions. What directors often say they use to judge an actor's performance, their directorial intuition and instinct, is in fact a complex array of conscious and unconscious factors learned over a lifetime and honed through extensive on set experience. Although Atkinson and Claxton (2000) are discussing high school teachers, much of what they argue applies also to directors.

This book is about what professionals do, and how they learn to do it ... [and it] takes issue with the dominant tradition which sees rational, explicit, articulate understanding as the central ingredient in both practice and development, and which, in consequence, stigmatizes or ignores other ways of knowing. It is self-evident that much of what teachers and others do, in the heat of the moment, is not premeditated; it is intuitive ... What then is the relationship between the rational and the intuitive; the explicit and the tacit; articulated comprehension and 'gut feeling'? (Atkinson 2000, p. 1)

While the camera is rolling directors are functioning in the heat of the moment. Their ability to perform their duty relies on their capacity to simultaneously focus on barely visible facial expressions, looks, glances, eye movements, tiny gestures, pauses, vocal tones and the numerous other elements that make up an actor's performance. Actors create their performance in a continuous string of tiny fractions of a second during which a vast array of elements occurs simultaneously. Directors must be able to perceive, recognize, and instantly analyze all these concurrent elements. When the scene involves more than one actor the director must do so for each and every actor at the same time. During the editing of the film, directors and editors will often debate whether or not to include or remove individual frames, not simply because an individual frame can impact upon the rhythm and pace of a scene, but the content of individual frames can also influence how the actor's performance might be read. A frame or two of film can

contain a look, a gesture, a thought, a shifting of weight, a partial breath or exhale, a relaxation of facial muscles, a blink or any number of other expressions that can change or add to the meaning of the performance. What a general audience sees on the screen is the complete performance. To use an analogy, when the audience looks at a tree generally the members of the audience see the trunk, the large branches, and a mass of leaves. When a skilled director looks at a tree they see every branch, twig and leaf. A skilled director perceives more than a general audience. From my research for this DCA, my twenty-five years as a professional director and my fifteen years of teaching directing I believe the skilled director also has greater perception than the student or novice director. Perhaps this is why people often disagree about what constitutes an ‘authentic’ film performance, what a performance ‘means’, or whether the actor is performing or simply behaving. There are many well known and highly awarded actors, such as Nicole Kidman or Tom Cruise, for example, who divide the cinema going audience. These disagreements regarding performance can also be found amongst actors and directors working on the same film. As Viera writes, citing Carney (2001), “The ambiguity at the end of *Opening Night* (Cassavetes 1977) is so strong that, as Carney points out, even Rowlands [the actress] and Cassavetes did not agree about whether the final play-within-a-play showed Myrtle’s defeat or her victory” (Viera 2004, p. 161).

Much of what directors do is located within their mind and to a certain extent emotionally in their bodies. It is neither visible, nor stable, nor easily understood. In the field of musicology, the theorising of the creative practise of conductors is academically well understood (Parton & Edwards 2009). So there must be a way to theorize the creative practise of a film director and how they assess the performance of actors when filming a scene as opposed to during rehearsals. Directors do the majority of their work verbally, not textually, or physically. One can see the consequences of their thinking in the actions of the actors and the movement of the camera. However, not even directors themselves seem to be able to fully articulate what they do or why they do it, or how they arrived at thinking that what they did was the correct thing to do. Directors often talk about just knowing when the actor has delivered a good performance. Yet when asked how

they know and what do they mean by 'good' or 'right', the answer is usually the same. They just know. Polanyi (1958, 1967, and 1983) Castillo (2002) and Gerrans (2005) call this kind of knowledge personal or tacit knowledge. Knowledge that is known, but difficult to articulate, "we know more than we can tell" (Polanyi 1983, p. 4). Borrowing from one of Polanyi's models might help us understand at least one aspect of what is occurring when a director assesses an actor's performance.

In the case of a human physiognomy, I would now say that we rely on our awareness of its features for attending to the characteristic appearance of a face. We are attending *from* the features *to* the face, and thus may be unable to specify features ... We may call this the *functional structure* of tacit knowing. (Polanyi 1983, p. 10)

Using Polanyi's model we can say that when a director is perceiving, or assessing, an actor's performance they are attending *from* what the actor is doing, the craft of acting or behaving, *to* the performance. Hence, a director might not be able to tell you everything that the actor did – their vocal inflections, their body language, their eye movement, their breathing, their gestures, and the rhythm with which the performance unfolded. These elements of the performance are like the features of the face that Polanyi uses in his example. Nevertheless, a director would be able to describe the performance to a certain extent, just like Polanyi's example of the subject being able to describe the face without being able to precisely illustrate the features.

There is a compelling need for this kind of scholarship, because although film studies touches on this area of directorial practice, it has not been thoroughly explored within academic literature. From the very beginning of cinematic analysis critics, theorists and academics have predominantly concentrated their examination on the solid, stable ground of the finished film, or as some prefer to call it, the 'text'. Robert Stam makes this clear, "The object of film theory – films themselves – is profoundly international in nature" (Stam 2000, p. 1). Although, at this point in his book Stam is discussing the universality of cinema, he plainly recognises that the finished film has been the preferred centre of investigation for many film scholars primarily because any film scholar anywhere in the world is

able to watch and analyse a finished film, for example *Casablanca* (Curtiz 1942). Excepting the slight variations of different release prints *Casablanca* is fixed in time. David Bordwell also supports this point-of-view. “Most scholars concerned with particular films have concentrated on interpreting them at a fairly high level of generality. The scrutiny of style that is common place in art history or musicology has still not become well established in film studies” (Bordwell 2005, p. 10). Both Stam and Bordwell have identified that by far the bulk of scholarly writing in the area of film studies has focused on film as text and rarely on the production processes that bring a film to life. Consequently a multitude of theoretical models have been developed to analyse the finished film: from the Phenomenology of Realism, through the arrival of Structuralism, Linguistics, Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Feminism, Post-structuralism, Multiculturalism, Post-colonialism, Enunciation Theory, Post-modernism, and to what Stam describes as today’s pluralisation of film theory. Up until recently film studies have to a certain extent shied away from a widespread investigation of directing actors during filmmaking – the actual act of directing as opposed to positioning the director as an auteur. The study of screen acting, or performance studies, is another area that has been less extensively examined. Recently Baron and Carson edited a special issue of the *Journal of Film and Video* specifically to help advance the academic study of screen performance.

Our desire to advance the analysis and understanding of screen acting, to help build vocabularies for analyzing performance, and to explore integral connections between framing, editing, sound design, and performance elements led to the anthology *More Than a Method: Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Film Performance ...* In launching that endeavor, we found a vibrant area of study underrepresented in academic discourse. (Baron & Carson 2006, pp. 1-2)

Baron et al, (2004) has many worthy and interesting essays, particularly those written by McDonald, Carnicke, Viera, and Carson. However, these and other essays are primarily concerned with generalizing about the meaning of particular screen performances. “Despite the diversity of method and material, the studies in this collection all begin from the perception that film acting is best understood as a form of *mediated performance*” (Baron, Carson & Tomasulo 2004, p. 1). In a

2006 article Baron speaks of a desire “to explore integral connections between framing, editing, sound design, and performance elements” (Baron & Carson 2006, pp. 1-2), yet little overall emphasis is placed on the role of the director as having a collaborative relationship with the screen actor in the creation of the performance. Perhaps this is because the actor/director relationship exists outside the film as a text. This oversight regarding the role the director has in shaping screen performance has echoes of the 1989 Academy Awards where *Driving Miss Daisy* (Beresford 1989) won four Oscars including Best Picture, and Best Actress, for Jessica Tandy, but Bruce Beresford was not nominated for Best Director, which caused a minor scandal at the time. Chief *New York Post* film critic Lou Lumenick raised this unusual case of the unrecognised director.

Since I started handicapping Oscar races in 1981, only on one occasion has a movie won Best Picture without receiving a Best Director nomination -- 1988, [it was in fact 1989] when *Driving Miss Daisy* pulled off an upset without a corresponding nomination for Bruce Beresford. Best Picture wins without Best Director nods -- whether the director wins or not -- are so rare during the academy's 82-year history that when Oscar nominations come out, us prognosticators usually begin by crossing these unfortunate movies off the list. (Lumenick 2009)

Actor and writer Jon Mullich makes the same point,

Driving Miss Daisy is a perfectly unobjectionable Best Picture selection, and it is refreshing to find such an unpretentious, simple film on the roster of Oscar fame. But the Academy didn't seem all that enthusiastic about its top choice, denying it the usually perquisite Best Director nomination for Bruce Beresford that accompanies a Best Picture (*Wings* and *Grand Hotel* are the only other Oscar winners not to receive a Best Director nominations, but they were both released in an era when only three directors could be nominated as opposed to today's five), and producer Richard D. Zanuck somewhat bitterly (and justifiably) objected to Beresford's lack of recognition in his Oscar acceptance speech. (Mullich 2009)

We cannot know why Beresford was not nominated, but we do know that culturally the film director has often been presented in a romanticised fashion as someone whose practice is steeped in feelings, shrouded by the mystery of creative muses and seemingly impenetrable individual creative choices—thus

giving the impression that their creative practice is unanticipated and problematic, and therefore difficult to analyse. As Bailin points out,

“The view of divine inspiration [proposed by Plato] excludes craft from the realm of art, while the technique view [proposed by Aristotle] reduces art to craft. The reluctance of some contemporary theorists to admit skill into the realm of creativity appears to be connected with this Platonic vision of the act of creation as mysterious, inexplicable, and unanticipated” (Bailin 1988, p. 90).

Although in recent years there has been a growth of scholarship in studying the scientific basis of human creativity, such as the work of Zolberg¹ (1990), Wolff (1993), Bourdieu (1996), Csikszentmihalyi (1997), Negus & Pickering (2004), Pope (2005), Sawyer (2006), and McConachie & Hart (2010), much of this work has been in the areas of sociology, psychology, literary and cultural studies, and in the case of McConachie & Hart, cognitive studies within theatre, which although they may not strictly line up with screen performance nonetheless provide valuable insights. However, there is only a small body of scholarship focusing on how creativity, as opposed to practice, functions within the realm of the film director. There are many non-scholarly works primarily aimed at young and upcoming film directors that deal with the craft of directing. Some of the better known ones are: Eisenstein (1970), Arijon (1976), Andrew (1978), Dworkin (1983), Ball (1984), Katz (1991 & 2004), Richards (1992), Rodriguez (1996), Stevens (1997), Bare (2000), Travis (2002), Bettman (2003), Kingdon (2004), Mackendrick (2004), Seger (2004), Dancyger (2006), Rabiger (2008) and Proferes (2008). Generally these texts attempt to cover the entire directorial process from conception and pre-production, through to production, post-production and sometimes even marketing and distribution. Alongside these practical books are anecdotal texts reflecting on the careers of notable filmmakers, such as Sherman (1976), McBride (1982), de Navacelle (1987), Coppola (1993), Lumet (1996), Kagan (2000), and Russell (2000). Other works, such as Mamet (1992), Weston (1996, 2003), Comey (2002, 2006), Salvi (2003), Higson (2004), Chow (2006), Carson (2006), and Stanislavski (2010) give considerable attention to screen

¹ All the texts mentioned but not cited in this Introduction are fully cited in the Bibliography.

performance or focus on approaches to screen acting like Stanislavski, Brecht, the Method and others, so that directors have an understanding of what it is a actor does and how to speak to an actor. Texts such as these are insightful regarding the role of the director and filmmaking in general; however, on the whole they pay little attention to discussing how a director knows and assesses an actor's performance on set while the camera is rolling. One reason might be because it is a difficult area to deconstruct and examine, mainly because many directors find it awkward to articulate exactly why they do what they do and the thought processes behind the decisions they make.

The work of the film director is not easily discernable ... we must look to the film and determine what is there that could only have come from someone in the position of a director. We must decide which of a film's dimensions of expression are the working domain of the director alone and of none of the other participants. (Sherman 1976, p. vii)

While assessing actor performance on set is the domain of the director, there has been a growth in recent years of academic texts that seek to expand the scholarship of screen performance. The work of Naremore (1984, 2006) has been significant in drawing academic attention to this area. So has the work of Baron (2004, 2006, and 2008) with her co-writers and editors, Carson, Tomasulo, and Carnicke, and also the work of Wojick (2004), Bordwell (2005), Carrol (1997), Comey (2002), Wolf (2003), Viera (2004), Drake (2006), McGillian (2006), Wright-Wexman (2006), Vinberg (2006), Walsh-Bowers (2006), Zucker (1997, 2006), and Taylor (2007). However, more work needs to be done in this area as Baron's two statements below, one in 2004 and the other in 2008 suggest.

Closing with a description of the minute details in Ingrid Bergman's expressions and gestures in a moment from *Notorious* (1947), McDonald argues for the importance of analyzing the *material elements of actor's performances* in film: vocal intonation, gesture, facial expressions, posture, and so on. (Baron, Carson & Tomasulo 2004, p. 3)

But a complete hearing is needed. Why? Because the simple, straightforward proposal that actors' gestures and expressions are on par with other filmic elements challenges the influential view that screen performances are created in the editing room. To suggest that acting is a component of film goes against accepted ideas about the

'nature' of film and the time-honoured notion that live performance is the province of 'true' acting. (Baron & Carnicke 2008, p. 1)

This exegesis seeks to make a contribution to this area of scholarship by shedding light on how directors know and assess an actor's performance on set while the camera is rolling.

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Chapter 1

Framing the Creative Work

It is important at this time to remember what your task is during the filming process. This is not about achieving that one perfect performance. It is about recording a sufficient range so that you can recreate the performance in the editing room. Yes, of course you are looking to capture those extraordinary moments that will occur, but this process is more about creating and collecting a range of material for postproduction. (Travis 2002, p. 257)

This quote describes the conventional Hollywood approach to directing and camera coverage that is typical of modern narrative filmmaking. This technique films multiple shots of an actor's performance, from different camera angles, so the performance can be re-created in editing. However, not every director adopts this method. This chapter discusses why I chose not to use the Hollywood technique for the production of *Gingerbread Men*, a fiction film, which I wrote, produced, directed, and edited. *Gingerbread Men* is 29-minutes long, cost approximately \$19,000 to produce and was entirely self-funded. The film had a semi-professional cast and a mixture of professional and amateur crew. *Gingerbread Men* is very much my creative vision and I tried as much as possible to control the *mise-en-scène* of the film, without trampling on the creative collaboration of the crew, and especially the actors.

I have also attached as an appendix to my DCA the very low budget feature film *10 Days to Die* (2010, 87 minutes), which was produced for under \$200,000. The film was funded by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Bond University. I produced the film, co-wrote the script with professional screenwriter Philip Witts, and I directed a number of scenes. I had creative control of the script development, casting and final cut of the film. The production of the film involved predominantly industry and Bond University staff (myself and others) as heads of departments, with students fulfilling other senior and supporting roles, with the exception of the role of the director, which was shared by two Masters students under my supervision. In the scenes I directed, I experimented with contrasting the single-shot per scene shooting style, which allowed the actors to develop their performance over time and space,

with scenes shot using the Hollywood technique. In my opinion some of the best performances were created in those single shot scenes.

My major work for the DCA the film *Gingerbread Men* tells the story of Jess, a recovering alcoholic woman who lives alone on a small isolated farm. Jess is traumatised because she feels responsible for an accident that crippled her young son Ben. Jess never forgave herself for not preventing the accident and her internal torment drove her to drink heavily. Eventually her husband, David, kicked her out of the family home and Jess fled to the country. She has not seen Ben or David since. In the back-story, before the film begins, Jess employs Tony, an itinerant farm labourer, to build her an organic vegetable garden. Unbeknown to Jess, Tony is also traumatised by a tragic event in his past. Tony and his younger sister were driving home from a party one night. Tony had had too much to drink. Some young people were racing cars along back streets. As Tony drove around a bend he saw two cars bearing down upon him. Tony swerved to avoid them, but in doing so crashed into a tree, killing his sister. After the police investigation Tony's parents disowned him and he left home a disgraced and broken man. *Gingerbread Men* begins when Tony arrives at Jess's farm to commence building the vegetable garden. When these two sad and lonely figures come together, their personality clash sets in chain a series of emotionally confronting events that ultimately leads Jess to confront her past and reach out for a brighter future.

Creating the story

The creation of the *Gingerbread Men* story had a circuitous gestation. It originally began as the story of a female heroin addict, Jess, who lived in a housing commission block of flats with her young son, Ben, whose father had long ago abandoned them. At that stage the story focused on how Jess tried to hide her heroin addiction in order to keep her job, her flat, and her son. Jess had a boyfriend, Tony, who supplied her with heroin and continually 'borrowed' from her what little money she managed to save. The further I developed the story the darker it became and soon I realised that the entire pitch of the story was misdirected. As is often the case with screenwriting, the characters had developed a life of their own and they were leading me into territory that I eventually felt uncomfortable with. The story was bleak and

depressing and so large a schism had grown between the story and me that I no longer had any empathy with the characters and their self-destructive behaviour. Jess and Tony lacked hope, humanity and dignity. They dragged each other deeper into a pit of despair, rather than fighting to lift themselves out of addiction. The story had become about the destruction of a family and a child, rather than about their recovery. Seger and Whetmore (1994) interviewed Bill Kelley, the writer of *Witness* (Peter Weir 1985), who believes that lead characters must have a combination of dignity, faults and weaknesses. When creating the character of John Book, played by Harrison Ford, he was looking to create a memorable character:

I start with the ideal man. Dignity is a very big key for me for the male character. I have to find what a man thinks of dignity, this is the man who is my hero. And he has to have something of an intellect. And then I dress him down. What are his faults? What are his weaknesses? (Seger & Whitemore 1994, p. 30)

Originally I had not heeded Kelley's advice and Jess was not this kind of lead character. I suddenly felt creatively paralyzed. The story had taken me to a place I had not foreseen and I did not know how to change direction. I had struck a problem that long periods of conscious thought and the application of learned cinematic dramatic knowledge was not solving. I had writer's block. Furlong (2000) uses the work of Schön (1987) to argue that in the real world professionals do not face neat well-formed problems they can solve by applying objective theoretical knowledge and learned techniques. To Furlong and Schön a gap exists between learned professional knowledge and the complexity of problems that confront practitioners – in my case, a director/writer with many years of professional experience. Schön states, “the problems of real-world practice do not present themselves to practitioners as well-formed structures. Indeed they tend not to present themselves as problems at all but as messy indeterminate situations” (Schön 1987, p. 4). I was in a ‘messy indeterminate situation’. I should say at this point that while I have some aptitude as a screenwriter (having won an industry award for my screenwriting) I am aware that I approach screenwriting as a director. My stories often begin with images and feelings, and characters take their time to evolve. Then one day, while suffering writer's block, I was staring out the window of my office and an image came to me. Claxton (2000) would call staring out the window ‘ruminating’, which is the act of reflecting on personal experience in order to seek insight into a problem.

Thus a student teacher, baffled by the poor reception of a well-planned lesson, may be more likely to generate a creative alternative for herself as her mind wanders drowsily in the evening than she is in a serious, anxious post-lesson debriefing with her tutor or mentor. (Atkinson 2000, p. 39)

For me, this image coming to me when I was not actively writing, but ruminating is an example of professional intuition. I had created these three characters, Jess, Ben, and Tony, but the story and the setting were not working. Seger and Whetmore stress this point, “A director’s decisions involve an intuitive process that seeks out the basic rhythms in each scene and story. This process applies to the characters and well as the film as a whole” (Seger & Whitemore 1994, p. 111). In my original story there was too much ugliness for its own sake, which resulted in too much easily manufactured but shallow and unsatisfying drama. Seger and Whetmore believe that:

Creating an unforgettable character in a script can be the key to winning the heart of a director because so many directors begin by considering how the character’s journey through the story will ultimately affect the audience. For Ron Howard this is the single most important consideration. (Seger & Whitemore 1994, p. 65)

As a director, Ron Howard is interested in characters who strive to be better people. “I think there is some sort of force within us to be better people. We have it within our power to actually phase out certain behaviours, such as violence, and create viable alternatives” (Howard quoted in Seger & Whitemore 1994, p. 102). Ron Shelton, director of *Bull Durham* (1988), has a very similar point of view, “I’m interested in doing films about real human behaviour ... I start by embracing the characters because I identify with them” (Seger & Whitemore 1994, p. 101). The image that came to me the day I was suffering writer’s block was of a woman sitting in the lounge room at the front of her house looking through an old venetian blind. She had a half-drunk glass of whiskey in her hand and was watching an itinerant-looking man jump off the back tray of a four-wheel drive utility. The man collected his large, swag-like, backpack, waved goodbye to the driver and moved hesitantly towards the woman’s house. Where this image came from, or what inspired this image, I still do not know.

After you’ve exhausted all the conventional things, and all of your own things, if you’re lucky enough, something pops into your head. It doesn’t come *out* of my head. It falls *in*. Maybe there are ideas floating in the air. Every good idea I ever had I never ‘thought’ of it. It

dropped. And I said, “Oh, yes, by god, that’s it.” (Mamoulian quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 123)

I knew immediately that the image was linked to the story of Jess and Tony, but I also knew that the image had transposed the location of the story from the gritty inner city laneways of housing commission flats to the wide-open spaces of the country. After this image appeared the story quickly changed from being about a heroin addict losing her son to that of a broken woman using whiskey to dull the pain of losing her son, but desperately wanting to get him back. Once losing the son became the back-story the rest of story came alive for me. According to Seger, Martha Coolidge, director of *Rambling Rose* (1991), was struck by a visual description when she read the script and it made all the difference to her.

You’re always looking for a metaphor that is extremely visual and dramatic so that it becomes a picture and not just words on a page. In the script there was an image of sunlight coming through the window in a kitchen, this vivid light hits the fruit on the kitchen table ... And I realized that Rose brought love and light into that family. The metaphor came out of the writing but the visual image gave birth to the design of the entire film, the way the cinematographer lit it, the production designer’s color scheme, everything else. (Coolidge quoted in Seger & Whitmore 1994, p. 99)

Previously, every time I sat down to write the earlier version of the story I had difficulty getting into Jess’s head and her emotions. Each time she felt altered and elusive. She thought different thoughts, had different feelings, reacted in different ways. However, the new Jess, who pined for Ben’s return, felt clearer, and more defined. It did not matter whether a day or a week had passed from the previous time I sat down to write, Jess felt the same. I was able to sense her, occupy her mind and delve into her emotions. I quickly came to know this country Jess and her world. The story was richer and more complex. These changes also impacted on the mood and feeling of the story. The new, farm based story, was a story of hope. The terrible events had already happened. Jess is on the cusp of breaking away from the pain and suffering of the past, and moving towards brighter prospects. Having this deep knowledge about the characters is invaluable for a director, for it has a significant impact on how one directs an actor’s performance. Hesper Anderson, the writer of *Children of a Lesser God* (1986), says she gets right into her characters. Anderson lives everything they live and feels everything they feel.

In writing, I become all the characters. It's dreamtime. Time to get inside the character. You lay the groundwork and hope it kicks in. Then a miracle happens, you wake up, get in the shower, and suddenly your characters take on a life of their own, they start talking, moving around. They've taken over. They come alive and they won't shut up. I become exhausted by them. (Anderson quoted in Seger & Whitemore 1994, p. 30)

The character of Tony also began to change. He was no longer the parasite that leeches the life out of Jess. Instead, he became a damaged soul like Jess. Tony mirrored Jess's predicament. Where Jess was using whiskey to dull her pain and hide from her past, Tony used the life of a vagabond to distance himself from genuine human contact and emotion. Life on the highway became a solitary one, a life in limbo and self-punishment for the terrible thing he had done. Jess had run away from her past to the farm where she now lived — Tony was still running.

The directorial approach

Filmmaking is a collaborative creative process and it is this fusing of a creative team from varying backgrounds that extends the creative choices and possibilities that imbue a film. *The Godfather* (1972) would have been a very different film had it not been directed by Francis Ford Coppola, photographed by Gordon Willis, designed by Dean Tavoularis and the characters performed by Al Pacino, Diane Keaton, Marlon Brando, Robert Duvall, Talia Shire and John Cazale. When Coppola made *The Godfather II*, in 1974, he assembled the same key creative team and cast (although Brando, was replaced by Robert De Niro). Sixteen years later, in 1990, Coppola again called upon Willis and Tavoularis, as well as Al Pacino, Diane Keaton, and Talia Shire for *The Godfather III*. However, what is and is not the work of the director is rarely easy to distinguish. The documentary, *Visions of Light* (Glassman, McCarthy, Samuels 1992), about esteemed cinematographers exposes the impact that creative collaborators have on what is sometimes perceived as the work of the director. In the documentary, Néstor Almendros and Haskell Wexler, both celebrated cinematographers, speak separately about the cinematography of *Days of Heaven* (1978) directed by Terrence Malick.

Almendros commenced the film as the director of photography, but because the film went over schedule, he had to leave to work on *Goin' South* (1978) directed by Jack

Nicholson. The producers brought in Wexler to replace Almendros. During the filming of the scene where Richard Gere is shovelling coal into a furnace Wexler used a lens filter, because it was a quick and easy way of achieving the look he wanted, even though he knew Almendros would disapprove of him doing so. Almendros loathed the use of lens filters and much preferred to achieve the look he wanted through careful lighting and choice of lens. Nevertheless, Wexler did it anyway, because he felt that he had to be true to his own creativity, even though he knew that it would make the scene look different to the other scenes photographed by Almendros. This is a clear example of where an A List director, in this case Terrence Malick, ended up with a film with two different looks, because he had to changed directors of photography during production. As the director, Malick was only able to partially control the *mise-en-scène*. According to David Bordwell (2005), the French critics who came after Bazin, and wrote in *Cashiers du Cinéma*, such as Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Francois Truffaut, and others saw *mise-en-scène* as:

... all the factors that the director could control during the shooting – the performances, the blocking, the lighting, the placement of the camera. Thus Hollywood directors, who may not have worked on the film's script and might have no say in editing, could still decisively shape the film at the *mise-en-scène* phase. (Bordwell 2005, p. 11)

However, the *Days of Heaven* example clearly shows that a director has variable control of the *mise-en-scène*. When directing *Gingerbread Men* I would only get one chance to see the actors' performance on set and I would be making assessments of their performance in real time. Hence, I needed a directorial methodology that was best suited to exploring how directors read and assess an actor's performance on set. In order to achieve this, I had to remove, as much as possible, any opportunity to re-create, improve or save the actors' performance during editing, in order to maintain the validity of the experiment. By doing this, the assessments I made about the actors' performance on set would be permanently fixed and thus be open for review and criticism. Consequently, ADR (automated dialogue replacement) was not used on *Gingerbread Men*. Furthermore, I deliberately did not use a video split monitor, nor did we use any playback facility. These are choices I believe contributed to the authenticity of the film. I would only get one chance to see the performance and that was as it was occurring. This was important to me because the ability to alter the actors' performance during editing would undermine what I was trying to explore.

Typically, once in post-production, the director has the opportunity to repeatedly watch an actor's performance. Each time it is possible for the director to see more deeply into the performance, compare it to other takes, and make a final decision about which is the better performance. This can be weeks, if not months, after filming.

What you feel on the set that given day in August is not at all what you're going to feel when you deposit that scene in the continuum of the narrative of the film on some day in September in a cutting room three thousand miles away. (Penn quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 114)

It is commonplace for directors, editors and producers to re-create an actor's performance during editing. I have done so on numerous productions. Standard multi shot camera coverage results in directors shooting several shots of different sizes and from varying angles of an actor delivering the same line of dialogue, gesture, or movement. Later, in the editing suite, the director and the editor have a vast number of choices from which to re-create each actor's performance and they can select the best moments from each of the shots, and takes, and combine them to create a seamless performance. Bordwell (2005, p. 23) analyses a three and a half minute scene from *Jerry McGuire* (Cameron Crowe 1996) that has over sixty-seven edits at an average shot length of only 3.2 seconds. This might be the reason that Seger and Whetman feel the editor is in a very privileged position, because they get to see every shot and every print take again and again, whereas on set the director generally only has one look and that is while it is being shot. However, because the editor's job is to select the best moments from the full range of shots filmed continuity of performance becomes critical. Joe Hutshing, the editor of *Jerry McGuire*, *Wall Street*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Indecent Proposal* and *JFK*, believes actor continuity is the editor's friend.

Everyone has a way of approaching it, but someone like Martin Sheen is the same in every take and every take is excellent ... you can transfer the words from one take into another because he gives them at the same pace. He's an editor's dream ... Other actors experiment more. Robert Redford does things differently each time. And maybe the actions don't always match, but I enjoy the fact that Redford gives you the option of all these different takes. He'll give you a lot of choices about which way you can go. (Hutshing quoted in Seger & Whitemore 1994, p. 276)

Bill Reynolds, the editor of *The Turning Point*, *The Sting*, and *The Sound of Music*, has a different view about the editor's relationship with the actor and the actor's performance. Reynolds believes that editors are often required to rescue a bad performance and must be creative in the way they use different shots and takes and how they join them together into something that was never achieved on set – in other words, to create a performance that the actor never created.

You can save a bad performance by placing a part of his [the actor's] dialogue on his back or on the cut-aways to other actors. You might place the dialogue offstage or have someone else react to what is being said off stage. (Seger & Whitmore 1994, p. 278)

Clearly this is an effective production style and is commonplace throughout the industry, because it allows for the re-creation of the performance in post-production, thus, ensuring the best possible performance makes it up onto the screen, even though the performance is a reconstruction, or might never have even existed as a single performance. In fact, as Bill Reynolds points out, an editor could edit together a performance that was greater than the sum of its parts. In this situation the director is deliberately gathering sufficiently varied raw material, or bracketing the performance, in order to create their version of the performance in editing. Ron Howard makes this clear when he states, "If all else fails shoot a master and shoot overs (over-the-shoulder shots) and singles" (Stevens 1997, p. 375). Allan Dwan, director of *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) makes the same point:

I tell you, if you know what you're doing, and your actors are good, things pop along. Actors will sometimes say, "gee, I could have done that better," and I always say, "we'll fix it in the close-ups; we'll save it." (Dwan quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 119)

Because the actors' performance can be, and usually is, altered by editing, the directorial approach I adopted would ultimately determine how useful my methodology would be for examining the results. To avoid jeopardizing the validity of how I assessed the actors' performance on set I needed to find a more constraining and editorially restricted camera coverage style, one that would severely limit my post-production options. According to Bordwell (2005), cinematic staging falls into two categories – the longer takes of yester-year, when mainstream Hollywood directors often created the rhythms and performance of a scene in a single beautifully choreographed, elegantly crafted shot; and the quick-fire cutting, multi-shot scene, or

intensified continuity style, of the modern era – a staging style strongly influenced by the television close-up, music videos and television commercials. However, one can also argue that the single-shot scene never really died and has always existed in independent and art-house films. Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise* (1984) adopted this style, where every scene is a single shot. The Turkish film *Uzak* (Distant) (2002), written and directed by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, and the winner of many international awards, has a similar single shot structure, as does Béla Tarr's recent film *The Turin Horse (A Torinói Ló)* (2011), which won the Silver Bear (Jury Grand Prix) at the 2011 Berlin International Film Festival, and Julia Leigh's *Sleeping Beauty* (2011).

Nonetheless, Bordwell's point is that there has been a significant shift in mainstream cinema over the past few decades. There was a time when even big budget action war movies were shot with carefully framed and choreographed shots and hand-held shots were rare. In recent years it is common for films to be shot entirely hand-held and edited in an abrupt, almost jump cut style that draws attention to the filmmaking process. Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) is but one such example, as are *Cloverfield* (2008) and *Quarantine* (2008). In contrast Bordwell offers the directorial styles of the Greek director Theo Angelopoulos and the Japanese director Kenji Mizoguchi. One could also add here the work of John Cassavetes, particularly *Opening Night* (1977) and going back a little further Otto Preminger, particularly in the film he made with Frank Sinatra and Kim Novak, *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955). One reason both Angelopoulos and Mizoguchi favoured the long-take approach to cinematic staging is because the rhythm and power of the actors' performance in a scene is allowed to fully develop.

In tracing out a history of film style, Bazin distinguished between 'directors who put their faith in the image' and 'directors who put their faith in reality'. Image-based directors built their style around painterly manipulations of the image (such as German Expressionism) or juxtapositions of images (such as the intellectual montage of Soviet filmmakers). By contrast, directors who put their faith in reality made cinematic art out of certain phenomenal features of the world, such as temporal continuity and spatial adjacency. Bazin believed that F.W. Murnau, Jean Renoir, Orson Wells, William Wyler and the Italian neorealists built very different styles out of the cinema's power to capture the concrete relations of people and objects knit into the seamless fabric of reality. (Bordwell 2005, p. 11)

Other directors also believe that the long-take shooting style produces a type of performance that is inherently different to that obtained by using the intense continuity style. Italian neo-realist director Roberto Rossellini was a big fan of this style.

I prefer the long takes because you can put a lot inside of the take. You build through a lot of things, the atmosphere around, certain kind of detail. Certain kind of mood, certain kind of passage in the thought, and attitude, physical attitude, too. In 'montage', you have to split things up. When you have a short take, it's more difficult to put in a lot. So you have to divide, and the whole thing becomes a demonstration instead of something which is contextual to the thing." (Rossellini quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 107)

Paul Williams, the director of *The Revolutionary* (1970) said:

In a film like *The Revolutionary*, you have to shoot very, very fast. I wanted to get a certain level of performance from the cast. I spent a lot of time and effort on performance. Whenever there was a choice to be made, I would always go for performance rather than for coverage. That may seem like an artificial dilemma, except that it wasn't in this case ... So, very often it is a matter of deciding how to do a scene in an interesting way, visually, but extremely simply and with very long takes ... You find that half of the scenes in *The Revolutionary* are one shot. Sometimes they are fairly carefully worked out, but still just one shot. (Williams quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 111)

Vincent Sherman and Sol Polito, on the other hand, are critical of this technique.

Vincent Sherman, "Sol Polito made me conscious of one thing. He said, 'Why take scenes that are too long and make the actors sweat it out when you know that they are going to be cut?' So, I really only made cuts when I felt that it would be necessary. I didn't want the actors to go through those long four-minute scenes when you knew damn good and well that you were going to have to cut them anyway. (Sherman quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 108)

As the experiment I was setting up was to test my ability to read and assess the actors' performance I felt that adopting the cinematic style of Angelopoulos and Mizoguchi, Cassavetes and others would be the most suitable, because it meant I had to correctly read the actors' performance on set for the entire take. It is a misnomer to think that just because a scene is filmed in a single shot there is no form of editing involved. Directors who choose the long-take style often achieve a great deal of visual editing through manipulation of setting, staging as well as actor and camera

movement. Preminger did this particularly well in *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), as did Hitchcock in *Rope* (1948), as have many other directors such as John Huston.

The best scenes I've ever shot, so far as the camera is concerned, are never commented on. I move the camera a great deal ... It will go from a medium shot to a close-up, back to a two-shot of people walking or something else, and they get into a car and the car drives away. Now these shots are almost ballet. The camera is having a dance with the actors and the scene. These are never seen if they are good. The audience never sees them, never realizes what's happening. (Huston quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 108)

In *Gingerbread Men* there is a scene towards the end of the film where Jess runs out of the cottage and pleads with Tony to drive her to Canberra. The play between the actors and the camera in this scene is similar to what Huston describes above; consequently the scene appears more edited than being a single-shot, and in no way compromised the work of the actors or the drama of the scene. Shooting in this style also meant that I had to give the actors sufficient direction to carry them through the entire scene. One of the advantages of multi-shot coverage is that the director can give the actors specific notes for the particular shot they are shooting and additional notes for subsequent shots. By presenting the actors performance in a single shot I was placing the entire success or failure of the film on an actors' ability to deliver a credible performance for the entire scene, and on my ability to correctly read and assess the actors' performance as it was being created. Again I was following in the footsteps of directors like Cassavetes, who Viera considers developed, "... anti-filmic technical elements, which do not construct a performance on the screen but allow for one to take place before the camera" (Viera 2004, p. 153). Bordwell quotes Steven Spielberg.

I'd love to see directors not shoot so many close-ups. I'd love to see directors trusting the audience to be the film editor with their eyes, the way you are sometimes with a stage play, where the audience selects who they would choose to look at while a scene is being played with two characters, four characters, six characters. There's so much cutting and so many close-ups being shot today ... It's too easy for filmmakers. It's very easy to put somebody up against a wall and shoot a close-up, and they say the words and you go onto the next shot. (Bordwell 2005, p. 22)

Eleanor Coppola (1993) recounts a situation during the making of *Apocalypse Now* (1979). When filming the dining scene which took place in the French compound, Francis Ford Coppola was having difficulty getting the actors to perform the scene the way he wanted. Eleanor Coppola details the process that Francis Ford Coppola was trying to execute.

He [Francis] had the actors do the whole scene in one long piece, over and over, trying to get a sense of the experience of being at that table as a family, arguing with each other. Going through an experience together to produce moments of reality that you don't get when you shoot in pieces, two lines at a time. But it didn't work. Francis was really frustrated, because that technique of creating an experience has always given him some terrific moments and this time it didn't work. (Coppola 1993, p. 121)

This raises one of the fundamental dangers of the long-take style and a possible reason why it fell out of favour, particularly with young up-and-coming directors, although not so much in more recent times. For this directorial approach to be successful all the technical aspects, as well as the actors' performance, must come together perfectly in that single take. Any error renders the whole take unusable and it must be re-shot. This is not only time consuming and costly, but it can drain the creative energy of everyone, especially the actors, resulting in a less than desirable outcome.

He [Francis] decided that maybe it was because they were French and the English lines were a barrier, or that some of them weren't professional actors. He was angry that the set had gone over budget, and he had tried to save money on casting. He kept saying, "An audience doesn't give a shit about the authentic antiques on the set, they care about the people in the scene." (Coppola 1993, p. 121)

Coppola is in agreement with Houston on this point who believed that his best work was never seen, because the audience is focused on the actors and how the story unfolds through them. Coppola was seeking the same thing, but on this occasion it was not working.

Vittorio wanted to break the scene into little pieces and do just a couple of lines at a time until it worked. That's the way they do it in Europe. Francis said that when Bobby De Niro first worked with Bertolucci, he said it drove him crazy because he never got to develop the character from doing the whole scene, he had to play it line by short line. The European approach is to start with the frame, and get

each frame right. Francis works by getting the emotion of the scene going and asking the camera to capture it. This morning, Francis is going to try it in short pieces. (Coppola 1993, p. 121)

It is clear from this passage that Coppola was trying to capture the rich emotional atmosphere that is created when all the actors deliver strong performance at the same time for the duration of the entire scene. Clearly, from the frustration displayed, Coppola was aware that not all the performances were authentic at the same time. Bertolucci's technique of dividing the scene into little bits seems to have gone against Coppola's directorial instincts, perhaps because he felt that the actors would be unable to fully enter their character's emotional space due to the staccato shooting style. The fact that a frustrated Coppola returned the following day and shot the scene in little bits might be seen as an indication that Coppola was reading the performances correctly and that his dissatisfaction with the inconsistency of the actors' performance was the result of a finely tuned directorial instinct. In the first release of *Apocalypse Now* (1979) the entire French compound sequence ended up on the cutting room floor. However, it was included in the *Apocalypse Now Re-dux* version released in 2001. I feel the story is better focused in the first version.

Not every scene in *Gingerbread Men* is a single shot scene, although the vast majority are. There are a few of scenes, such as the scene where Jess tries to help Tony dig up the ground, that use multi-shot coverage. Because of the emotional need to stage Jess and Tony digging at different ends of the garden, and still be able to see both their faces, I felt I had little choice but to use multi shots coverage. However, the number of shots is kept to an absolute minimum. Additionally, the scene where Tony compliments Jess on her cooking, and ends up telling her about the car accident that killed his sister, is another where I held the wide two-shots for as long as dramatically possible. At one point Tony gets up and walks over to the tree and the spatial gap between them is too great to contain them in a single shot. I could not afford a professional grip for the shoot (none lived in Canberra at that time) and so we were restricted to using a Wally Dolly for all the camera moves. Also, there is only one true close-up in the entire film and it is almost the very last shot of the film. It is the moment when Jess sees Ben for the first time. I deliberately held off using close-ups elsewhere in the film so that this climactic moment would have the strongest impact.

Using the long-take style does not mean that I only shot one take of each scene. Often the actors made mistakes, would stumble over words, or forget their lines. At times while moving around the set they would step out of the light. As in all films, technical problems were common. The camera operator would mis-frame the shot, or the camera move was not smooth, or the focus was not sharp, or the boom pole would drop into frame. At other times, the actors' delivery of the dialogue was perfect, but their physical actions were not evocative enough, or they had mistimed an action, or there something awkward about their body language. There were also times when as a director I felt a degree of uncertainty about whether the actors had delivered an authentic performance and so I would ask them to perform the scene again. The most common reason we went for another take was that the actors' performance were not consistent throughout the entire scene. When we re-shot these scenes, I gave the actors short but specific notes about which moments worked and which moments did not. It was through this careful reshaping that I was able to assist the actors to deliver the quality performances achieved in the film. However, once we got a good take for everyone, performance and technical, that take would be printed and we moved on.

The production of *Gingerbread Men*

The filming of *Gingerbread Men* took place over a five-day period from early Friday morning through to late Tuesday night during winter. The film is set in and around a small weatherboard cottage on a farm in Urriara, at the foothills of the Brindabella Ranges, about 40 minutes south of Canberra. All but one scene of the film was shot on or very near the farmhouse, and that was the final scene which was shot in a small car park on the edge of Lake Burly Griffin, in Canberra. The cinematic look of the film was determined by my approach to the story and its location. Because of the optimistic nature of the story, the fact that it was winter, and soft browns, ambers, muted greens and deep yellows were all round the primary location and the interior of the cottage had a wood-fuelled fireplace, I felt that a warm look would best convey the feelings and emotions of the story. For inspiration I studied the first two *Godfather* movies, photographed by Gordon Willis. Both *Godfather I* and *II* are washed in warm browns and muted greens. The lighting is often pooled, meaning that central areas of the set, usually occupied by actors, are lit, but the light falls

away quickly so that the walls are dark. From the outset the film, which was shot on SP Betacam, was intended to be graded, and although the final warm light amber colour of the film can be considered un-naturalistic it is, nonetheless, a look that is very familiar to general audiences and one which an audience is unlikely to consider artificial.

As is common for that time of year in Canberra a cold front was passing through and the first three days of the shoot were overcast and grey. This weather suited the early part of the story well, because at this stage Jess and Tony are deeply troubled and unhappy. On one particular day it rained and although this slowed us down, the gentle rain symbolised the inner anguish of the two characters. In the scene Jess brings Tony a cup of coffee while he is working in the garden and apologises for her rude behaviour the previous night. Jess opens up for the first time and tells Tony that she has not seen Ben in over a year, but that she keeps his photos close to her. This raw honesty is too much for Tony and he moves away. The gentle rain was like the tears neither character was yet capable of shedding.

Engaging the cast was a relatively straight-forward process. I had worked with both Emma Strand, who plays Jess, and Mario Gamma, who plays Tony, on many occasions over several years and a great deal of trust and mutual respect had developed between us. I was familiar with their acting style and their range. I believe this was an important factor in achieving the quality of performance seen in the film. Emma gives the most consistent and engaging performance. She fully embraced the character of Jess, and I believe physically, emotionally and psychologically changed when she put on Jess's shoes. It is fair to say that Mario's performance is patchy. At times Mario nails the performance perfectly, like the scene mentioned above. He finds the precise emotional space that Tony is in, and as an actor he lives through that experience for the entire scene. In these scenes the complexity of Tony's character, his anguish, his fears, the protective barriers he has built are easy to see. In other scenes Mario is not as successful in creating as visibly complex a character and it is obvious he is not as emotionally engaged in the scene as Emma. As a character the ramifications of what is occurring in the scene do not appear to be affecting him to the same emotional depth and resonance as they are Emma. A good example of this is the scene where Jess is kneading dough. Tony returns an empty coffee cup and

Jess asks him to read her cards. In this scene Mario struggled to fully connect with Tony. Although Mario confessed later that he had not sufficiently prepared for the scene I still feel that it was a short-coming of my directing skills that I was unable to help Mario make those connections. We did numerous takes of this scene and in the end I settled for 'good enough'. Although he was unprepared for that scene Mario is a skilled and competent actor and with more time and better direction he could have achieved a stronger performance. However, I did resist the temptation to shoot the scene little bit by little bit and from multiple camera angles in order to re-create Mario's performance in the editing suite. Throughout the production Emma was the most professional of all the actors in the way she approached both the demands of the shoot and her character. It was evident that she had spent considerable time thinking about, researching and delving into the psyche of Jess and her damaged emotions. She undertook her role with diligence, sincerity and a genuine desire to portray Jess to the best of her abilities. During the five-day period of the production playing Jess was clearly the most important thing in Emma's life.

In this chapter I have discussed the production of *Gingerbread Men*. I have examined the origin and development of the story and how my own personality had a significant bearing on its evolution. I outlined my thinking in the selection of the directorial approach I adopted that I felt would truly test my ability to read and assess the actors' performance on set. I have also discussed how the coverage style, influenced by the work of Angelopoulos, Mizoguchi, Cassavetes, Coppola and Béla Tarr, of shooting as many scenes as possible in a single long take forced me to make unalterable decisions about the actors' performance. This style of coverage did not allow me to re-create or save the performances in post-production and my choices while editing were limited to reviewing each of the takes in their entirety. The vast majority of the time I ended up using the last take that was filmed of each scene. As with all films some scenes did not survive the editing process and ended up being removed. In all honesty these scenes ended up adding little to the story or development of the characters and their removal enabled the film to flow more smoothly and be more sharply focused.

From a performance point-of-view I was seeking a more 'naturalistic' actor created style of performance, rather than the more 'constructed' director created style typical

of modern films, or non-realist modes as seen in some art-house and experimental films and particular types of comedies. Thus, how well I read the actors' performance on set would have an unusually disproportionate effect on how well the film turned out. In a standard production the director can re-build the actors' performance in editing, thus ensuring that the best possible performance is seen by the audience: and possibly even a performance the actor did not generate in any given take, or even create at all. In *Gingerbread Men* the only performance the audience would see was the one I deemed most authentic at the very moment it was created at the time of filming and without the assistance of many video playback to review it just to be sure. Placing these severe restrictions on the how *Gingerbread Men* was made still seems to me the best way to understand what actually happens when a director is reading and assessing an actor's performance. Finally, I discussed the quality of the two lead actors' performances. Upon reflection I believe that adopting the long-take camera coverage technique was a useful methodology that allowed me to explore reading and assessing the actors' performance on set. It also provided me with useful insights into how a director knows an actor's performance and how a director determines the quality of that performance – topics which are discussed in more detail in chapters four and five.

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Chapter 2

The Role of the Director

The terminology used to describe a director has changed little since Milne¹ (1922) and Pudovkin (1927) and has been so widely used that it has become somewhat empty of meaning. At some point in almost every text written about directing the author will endeavour to define what it means to be a director. Ron Richards uses a collection of other professions in an attempt to bring together the many facets of a director's duties:

He is the guide, the protector, the dictator, the taskmaster, the sadist, the pain in the ass, the artist, the fighter, the trickster, the lover, the teacher, the comedian, the parent — in short, the director is many different things to many people. (Pollack quoted in Richards 1992, p. 7)

This approach, seeking to define one profession by comparing it to another is not always helpful because while the writer identifies certain aspects of another profession's duties as being 'like' or 'similar' to those of the profession they wish to describe the reader is just as likely to make erroneous associations, because they are not privy to the exact details of each aspects the writer had in mind. "His [the director's] job is often misunderstood not only by the general public and by his peers in the movie industry, but also by the director himself" (Richards 1992, p. 7). The last part of this statement is insightful, because directors often struggle to comprehend the full breadth of their role and delineating where their duties end and the duties of other crew members begin. Bare believes that even today it is difficult to describe what a director is:

What is a director? ... even today the question of who does what in the making of a motion picture is one of perpetual mystery to those who view the finished work ... Despite the protestations of the proponents of the auteur theory, the contributions to a motion picture are many

¹ Milne was a "Motion Picture critic for over six years on Motion Picture News, Picture Play Magazine and Vid's (Film) Daily; and member scenario and production department of Famous Players-Lasky Corporation", and his book was "Used as a Supplementary Text in [the] New York Institute of Photography, New York, Chicago, Brooklyn". This information is printed on the title page of the book.

and overlapping; sometimes even those who worked on the picture aren't sure who contributed what. (Bare 2000, pp. 20 - 21)

Furthermore, this raises the question of whether directors are born or made. "Unlike some gifted artists, actors and writers who are born with their talents and can often succeed on their own, the director must learn the art from others, acquiring knowledge and skill through observation and practice" (Bare 1971, 2000, p. 11). Although Sydney Pollack believes that people either have or do not have perception and that perception cannot be taught (Stevens 1997), Bare's position that directors are made rather than born is also not new. Many of the great directors of the early years of cinema, such as Cecile B. DeMille, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Sergei Eisenstein and Lev Kuleshov were all born before 1900 – before film directing existed as a profession. If we look back to the beginnings of cinema during the period when the role of the director was delineating itself from that of the producer we find texts that sought to define what it means to be a director. One such text was written in 1922 by Peter Milne and titled, *Motion Picture Directing: the facts and theories of the newest art*. In the preface Milne attempts to describe a director.

To teach the craft [of directing] through the printed page is as impossible of accomplishment as instructing a steeple-jack in his trade through correspondence school. 'A director must be born, not made.' This old adage, adapted to our present situation, is of a necessity partially false, in-as-much as at the time of the present day directors' initial birthdays there was no such thing as motion picture production. Still it is true in a sense. Because to direct for the screen requires a personality and an ability, blending so many elements of generalship and technique that to studiously require them is next to impossible. (Milne 1922, p. 6)

What Milne and history seem to indicate is that successful directors have a certain aptitude, be it personality, character, intellect, instinct, determination and talent that they bring to directing, rather than having some unquantifiable quality that is somehow mysteriously acquired at birth. Even though John Frankenheimer believed the difference between a good filmmaker and a poor filmmaker lies in their visual sense (Pratley 1969) the ability to use a camera well is a rather common talent. Since the invention of the cinema there have been so many thousands of successful directors worldwide that it cannot be seriously considered a rare skill, even if it mastered by proportionally a small percentage of the population. To be successful

does not mean that a director must be in the same league as Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, Kathryn Bigelow, Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, George Miller, Peter Weir, Gillian Armstrong, Bruce Beresford or Jane Campion. Furthermore, Bare seems to agree with Milne that film directors can come to directing from many different avenues and whatever a person's previous job in the film industry history seems to indicate that no one job has proven better than any other at predicting who will successfully make the transition to directing.

Logical, you might say for actors to go into directing ... many were sure that, if given the chance, they could do it better. Some have and some have not. On average, the degree of success among the actor-turned-director group has not been any more spectacular than for other groups. (Bare 1971, 2000, p. 14)

The crux of the problem is that it is difficult to describe exactly what a director does and what is unique to their role, because they work so closely and collaboratively with other crew members.

They [the director] preconceive a motion picture as it will appear in its entirety and vitally participate in all the phases of its preparation and execution. Above all, they must indelibly stamp their personality, their style and their *touch* on the film they create, and the measure of this success is the extent to which they enlighten, uplift and give pleasure to the audience. (Bare 1971, 2000, pp. 22 - 23)

This is the world of the director as leader of the creative team, whose over-arching vision is essential for maintaining the creative unity of the film.

Your key function is to inspire other artists to contribute to the making of your movie in such a fashion that the project maintains a cohesiveness along the lines of your vision ... This is a unique collaboration wherein you rely heavily on other artists to interpret your vision and deliver various elements of the story to you. (Travis 2002, p. 125 & 127)

This is the function that is most commonly associated with directing: creative leadership. Milne, perhaps because of the period in history when he was writing, called it 'generalship'. Ron Howard believes the director should have a plan, but be open to the creative input of the other members of the production team.

I try to come in every day with a plan that is solid enough to provide a foundation for the movie. That's where it starts. Next you look for ideas and inspiration from your collaborators: actors,

cinematographers, production designers, and others ... You look for things that will embellish on that fundamental point of view and elevate the storytelling quality of the film to help take it to the next level. (Seger & Whitemore 1994, pp. 137 - 138)

In reality the production designer, the director of photography, the camera operator, the wardrobe and make-up crew, stand-by props, even the location scout that drives around looking for locations, all have creative input and are constantly making decisions that the director may not even be aware of. The director only becomes involved in the discussions and decisions that crew members consider necessary to bother the director with. To write his book Milne interviewed several leading directors of the early years of cinema such as Marshall Neilan, William C. DeMille, Rex Ingram, Cecil B DeMille, Frank Borzage, Edward Dillon and Ernst Lubitsch. According to Milne when he asked these esteemed silent era directors, “What is the fundamental asset that makes the great motion picture director? The requisite that distinguishes the real artist from the rank and file?” (Milne 1922, p. 9), very few of them agreed with each other. This reinforces the belief that what a director does has always been difficult to express, even by esteemed practitioners. This attests that tacit knowledge plays a significant role in how directors function. Further on Milne reveals what he believes is *the* essential asset, that unique quality, necessary for ‘the conscientious director’.

It is really the same asset that distinguishes the great artist in any walk of art from the less great ... It is quite true that the ability to ‘feel’ a story and each one of its individual scenes, counts a lot in a director’s favor. The proper ‘atmosphere,’ the director’s ability to achieve it, is vastly important. So also it is important to have the ability to properly ‘visualize’ the continuous action of a picture even before the cameraman has once turned his crank. But after all has been said and done on these scores it remains that the one determining factor that distinguishes the great from the near-great in the picture producing art is [emotional] experience. (Milne 1922, p. 9)

What is interesting here is that in 1922 before ‘talkies’ Milne recognised that having emotional experience is paramount. George Cukor seems to support this view, “I can’t tell you what are the basics. I wish to Christ that I could. You could turn me inside out. That is the knowledge of a lifetime” (Sherman 1976, p. 4). Directors often say that when making a film you must love your characters. Milne believed that it is the director’s ability to identify with and have empathy and compassion for each character’s emotional journey that enables them to guide the telling of the story and

each actor's performance, thus affording the audience the best opportunity to emotionally engage with the characters and the story. This is also something that Stanislavski believed, "Stanislavski saw that it is easier to give an audience a clever ride than a real experience" (Donnellan quoted in Stanislavski 2010, p. x). However, Milne, Bare and Cukor are not the only ones who struggle to define what it means to be a director. Even Academy Award and Palm D'Or winning directors struggle, "He [Francis] said, 'Vittorio², I have a confession to make. I am scared every day that you will think I am an asshole, because I am not definitive enough, that I am trying to find my way, find a direction for this film'" (Coppola 1993, p. xviii). According to Nicholas T. Proferes, successful directors have "an innate dramatic instinct" (Proferes 2008, p. xviii). Francis Ford Coppola speaks about being 'definitive' and trying to 'find a direction for this film'. This could be seen as him struggling with his dramatic instinct. Coppola sees it as the director's responsibility to guide the filmmaking process, not just for the actors, but also for the cinematographer and the rest of the crew. The struggle to definitively tell the story, and stay on-story, is evident in Coppola's confession. The language that Coppola uses also gives some light as to how he sees the role of the director. This is something that Proferes also seeks to clarify.

There are many attributes that are necessary for a good film director: imagination, tenacity, knowledge of the craft, knowledge of people, ability to work with others, willingness to accept responsibility, courage, stamina, and many more. But the most important attribute that can be taught, the one that if missing will negate all the rest, is *clarity*—clarity about the story and how each element in it contributes to the whole, and then clarity about what is conveyed to the audience. (Proferes 2008, p. xviii)

Proferes in 2008 speaks about 'clarity' and Coppola, who was shooting *Apocalypse Now* (1976), speaks about being 'definitive'. Does definitiveness come through clarity? Are they one and the same? It is possible that what Coppola was struggling with was the ability to clearly see the entire film, every moment, gesture, glance, action, stunt and camera composition with such clarity, such definitiveness, that at any given moment, whether on set or over lunch, he could decisively answer any of the thousands of questions that continuously bombard the director? "Directing is a

² Vittorio Storaro was the cinematographer on *Apocalypse Now* (1976) for which he won one of his three Oscars. He went on to work on several other Coppola films.

lonely business and there is a prevailing myth that the director must by definition have all the answers. Well, nobody has all the answers. Not even our greatest directors have all the answers” (Johntz quoted in Travis 2002, p. 390). Jo Lane³ says something similar.

There is so much happening around you as a director, and every single person is asking you a question about something, from as minute as should the apron be pink or blue, to as big as, we’ve just lost the money on this project. And each of them are absolutely as important as each other to the person who is asking you the question. (Sergi 2011)

This is important, because as Steven Spielberg points out the director must uphold the appearance of being in control at all times:

One of the things Henry Hathaway told me is that you just have to know what you’re doing every single minute of the day. His advice was: even if you don’t know what the hell you’re doing, pretend you do. (Sherman 1976, p. 140)

Therefore, in order to understand which aspects of the filmmaking process influence how a director assesses an actor’s performance it is necessary to more closely examine how a director functions on set. Every time a director walks on set and begins the process of shooting a scene they are confronted with a vast array of possible creative choices. As Steven Katz says, “the filmmaker is confronted with a variety of visual decisions that the screenplay does not address” (Katz 1991, p. 5). Regardless of how much pre-planning may or may not have gone into the organisation of the scene the director’s primary task is to bring that scene to life. What occurs next depends on what kind of director the director is. Eric Sherman (1976) quotes Jean Renoir who believed directors fell into two camps; those directors whose primary interest lies with the camera and the visual image and those who focus on the actors and their performance as the primary storytelling vehicle. Renoir, even though he referred to actors as models, saw himself as belonging to the group who derived the pictorial elements of the film after working with the actors as creative contributors. Carnicke places Fritz Lang, and “Michelangelo Antonioni, [who] tends to follow the ‘master puppeteer’ approach” (Carnicke 2004, p. 43) as

³ Jo Lane is an Australian director, and she appears in the *Research Interviews* DVD that also forms part of this DCA.

directors whose main interest lies in the image. Carnicke then states that, “Actors see most film directors as belonging to this group” (Carnicke 2004, p. 43). However, Sherman believed there are many kinds of directors. There are those who say that their primary concern is the structure and inherent narrative and dialogue patterns of the film; others for whom the pictorial beauty of the film is paramount; still others who believe that it is through editing that the uniqueness of the film art is truly expressed; and some who believe that their primary task is achieving the best possible performance from the actors.

... other directors are occupied primarily with the performance of actors. To them, the beauty of film will be correlative with the quality of the acting. These directors attend not only to the performance as a whole, but to endless minor nuances and gestures throughout. (Sherman 1976, p. xvii)

According to Pratley (1969), John Frankenheimer believed that what actors contribute to the directorial process and filmmaking in general is often overlooked, even though regardless of how a film is shot, in reality, the director is filming the performance of actors. Margaret Mills⁴ express a similar sentiment.

I like working with directors who love actors. And because they love them they have paid attention, and they've learned a lot about actors ... and how they work as directors with actors. That counts the most. Wonderful things can happen when that's what's going on. (Sergi 2011)

Norman Jewison believes that the relationship between the actor and the director is particularly special and that in many ways a director can feel closer to the actors than any other members of the crew.

You have to be totally *simpatico* with your actors. I feel closer to the actor than I do to any other aspect of the film. You really have to like each other, depend on each other, trust each other. The actors must feel that I will protect them, that I am their best friend, that all I was if for them to be wonderful in that role. (Jewison in (Seger & Whitmore 1994, p. 132))

⁴ Margaret Mills is an Australian actor/dramaturge, and she appears in the *Research Interviews* DVD that also forms part of this DCA.

As does Clint Eastwood:

I think a director's most important function is probably a comfort zone that he can set up for the actors, because every actor has a certain insecurity level when they first come on. It's a very frightening experience: you are up in front of a lot of people you don't know, and all of the sudden you are going to start sprouting dialogue you've thought about, but you've never heard it come out of your mouth. (Kagan 2000, p. 130)

Other elements of filmmaking, like the production design, cinematography, wardrobe and make-up, are tangible. They can be seen, touched and altered until they are exactly right. However, purely performance moments, such as the final scene in *Casablanca* (Curtiz 1942) where Ingrid Bergman and Humphrey Bogart say goodbye in the aircraft hangar, are about the intangible and evaluating the impact of directorial decisions regarding performance is far more elusive. It is worth noting that the most famous scene in this highly regarded film is not any of the action scenes involving guns, soldiers and speeding vehicles, but the above mentioned scene, which is shot in a simple and straightforward manner.

Action scenes are technical, and technical problems are solvable, like mathematical puzzles are solvable; emotional problems are not. There are millions of ways to solve an emotional problem, and there's no certainty that you're ever right. They're not provable the way an action sequence can be built up. (Pollack quoted in Stevens 1997, p. 10)

Depending on the nature of the director the early stages of filming a scene, such as blocking the actors and the determining of the camera coverage, can be an open and collaborative process.

I never start by pushing the actors into a position, even though I know that's where I'm going to end up. I always let the actors do pretty much what they want to do, have a lot of freedom, and as quickly as I can, I begin to move that into focus. And I usually try to get what I had planned on before I came in, without making the actors feel like they're being pushed about like puppets. But sometimes, in the rehearsal process, we'll find a way that's better than what I had planned. (Pollack quoted in Stevens 1997, p. 27)

Once the scene is blocked the director usually hands the set over to the 1st AD (first assistant director). "During the first walk-through for camera the actor blocking and

the camera blocking will be set. As soon as it's over, the crew is going to go into high gear to set the shot as fast as possible" (Bettman 2003, p. 224). At this time some directors take the actors away from the set and quietly rehearse. "If the director lets the 1st AD work with the crew to set the shot, that frees the director to do what he can do that the 1st AD probably cannot do — namely, work with the actors to help them summon up their very best performances" (Bettman 2003, p. 220).

Tom Kingdon also supports this approach:

If no rehearsal time as been allocated, then the director should do her best to find rehearsal time during the shoot. Almost all actors are willing to devote an hour or two to improving their performance ... the director has to maximize the twenty minutes or an hour while the lighting director sets the lamps for a new scene (Kingdon 2004, p. 308).

According to Weston actors begin performing, or getting into character, prior to the director calling action.

A scene should always happen in the middle of something. You need to watch for an actor 'winding up' to start a scene; it can be as simple to spot as an actor taking a deliberate breath when he hears 'Action'. There needs to be something going on before the scene starts: an awareness of the physical life of the scene; a relaxed freedom and presence in his own body; and a connection to the other actor(s) (Weston 1996, p. 286).

Many directors believe that after properly rehearsing a scene the actor's first take is likely to contain something special – a real freshness, or spontaneity because this is the first time the actor has given a full performance. Allan Dwan, who was born in 1885 and directed many films, including *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), believed in the first take, "My slate numbers are never over three or four if they're that high. And mostly one — the first take" (Allan Dwan quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 120). Vincent Sherman also believed that the first take often has a quality that subsequent takes do not have.

Sometimes I would print the first take. Usually I would see something in the first take, something of value that had not been exploited. I would say that my average was around four on a picture. But sometimes you would get a good first take, and you could never get anything better than that. Most of the time it would be two or three or four. (Sherman 1976, p. 121)

According to Robert Zemeckis, some actors are quite good at reading the tone in a directors' voice and determining from that tone the director's assessment to the actor's performance.

Kurt Russell, when we were doing *Used Cars* (1980), by the end of the movie said, "I got to the point where I could hear how you'd say the word 'cut' and I would know whether we'd be doing it again or not". (Kagan 2000, p. 143)

The director is reading and assessing the actor's performance from the moment 'action' is called and the actor commences performing. It should be remembered that the quality of the performance is not the only reason a director might go for another take. If the focus is soft, if the framing is askew, if the dialogue is off-microphone, if some prop or art department effect did not work properly, are all reasons why a new take is filmed. In these instances the actors' performance may have been first-class, but because of technical problems the take is deemed unusable. Unfortunately, when such things happen they can have a negative positive impact on the actors. Alan Hopgood⁵ is an eminent Australian actor and screenwriter who wrote the screenplays for both *Alvin Purple* (1973, 1974) films. Although he is speaking about television the same also applies to the making of feature films. "In television the worst thing is to feel that your performance is only part of the whole process. So if something technical goes wrong and that takes precedence over the performance you might have given, that's a very unsettling feeling" (Sergi 2011). Generally speaking the director and the crew work very hard to iron out all these technical matters prior to shooting the first take.

Regardless of whether it is the first take or the tenth, after the director calls 'cut' they have a few seconds to process and analyse the actor's performance against a vast array of intangible and partly defined criteria that exists solely in their mind. At the same time the rest of the crew are all evaluating their own work and it is common for them to discuss with fellow crew members how well they carried out their duties. The director of photography is constantly discussing the quality of the lighting with the gaffer and at times the art director. The camera operator discusses the framing and composition with the director of photography. The sound recordist discusses the

⁵ Alan Hopgood is an Australian actor and screenwriter, and he appears in the *Research Interviews* DVD that also forms part of this DCA.

quality of the sound with the boom swinger. The many people in the art department, wardrobe and make-up are constantly discussing among themselves the particulars that pertain to their areas of specialisation and the script supervisor is in regular discussion with all the members of the crew. All these crew members have colleagues by their side helping them evaluate their work. During a take it cannot really be said that the director is evaluating their own work. That happens later in the editing room and ultimately in the cinema. In contrast to the rest of the crew the director evaluates the work of others and in particular the performance of the actors. Assessing the actors' performance is generally regarded as the sole responsibility of the director and in some ways could be considered as being at the epicentre of the director's on-set duties, and yet, the process of filmmaking can make it difficult for directors to give appropriate attention to the actors' performance.

In the past I used to get too wrapped up with what was actually going on around me. The actual environment I was in was distracting me from the umbilical cord to the thing I was trying to get, which is the result on the screen. (Lane quoted in Sergi 2011)

John Madden, when speaking about directing *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) highlights just how difficult this can be.

Because this material – it was so strange how elusive it could be – every actor would come up and go, “I don't know, was that all right? Did that work? I didn't quite feel that was right—was it funny?” And we all knew what he meant. It was just very, very hard material to target. I had to restrain my instinct not to want to go again, because I am so committed to this idea that there might be something I haven't yet discovered. (John Madden quoted in Kagan 2000, p. 129)

Consequently, what sets the director apart from all of the other crew members, including the heads of department, is the collegial isolation the director experiences when it comes to accomplishing the duty that they alone can perform: the reading and assessing of the actors' performance. As a general rule the director does not discuss the many aspects of the actors' performance with anyone on the film set, including the actors. According to Mark Travis other crew members should not interfere with the special relationship between actor and director. “The communication between actors and director is private and must be kept that way. The privacy honors the sensitivity of the work” (Travis 2002, p. 248). Michael Wiese believes that only one person, the director, should have a professional relationship

with the actors (Travis 2002, p. 389). Frederick Johntz is even more protective. “As soon as any outside person, be it an assistant, other actors, the cinematographer, or anyone else begins to give character direction to an actor I could be in trouble. I just don’t allow it” (Johntz quoted in Travis 2002, p. 389). Sydney Pollack also believes that only the director should work with the actors to shape the performance. One of Pollack’s first jobs was as dialogue coach for John Frankenheimer on *The Turn of the Screw* (1959), which starred Ingrid Bergman.

Ostensibly, my job was to help teach actors their dialogue, but I was really hired by John Frankenheimer to coach the two young kids who were in it. It was an interesting and difficult job because, although I had to talk to the children about acting, it was very important that I not interfere with the actual directing that Frankenheimer was doing. (Pollack quoted in Stevens 1997, p. 3)

It is solely the director’s job, as Weston says, to “make sure the work is good⁶ and that the actor looks good” (Weston 1996, p. 8). And as Hopgood points out it is unsettling for an actor if the director is incapable of discerning when they have delivered a quality performance. “If you’ve nailed it, and they say, ‘We’ll do another one’. You lose confidence in them and you lose confidence in your own judgement of the performance you’ve given” (Hopgood quoted in Sergi 2011). This is very important, because it maintains the director’s creative authority during filming, “I have to be very careful I don’t shake my co-workers’ confidence in my ability to carry out my functions and that they are in safe hands” (Asaad Kelada quoted in Travis 2002, p. 388). A director who is unable on their own to determine the quality of an actor’s performance is not held in high esteem by the cast and crew. Mills is clear about what it feels like working with a director who is uncomfortable working with actors.

Bad directors don’t give you a sense that you’re terrific and that they trust you ... and that they like you. I think that’s a good thing to feel as an actor. And they get anxious when you’re not giving them what they want. (Mills quoted in Sergi 2011)

⁶ It is worth noting that the terms “good” and “bad” in relation to actor performance are not uncommon in industry texts on the matter, as well as being part of the regular language of film crews.

Bare also makes this clear:

[Charlton] Heston firmly believes that in films the actor depends on the director so completely that there must almost be a father relationship. An actor can assess his or her performance on the stage, but in films the actor cannot always tell whether it is working or not. Therefore, declares Heston, an actor must trust the director's taste, intelligence, experience and judgement (Bare 1971, 2000, p. 180).

It is important to note that Hopgood, Mills, and Bare suggest that actors rely solely on the director to assess their performance. Even though after watching rushes the producer might discuss the actors' performance with the director, they generally do not engage in on set discussions with the director as each take is being filmed. Unlike all the other creative professions the director must exercise their judgement without seeking anyone's council. This does not mean that the director does not speak to the actors regarding their performance. Directors and actors often spend a great deal of time discussing the character and how the actor will create their performance. What does not happen is the director seeking the opinion of the actors, or any other crew member, concerning whether the performance worked or not; on how convincing or unconvincing the performance was, or what need adjusting etc. Those decisions rest solely with the director. Tom Kingdon states it bluntly, "The performance carries the scene, so the director has to get that right. You (usually) only get one chance to shoot a scene" (Kingdon 2004, p. 350). Weston (1996) goes further and says that actors are incapable of evaluating their own work, and the central paradox of film acting is that the actor's dependency on the director frees the actor to experiment with how they play the scene, because they know the director is continually evaluating their performance. Sydney Pollack is also of this view, "In film acting, you [the actor] don't have to understand how or why you did it, because you're doing it all out of sequence ... You're much more dependent on a director in film (Pollack quoted in Stevens 1997, p. 26). Alan Hopgood expresses this from an actor's point of view. "A good director knows when you've nailed it. But you also know when you've delivered. And you're at one with him or her, and he says, 'That's a take,' and you say, 'Good. That's as good as I can do.'" (Hopgood quoted in Sergi 2011). James L. Brooks sums it all up when he says, "But I think the big responsibility you have [as a director] is: let's move on. 'Let's move on' should be your pledge to the actors that you really have it. That's what that should mean" (Brooks quoted in Kagan 2000, p. 157).

In this chapter I have argued that on a film set the director is the only person whose responsibility it is to read and assess the actors' performance. Furthermore, unlike all the other crew members who can openly call upon input from fellow crew members if they are uncertain about any aspect of the work they are doing the director must be able to assess the actors' performance on their own, without seeking any input from either the actors or other crew members. This is manifestly different to any other element of the film where the director works in open collaboration with other crew members. Ultimately, this means that the locus of the director's decision making regarding the actors' performance lies solely within their own mind and body. Therefore, how they come to know the actors' performance becomes a critical factor in determining the decisions they make. This is taken up in Chapter Five where I delve deeper into unpacking how directors know an actor's performance.

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Chapter 3

The Director as Audience

Directors often see themselves as the first audience of the actors' performance.

Richard Sarrell¹: "I suppose what you have to practice as a director is trying to stand there as an audience and see whether, if you were hearing it for the first time, you would understand the story" (Sergi 2011).

Laurie Campbell²: "First and foremost I'm being the audience of whatever the film will be. So I'm watching it as if... I'm watching it from somewhere else" (Sergi 2011).

Jo Lane: "Now, when I watch a take as it's happening I'm totally transporting myself into a time in the future, in a place that isn't this set, that's perhaps a theatre or a living room and a screen, and I'm watching it" (Sergi 2011).

Implicit in this notion is the unstated belief that there are genuine similarities between the director and the cinema audience. This presupposes that the concept of 'audience' is relatively consistent and the director and the cinema audience share a common type of relationship with the actors' performance. Weston (1996) writes about the director being the viewer and the actor being the viewed. Sali (2003) speaks about how actors need the director to be a mirror of their performance. Academy Award nominated actress Mary McDonnell, (*Dances with Wolves, Grand Canyon*) believes that the director reflects the actors' performance back to them.

Good directors are in touch with their masculine side, they have a sense of balance. They know how to give orders and have a heady sense of the whole picture. Then they turn around to the actors and have their feminine side – they become a reflector and emotional supporter. It's a remarkable thing to see a director with that kind of balance. You just feel great and want to be there. (Seger & Whitmore 1994, p. 123)

¹ Richard Sarell is an Australian director, and he appears in the *Research Interviews* DVD that also forms part of this DCA.

² Laurie Campbell is an American director living in Australia, and he appears in the *Research Interviews* DVD that also forms part of this DCA.

This chapter explores the differences in how directors and audiences view an actor's performance, and argues that it is impossible for a director to view an actor's performance like a cinema audience, just as it is impossible for a cinema audience to view the screened performance like the director. The obvious difference is that the director is usually standing in front of the actor when they perform and the audience is viewing the image of the performance either in a cinema or on a television set. Although this is a significant disparity there are also other differences that require examination. For instance, the director is witnessing the performance in a fragmented state as it is being created, while the audience is viewing the screened performance as part of the complete narrative of the film after it has been re-crafted in the editing suite and the actors' voices have been 'cleaned up' in audio post-production, and other enhancing elements, such as music and sound effects, have been added. As a consequence there is little similarity between these two types of 'viewing', however, further examination can provide beneficial insight into the role of the director as the determiner of the actors' performance. Understanding what type of viewer the director is might also assist directors in being better able to work with the actors. For in order to emotionally move an audience a director must know how to assist the actor to craft a performance that is able to communicate the complex and intangible language of emotions as clearly as possible. Considering that comprehending emotions is often imprecise, that at times the actor might be experiencing several differing and possibly conflicting emotions at the same moment, this is not an easy task.

"Smiling is a global language," a college student recently told *China Daily* ... "But a smile can express everything." Which may be truer than she imagined. People often equate smiling with just one emotion, happiness ... But maybe because so much smiling behavior is unconscious, most people never recognize that a smile can mean almost anything ... Smiles can communicate feelings as different as love or contempt, pride or submission, flirtatiousness or polite tolerance. A smile can be deeply comforting and reassuring ... Or it can induce a chill of fear. (Hannibal Lecter smiled when he thought about fava beans and a nice Chianti – with liver.) ... In truth, despite the common phrase, there is no such thing as a simple smile. (Conniff 2007, pp. 47 - 48)

What Conniff is suggesting is that there are multiple ways of reading part of an action, for a smile, like other facial reactions, is only part of the actor's performance.

When the director and the audience read an action, and all the individual parts of that action, the context within which the action is occurring is critical to making sense of that action. Although throughout this exegesis I have focused exclusively on the naturalistic acting style as originally developed by Stanislavski it is useful to consider what Higson (2004) says about performance engaging an audience even though he is arguing for a style of performance that is more in line with Brecht than Stanislavski. Higson calls for a radicalisation of screen performance that deliberately seeks to open up the actor's work to question and criticism by the audience as a means of drawing attention to the historical and social context of the performance and its meaning. In his view such a performance might be less emotionally engaging than a naturalistic performance.

Brecht's strategy of distanciation is a means of establishing a critical distance between the performance of an action and the reading of that action, the process of making sense of it. It is a means of foregrounding the ideas, or the ideological processes at stake in the action, rather than encouraging the audience to become inextricably bound up in the psychological predicament or emotional state of the character performing the action. (Higson 2004, p. 155)

This also raises the complex question of how the notion of what is a 'naturalistic' performance has changed over time and the different performance styles that have become associated with various film genres. In order to understand what is taking place when a director reads an actor's performance one needs to understand the nature of the viewing relationship between the director and the actor. On set each shot is a fragmented piece of performance. What needs to be considered is how the director perceives, or 'makes sense of' (Higson 2004, p. 155), the actors' performance at a time when it is fragmented as distinct to the audience's reading of the actors' performance as part of the completed film when it exists as a continuous whole. Although Walter Benjamin chose to use the term 'middleman' when he sought to differentiate between cinematic and theatrical performances he nonetheless noted the differences between the director as one type of audience and the cinema audience as a different type of audience. Wolf (2003) points this out.

As Walter Benjamin noted in 1936, film separated actor and audience, as well as actor and performance, allowing for the interference of a middleman who could edit the performance between its production and reception. (Wolf 2003, p. 48)

Benjamin is correct in drawing attention to the director as interfering with the actor's performance between its creation and its final reception by the audience. Yet the director's interference does not lie solely in the editing suite. The beginning of the director controlling the actor's performance goes all the way back to casting and rehearsal, and then to the process used by the director to assist the actor create the performance on set. Primarily, however, it is the director's privileged position of being able to assess and select which of the actor's performances are printed and sent to the editing suite, which functions as one of the most significant acts of control. What Benjamin seems to have overlooked was that generally the director mostly controls what is happening on set while the performance is being filmed, rather than in the editing suite when they select from the already 'approved' takes. Nonetheless, the director is not alone in controlling the actor's performance. As previously discussed, editors, producers, dialogue editors and re-recording mixers all interfere with and manipulate the actor's performance and at times there can be a stark difference between what the actor created on set and what the audience sees on the screen. For example, the majority of the cinema audience would have had no idea that three actresses were involved in creating the character of Katie Larson in *Cast Away* (Robert Zemeckis, 2000). Lasse Halstrom used the same three actresses, identical triplets Alyssa, Kaitlyn, and Lauren Gainer, to portray the character of Quoye's daughter Bunny in *The Shipping News* (2001).

According to *Shipping News* director Lasse Halstrom : 'I had favourite girls for favourite types of scenes ... the lighter moments I used one of the girls, for the more brooding scenes I used another girl, for the fights I used the third girl.' The end result in both films is a performance with a range beyond that of any of the three actresses playing the character. (Wolf 2003, pp. 49 - 50)

Accordingly, directors can create for the screen a character and performance that did not actually exist as part of the on-set world of the film, because the character and performance is the work of multiple actors. Again what the director experiences and witnesses is starkly different to the cinema audience. According to Wolf manipulating the actors' performance is no longer confined to the director on set or the editor in the editing suite. With 21st century digital post-production techniques directors can work within the frame itself to alter an actor's performance. The new performance might contain physical elements, or facial, gestural, corporeal and vocal

combinations that the actor did not produce, or was incapable of producing, when they were creating the performance on set.

In *Star Wars, Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999), George Lucas made some shots by combining actors from different takes of the same shot, the logical extension of editing into the frame itself instead of just between frames. In Ron Underwood's film *Heart and Souls* (1993), a character was even made to blink in a shot where the actor did not. (Wolf 2003, p. 51)

The use of stunt doubles is a further example of how the director and the audience witness different performances. The director places the stunt double into a shot to perform an action that is potentially too dangerous for the actor and therefore knows that it is the stunt double portraying the actions of the character. Indeed, the director is doing as much as possible to disguise the fact that a stunt double has replaced the actor. However, the cinema audience, who are in a state of suspended disbelief, continue reacting as if it is the actor/character who is performing the stunt, even though it is common knowledge that stunt doubles are regularly used for the more dangerous shots. So long as the crafting of the shot sufficiently disguises the switch from actor to stunt double the audience's emotional engagement and suspension of disbelief continues as it would be if the actor were performing the stunt. Wolf also points out that in bigger budget productions the way stunt doubles appear on screen is changing in order to give the audience a stronger cinematic experience.

The technique of Face Replacement, first appearing in Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* in 1993, allows the face of one actor to be placed onto the body of another. Whereas in the past stunt doubles' faces would have to be hidden or kept at a distance from the camera, face replacements allow stunt people to appear close to the camera, and actors' faces to appear anywhere the director wants. (Wolf 2003, p. 52)

Like Benjamin, Bazin's idea (Bazin 1967, p. 97) that the screen is incapable of placing the audience in the presence of the actor at the very moment that the actor is in the presence of the audience further highlights another difference between the director and the audience. For the director is 'in the presence' of the actor and the actor is 'in the presence' of the director when the actor creates the performance. However when the audience watches a film the actor is, nonetheless, being viewed, even though only an image of the actor as the character is on the screen. Furthermore, unlike the director the audience is watching the film for the first time

and they come to the film with little or only fragmented pieces of knowledge about the narrative unless the film is an adaptation of a novel, for example the *Harry Potter* series. Yet, even in these circumstances, audiences have come to expect the film to differ from the novel. Some audience members may have seen the trailer, some may have read reviews in newspapers or magazines, some watched critics on television or on the web and some may have heard reviews on the radio or may have been told about the film by family members, friends, or work colleagues. Regardless of how much a person in the audience may know or not know about the film before they watch it, and whatever and wherever their knowledge of the film and the actors' performance might have come from, their knowledge is only ever partial and fragmented and in no way can be said to resemble that of the director. It should not be forgotten that by the time the director walks onto the set it is highly likely that they have been working on the film for several years and that during that time they have become closely involved with developing the narrative and each character's emotional and psychological journey. As William Friedkin says, "I see an entire picture in my head before I do it" (Sherman 1976, p. 103). Producer/Director Merian C. Cooper who created the original *King Kong* (1933) makes this point clearly. "I always write the history of each character from birth to death, so when you get anyone playing the character, you know all about it" (Sherman 1976, p. 103).

For a general audience the story remains the most important aspect of the film. When audiences talk about films they most often speak about how good, or bad, or predictable the story was. For them the film unfolds in real time. A 120-minute film takes 120-minutes to screen and watch. Frame by frame, shot by shot, scene by scene the film rolls on in an unrelenting, uninteruptable manner. Once the film starts the audience must keep up with the narrative flow and for many film genres, such as thrillers and detective films, the audience must work at remembering a significant amount of plot and character detail, which accumulates as the story progresses, in order to continue to make sense of the developing narrative. Of course there are multiple levels of narrative – those of the over-all story, of the particular sequence, of the scene, and of the character. All of these are communicated through the actors' performance, and all of these must be present in every moment of the performance. Although Aaron Taylor is discussing melodrama the point he makes about the relationship between performance and narrative is relevant to what is occurring when

an audience reads an actor's performance. For Taylor, "melodrama provides us with a series of performance cues through which the moral universe of the narrative is articulated" (Taylor 2007, p. 15). Of interest here is the idea that it is through performance cues that the audience reads and decodes the narrative. In psychological and philosophical terms this most closely aligns with the concept of apperception (used by Watson (2006) in his discussion of tacit knowledge), where the perception of new experiences (in this case the performances and narrative of the film) are perceived through the sum of an individual spectator's past experiences. Thus, the act of apperception aligns closely with Edward Branigan's point that:

... story comprehension involves the continuous generation of better specified and more complicated expectations about what might be coming next and its place in a pattern. Thus a perceiver will strive to create 'logical' connections among data in order to match the general categories of the schema. (Branigan 1992, p. 15)

It is through the performance of the actor that the audience makes sense of the character's emotional and psychological journey and thus the narrative of the film. From the beginning of the film the audience begins decoding, interpreting and combining the complex actions of the actor (facial, gestural, corporeal and vocal) within the specific context of each scene and within the defined universe of the film, in order to piece together the narrative cues of the film. Therefore, the actor is not only creating the character through their performance, but they are also creating, alongside the other visual and audio elements of the film, the narrative of the film. Although McConachie and Hart (2006) are discussing the theatre and theatrical performances the underlying line of their argument is also relevant to cinema. According to McConachie and Hart, "it is evident that most spectators engage in emphatic observation as soon as a performance begins, watching facial expressions and body language in human exchanges to figure out what is going on" (McConachie & Hart 2006, p. 5). What the actors do, what they say, how they react, where they go, as well as their relationships with each other not only develop and create their characters, but also construct the narrative. Higson's idea of the relationship between actor – character – and narrative is useful in this context.

What is important, in the final analysis, is not the inner feelings of the actor, but how the image of actor-as-character and the performed gestures look on screen; the important question to ask is 'does the visible action demonstrate the necessary points?' (A question which,

incidentally, cannot be answered by recourse to the script alone as the site of coherence.) (Higson 2004, p. 154)

What Higson is saying is that by the time the actors' performance reaches the screen they have transcended the emotional experience of the actor at the time the performance was created to become part of the coded system of the film's narrative. If this is the case then how should we consider the role of the director watching the actor create the performance on the set as the camera is rolling, because the director already knows 'what's going on'? As we have seen the director is a different type of audience than the one sitting in the cinema and to consider the director an audience, or reflector, of the actor's performance appears to limit our understanding of their function, because what they are doing is more than reflecting the actors' performance back at them and more than merely experiencing it like an audience in a cinema. In reality the director's intense scrutiny of the actor's performance is searching for the communication signs and signifiers, in other words a complex visual and aural language created by the actor that indicates the constantly changing emotional and psychological state of the character, which contributes to the construction of narrative. According to McConachie and Hart these are not signs and signifiers in the Saussurean reductionist semiotics sense, but more aligned with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodied consciousness, as well as aspects of phenomenology and J. L. Austin's speech-act theory. Thus, the director is reading the actor's performance in order to ensure that the performance contains the correct, or appropriate, complex signs and signifiers within the actor's embodied consciousness, and in the proper order, that will enable the audience to decode the character and through the character the narrative. Thus, reading everything that the actor is doing with their face, voice and body, and the psychological and emotional states the actor is experiencing:

... is not the same as reading the body as a sign. Rather, it is a mode of cognitive engagement involving mirror neurons in the mind/brain that allow spectators to replicate the emotions of a performer's physical state without experiencing that physical state directly. (McConachie & Hart 2006, p. 5)

Higson sees "acting as a sign-system capable of producing specific meanings in specific contexts" (Higson 2004, p. 146). If we accept this then at the moment of the actor's creation of the performance might it not be the director's role to ensure that the actor is creating the correct complex sign-system to produce the correct specific

meanings for that particular scene, thus ensuring that the narrative code of the film is maintained so that upon witnessing the scene the audience is able to make sense of it in relation to the other scenes that have previously occurred, and this is positioned alongside where the audience senses the narrative is likely to be heading? Higson, criticises the Stanislavski and Method schools of naturalist film acting styles for having the possibility, or potential, to:

... drift into self-reflexivity, signifying a power of presence and inner truth which may actually *exceed* the requirements of the narrative. Thus, the gestures of Marlon Brando in *The Godfather* tend to exceed narrative motivation – to exceed that which is narratively required of character. *Intended* as a display of descriptive, realistic detail (ethnicity, authority, etc), it may actually be read as a display of the actor as such...so that to watch Method acting is to be fascinated by the obsessive nature of the performance, rather than by the signified or the represented of the action. (Higson 2004, p. 146)

In doing so Higson also highlights the role of the director as the assessor of the actor's performance at the moment of creation so as to ensure that the actor creates a character that neither falls short of, nor exceeds, the specific requirements of the narrative. When the actor is performing they are creating a constant stream of facial, physical, verbal, emotional, and psychologically complex language signifiers, all of which must be instantaneously assessed by the director. In this light, the director could be seen as the guardian of the character and the narrative and the union of the two as they existed in the screenplay. The director is not an audience, like the audience in the cinema, reading the actor's performance so as to understand the character and their function in the film. The director already knows that. Rather the director is collaborating with the actor in creating the performance and is closely observing the actor as they create the performance so as to ensure that what is created is what is required, and consistent with the needs of both the character and the narrative at that point in the film. The director is more of a reader/assessor, working with the actor to eliminate from their performance all the unnecessary signs and signifiers and ensure that only those most appropriate to successfully progress the evolution of the character and the narrative are displayed. Consequently, this leads us to ask how a director identifies the unnecessary, or inappropriate, signs and signifiers in the actor's performance, and this is discussed in the next chapter.

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Chapter 4

Assessing Performances that are not Working

Understanding the indicators of why an actor's performance is not working may assist in understanding the signs that a performance is working. In this chapter I explore this in three ways. First, I will discuss what directors do and do not do, that might cause actors to consider them to be poor directors. Second, I look at how directors discern that a scene has been poorly realised or staged. And last, I examine the language directors use to describe how they know that an actor is struggling to achieve a truthful performance. In order to do this I will predominantly use comments from Australian actors and directors that I interviewed as part of my research for this exegesis. I hope to show that directors rely a great deal on their own emotional and psychological reactions to the actor's performance when assessing whether or not an actor is struggling to achieve an authentic and believable performance.

In February 2011 I attended some master-classes at the Berlinale Talent Campus, which is an offshoot of the Berlin International Film Festival. One of those master-classes was with Hungarian director István Szabó who won an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film with his film *Mephisto* (1981), on stage with Szabó was the Oscar nominated English actor/director Ralph Fiennes who was in Berlin because his directorial debut film *Coriolanus* (2011) was in the Official Competition of the Festival. Szabó and Fiennes worked together on *Sunshine* (1999) where Finnes played the triple lead roles of Ignatz Sonnenschein / Adam Sors / Ivan Sors. The class centred on the actor-director relationship and how actors and directors work together. At one point Szabó spoke about how little direction he gives to his actors.

You have to have an enormous trust. And they [the actors] have to know that you have an enormous trust. This is the most important thing. Because if they know that in your opinion they are the best to do it, then they can try everything, and sometimes you will say, "No maybe it's too much. Or you can say, "No it's not enough". That's all. And then your job is only to keep silent, to give them the possibility to work. That's all. (Szabó quoted in Berlinale 2011)

In 1988 Szabó worked with Swedish actor Erland Josephson during the making of *Hanussen* (1988). One day Szabó asked Josephson about how Ingmar Bergman directed him, because Szabó thought Josephson's performances in his Bergman films were his best. To Szabó astonishment, Josephson replied, "Bergman says nothing." According to Josephson, Bergman was the only director who knew where to place the camera so as to show how good the actors are. Szabó also commented that he is still learning where to place the camera (Szabó quoted in Berlinale 2011).

When Szabó speaks of keeping silent so that actors of the calibre of Fiennes are able to work he is doing so from a privileged position, because such an actor will at the very least create a strong and engaging performance, even though both Fiennes and Szabó would say that their collaboration elevated Fiennes' performance to a higher level. But most working directors, young directors, and independent filmmakers rarely have the opportunity to work with actors who have the talent of a Fiennes, just as most actors seldom have the opportunity to work with so talented and actor focused a director as Szabó. Woody Allen is also famous for casting excellent actors and then saying little to them while shooting. According to the detailed daily account of de Navacelle (1987) who was on set with Allen during the entire filming of *Radio Days* (1987) although Allen might occasionally shoot up to 14 or 16 takes of a shot, his average number was around 5 or 6.

As a result of this interest with the elites in the industry many of the texts available that seek to reveal the creative practice of actors and directors focus on the work of high profile, and predominantly American, 'A List' people. Although there is much to be learned from these talented people it is worth remembering that these people almost always work repeatedly with each other and as such their experiences are not readily transferable to the rest of the worldwide filmmaking community. The insights into creative practice that they reveal need to be understood as coming from highly talented, sometimes rarely gifted artists, and consequently it is not surprising that they have an almost a shorthand operational technique. What can a young filmmaker do with the notion that esteemed directors direct actors with "silence", "no that is too much", or "no that is not enough"? Or that all you need to do to achieve outstanding performances in your film is cast the most appropriate 'A List' actors available and then give them the space and the freedom to work. These points illustrate that as

researchers in order to further our understanding of how directorial practice functions across all sectors of our industry we need to cast our net wider than just ‘A List’ actors, directors, and producers etc. Furthermore, one should not automatically dismiss the insights into creative practice that come from less well known actors and directors. Consequently, I chose to film a series of interviews with some Australian based actors and directors who attended the Australian Screen Directors Association (ASDA)¹ annual conference held in Melbourne in September of 2002.² Some of the actors and directors interviewed presented master-classes at the conference, while others were conference attendees. The following is an analysis of the insight into directing and performance assessment that came from those interviews.

Tony Wickert¹ believes that, “when directing the chief task is to be a realiser”, so you can “realise that which you imagined” (Sergi 2011). Jo Lane describes how she has to imagine the scene fully realised before she can shoot it, otherwise she’s all at sea and it’s a disaster on set (Sergi 2011). While Richard Sarell believes that “directing is about, as much as anything, stopping the mistakes from happening” (Sergi 2011). Their insights suggest that if a scene has been poorly realised at least two things have occurred. The director’s imagined realisation, or their execution of what they imagined, was poor, or a mistake occurred that the director did not, or was unable to, prevent. Interestingly, even though the directors interviewed had all directed countless scenes not all were able to fully articulate what it was about a scene that indicated it was poorly realised and failed to communicate the narrative’s and director’s intention to the audience. Tom Cowan², “Oh, well, hell, that’s a hard one” (Sergi 2011). Jo Lane “it’s a feeling. I haven’t felt honesty ... for me it’s very obvious” (Sergi 2011). This once again highlights the role of Polanyi’s notion of tacit knowledge in the work of the director. Solrun Hoaas³, however, understood that seeking to articulate this is difficult. “I find it hard to answer that in abstraction, because I think it’s really an intuitive thing in relation to what’s going on, in relation to the specific scene, and that’s something that changes” (Sergi 2011). Richard

¹ Tony Wickert is a past Co-Head of Directing at AFTRS and an Australian director. He appears in the *Research Interviews* DVD that also forms part of this DCA.

² Tom Cown is also a past Co-Head of Directing at AFTRS, but at a different time to Wickert. He appears in the *Research Interviews* DVD that also forms part of this DCA.

³ Solrun Hoaas is an Australian director, and she appears in the *Research Interviews* DVD that also forms part of this DCA.

Sarell, on the other hand, believes, “There are two options. One is that the story hasn’t been told ... The other one is that the acting hasn’t been truthful or believable in the telling of the story” (Sergi 2011). Furthermore, Wickert feels that, “what directors look for is, they imagine their outcome, and they try to see to what extent they have realised their outcome” (Sergi 2011). He then qualifies this by adding, “there are no rights in this. There are multiple appropriates” (Sergi 2011). As Wickert points out directors are not searching for *the* right way to realise a scene, because there is an understanding that there is no such thing. However, there are appropriate and less appropriate ways and these will very much depend on the circumstances of the realisation.

I think any director brings a lot of baggage to what they’re doing. Not just training, analysis before hand, the preparation for a particular film. But you also bring whatever cultural baggage you have, whatever background you have to it. And those things all come together in terms of determining the decisions you make. (Hoas quoted in Sergi 2011)

Who you are as a person, the life that you have experienced, the training you have had, and the point in your life that you are making the film, all have a bearing on the director you are, and the manner in which you imagine and then realise the film. For Wickert it mostly comes down to the actors’ performance, and this raises questions about how capable some directors are at assessing performance, “what makes me think it has been poorly realised is that they haven’t got complexity, mostly it’s that. They haven’t captured human complexity” (Sergi 2011). Wickert is referring to the ability of the actors and the director to create believable situations of human interactions; to craft performances that recreate authentic human behaviour within a narrative that is emotionally and intellectually believable and engaging. And as Carnicke (2004) says, directors have their own ways of working with actors, and achieving a performance. One way to achieve this is for both actor and director to be able to discern between significant moments that advance the audiences’ understanding of the character and the narrative and those moments that are less significant or do not belong at all. Wickert, again:

... they haven’t recognised, as a director, how to sort out of the myriad issues that arise in the making of a scene - which are the most important. Sorting them out. Working out that this moment matters more than others. (Wickert quoted in Sergi 2011)

Wickert is speaking of a methodology where the actor and director create and select only those moments that clearly convey the narrative and the character's journey. In order to better understand how directors differentiate these moments it is useful to know how actors and directors distinguish poor direction. Knowing the negative can sometimes illuminate the positive. It is no secret that there are directors of poor quality working in the film and television industry, just like there are professionals of poor quality in any industry. However, as Sherman, Renoir and Carnicke point out not every director considers that the actors' performance is the key element in their film. These directors might not be so poor at directing actors, it is just that their storytelling focus lies elsewhere and actors are but one storytelling element amongst many. Salvi (2003) recounts Dustin Hoffman making this point and Ross and Ross point out.

When directors' feedback proves unreliable or when trust is betrayed, film actors are left unsatisfied and sometimes profoundly shaken. Discussing his work during the Hollywood studio era, Melvyn Douglas recalls, "ghastly frustrations, especially when I had the kind of directors I couldn't hold an intelligible conversation with, and I had a lot of that". (Ross and Ross & Ross 1984, p. 33)

What is it about some directors that cause actors to not enjoy working with them and makes those actors feel that the performances they create are in some way less than their best? The quality of the attention that the director focuses on the actor has an impact on how the actor sees their part in the filmmaking process. Feeling insecure and unsettled is unlikely to produce quality work. This supports Szabó's comment about the director making clear their trust in the actors and that this trust is essential for actors to create great work. Mills makes this very apparent when she says, "The directors that I love working with, and that I usually do work with, are ones that love working with actors" (Sergi 2011). Actors can distinguish the kind of director they are working with. Furthermore, Hopgood points out that, "... a bad director confuses you with their direction. So you're going along, and they make you do a turn and go in the other direction. And you finish up going nowhere" (Sergi 2011). Mills' additional comments about 'bad directors' are even more illuminating:

A bad director can't hear you or see you. Doesn't listen. Doesn't know their own script. A bad director won't see the choices you've made. Won't see the good things you've done. Won't see where your difficulties are. They won't be looking at your whole body. Good

directors look at your whole body. They look at your breathing. They look at your eyes. They look at all the tension in your body, or not. (Mills quoted in Sergi 2011)

Here is a coherent list of what ‘bad’ directors do not do thus implying what ‘good’ directors possibly do. What is insightful about Mills comments is that she lists a series of actions that directors would be doing if they were paying close attention to the actor’s performance. Hopgood illustrates this point, “I like to feel I can rely on a director to give me the level. Because I claim you don’t know” (Sergi 2011), and Lane, who believes that not everyone can perceive what is going on with the actors’ performance supports this from a director’s point of view.

... often I’ve said to actors, “I just so didn’t believe what you just said”. And they go, “Oh I know. It didn’t feel right.” And everyone else goes, “That looked like the same take as the last one.” And I go, “No it wasn’t. It was completely different.” So I’m connecting somehow to something that other people maybe aren’t even seeing. (Lane quoted in Sergi 2011)

Mills’ (Sergi 2011) earlier point that directors become anxious when the performance is not going as planned is also useful, because it seems to indicate that the anxiety these directors’ experience appears to stem from them not feeling capable of successfully directing the actors. In contrast Lane speaks about remaining calm and being like a counsellor, as she worked with a well-known actor who was having a bad day and could not deliver the required performance for the duration of the take. Lane points out that it was her job as the director to continue to make the actor feel special and help them stay focused and untroubled by the amount of takes they were shooting until the actor delivered the required performance – on the forty-fifth take (Sergi 2011). If ‘bad’ directors make actors feel insecure and unsettled, if they are unable to see the subtleties of the actor’s performance and are therefore missing the difficulties the actor is having, as well as not noticing the parts that are working, what is it that good directors do?

Whereas the other type of director, that is totally at one with you, everything else melts. And you feel that he is at one with your performance, so much that it doesn’t matter what else happens it’s what he’s extracting from you, or what he’s allowing you to give is so important. (Hopgood quoted in Sergi 2011)

Hopgood is saying that while he is performing he can feel the concentration of the director. Extrapolated further this appears to indicate that even while he is focused on playing all the actions of his character Hopgood somehow has a sense of the director's close attention. Laurie Campbell seems to support this from a director's point of view, "I think something just sort of magical happens and it's almost as if you connect with whatever the actor's connected with" (Sergi 2011). Lane also suggests that she experiences something similar, "Now when I watch a take, as it's happening ... I'm totally connected to what's happening within the set. It's a two way through put to a story" (Sergi 2011). However, when asked to articulate what the indicators are that an actor's performance in a scene is poor or not working most directors had difficulty articulating in detail how they knew. For Lane the effects on her of a scene that is not working are both physical and psychological.

The signs that it isn't working is this space that I feel. It's like a bit of a dread. It's not like it's one particular thing. Suddenly it feels like it's all at sea. It doesn't have a thread that everyone is holding onto. Everyone is doing their own thing. And when all that's happening, it's an awful, empty, black, cold feeling. It's awful when it's not working. (Lane quoted in Sergi 2011)

For Campbell it has to do with her level of engagement with what the actors are doing, "When I'm watching a scene that is not working, what usually happens is I'm bored. If I find I'm suddenly not engaged or if I'm thinking about something else, then it usually means that there is something that's not quite there" (Sergi 2011). For Tom Cowan it has to do with the authenticity of what is occurring, "I think it's just falseness. Not really being alive to the moment. There's also elements of storytelling and the attitude of the director. What their philosophy is" (Sergi 2011). Cowan's point of the director's philosophy links back with Hoas' earlier point of directors bringing their personal baggage to their work. The indicators for Hoas that an actor's performance is not working have to do with how the actor goes about creating the performance, "They were over-doing it, and playing to the camera ... it felt stiff and awkward" (Sergi 2011). Wickert expresses something similar, "The person who is playing the part isn't in the moment of the character. They're in their own moment. They're in their own life and they haven't managed to surrender themselves sufficiently to the imagined situation" (Sergi 2011).

Both Hoas and Wickert are able to distinguish the actor from the character. For them being able to see the actor in the throes of performing is a key indicator that the actor's performance is not working. Presumably this stems from knowing both the actor and the character as essentially two different and separate identities and recognising when the actor undergoes the transformation where their personality disappears sufficiently for the character's personality to be distinctly visible and becoming 'present' in the performance. To them this is the major indicator that the actor is on the path to creating an authentic performance. However, when the actor is unable to sustain this level of imagining then the actor remains all too 'present' the director and the camera and the character is never able to fully emerge and be recognised. Wickert stresses this point.

After all it's the actor's task to imagine that this story is a reality, and so being able to convince themselves is part one of being an actor. Part two then is, of course, to take on the attributes of the character at that particular time. (Wickert quoted in Sergi 2011)

Sarell offers up some possibilities as to why an actor might have difficulties in convincing themselves of the reality of the story.

Not listening. They are committed to playing the emotion. So you'll find actors desperately trying to get in touch with their emotional core, or whatever label they've put on that. And in which case they start thinking about themselves and they stop thinking about [the other actor] and what effect this story is going to have on the other [actor]. So they take the interactive thing out of it, and start doing self indulgent things. (Sarell quoted in Sergi 2011)

It seems for these directors, actors who focus on themselves and the emotions they are trying to feel are misplaying their performance. Rather, what these directors are looking for are actors who can surrender themselves fully to the character and actively engage with the other actors as the character in a constantly evolving chain of actions and reactions. Sir John Gielgud expresses a very similar view:

Of course, all acting should be character-acting, but in those days I did not realize this ... I could not imagine a young man unless he was like myself. My own personality kept interfering, and I began considering how I was looking, whether my walk was bad, how I was standing; my attention was continually distracted and I could not keep in the character I was trying to represent. (Gielgud quoted in Cole & Chinoy 1970, p. 398)

What is interesting to note is that these directors, like many of the famous directors quoted in numerous texts, distinguish the quality of the actor's performance in terms of how they react to what they are seeing. Phrases like, "I get bored", or "it felt false" or "they were stiff and awkward" are common. This idea that as directors they can 'feel' the performance and therefore they use this 'feel' to read and assess the performance is commonplace. Sidney Lumet expresses this in a similar way.

I focus my concentration on what the actors are doing. From the moment the actors start working, I play the scene along with them...If at any point in the take my concentration breaks, I know that something has gone wrong. Then I'll go for another take (Lumet 1996, p. 120).

Therefore, these directors surrender a portion of their judgement regarding how they assess a performance to how they feel about it. Thus it becomes subjective and the criteria remain elusive and difficult to articulate. John Frankenheimer believed that not only would he find it difficult to explain every reason for every decision he made, but like many people who believe in intuition he had a fear that talking too specifically about what he did might un-weave the magical qualities of intuition (Pratley 1969). Potentially, this means that a director's subjective judgment could change without them being fully aware, or completely understanding the nature of the change. Mills makes this point.

My own perception has changed over the years. I don't think I would have seen value in what I see [now] ... I don't know that I would have even perceived it five years ago. And in a sense I've changed who I like, in terms of actors, because my perception's changed. (Mills quoted in Sergi 2011)

Consequently, it seems to a certain extent that these directors have either consciously or unconsciously located their evaluative criteria in the realm of intuition and instinct, which means that it functions, at least to some degree, as ever evolving tacit knowledge. Thus, the accumulation of their directing experience within this context appears to be a layman's way of describing the continual growth in their tacit knowledge, which is exactly the point that Wickert makes.

To some extent it's an experience to do with having done it before. In other words, doing it helps you check yourself. You're able to evaluate your own decision making of the past, and say "Ah, when I

did that, and I used that as criteria, then ... I can see now that more complex criteria needs to be at play” (Wickert quoted in Sergi 2011).

And although at times directors speak more specifically about the actor and what the actor is actually doing, they more often than not seem to speak in general terms, such as, “they’re self conscious”, or “they’re not in the moment”, or “they are committed to playing the emotion”, or “[they] start doing self indulgent things”. These terms carry a deeper meaning for the person who is speaking than for the person who is listening. For example, Wickert speaks about, “the pitfall that most actors fall into is the notion of controlling their output” (Sergi 2011). Wickert understands what he means by this, but another person might need to question Wickert further to better comprehend what he means by “controlling their output”. I suspect it refers to the actor consciously controlling their performance, rather than losing themselves in the character. Mills, who works more often as an actor and dramaturge than as a director, uses similar language when she describes an actor’s performance that is not working.

The actors are uncomfortable. It’s just not flowing between them like normal talk. Or I’m bored. Unsatisfied. I’m unsatisfied with a lot. It’s not interesting enough. I get what you [the actor] are doing. It makes literal sense. But I’m not drawn in. (Mills quoted in Sergi 2011)

Again we see phrases like, “I’m bored” or “I’m unsatisfied” and “I’m not drawn in”. However, Mills also uses phrases that the directors did not use and we can see a language emerging that centres on what the actor is actually doing, rather than what the director is feeling. These phrases identify physical aspects of the actor’s performance that can be observed, studied, and discussed. Therefore we could say that one of the indicators of a performance which is not working is that the actor’s delivery of dialogue does not ring true to the director’s ear. Mills describes this as, “the words come out funny” (Sergi 2011), which means the actors’ delivery of the dialogue does not align with her years of normal human experience of hearing many different people speak in diverse situations. Also of importance is what Mills describes as, “It’s not interesting enough. I get what you [the actor] are doing. It makes literal sense. But I’m not drawn in” (Sergi 2011). The notion that what the actor is doing is presenting the character without creating any authentic human dimension results in Mills assessing the actor’s performance as not being interesting enough. All of the above aligns with what Wickert expresses as not having achieved

human complexity and with what Mark Boal, the writer and producer of *The Hurt Locker* (Bigelow 2008) says.

I had a table read and I was so depressed after, I thought, “Oh my God, this has literally been a waste of my entire year and I'm doomed.” And Kathryn said, “Wait and see what it's like when we have the cast.” And then we did another table read four months later and I was like, “Oh my God, this was great.” And it was the exact same script. So it depends on what the actors are bringing to it and how invested they are. (Boal quoted in Fernandez & Belloni 2009)

Mills becomes even more specific about what she reads in the actors' performance when they are struggling, “You see all sorts of hesitations. You can see people [actors] think ... Do a whole lot of thinking [as the actor not the character] rather than responding” (Sergi 2011). Here Mills is identifying explicit elements in what Wickert described more generally as “you mostly see attributes of the person who is playing the part, which are irrelevant ... they're self-conscious” (Sergi 2011). For Mills one of the indicators that actors are being self-conscious is being able to see them hesitate and think as actors not characters. Describing in words the difference between seeing an actor think as themselves rather than as the character is no easy task. But clearly Mills and the other directors all believed they could do so. Wickert earlier described directing as the process of realising ‘the imagined’, which not only involves the cinematography, production design and other visual elements of the film, but also the characters moving through the world of the film, interacting with other characters, sets and props, and speaking the dialogue. Therefore when the director is watching the actors perform they are able to gauge the performance against what they had earlier imagined.

Moreover, it seems clear that directors who are poor at judging performance not only make actors feel insecure about their performance, but also have difficulty in reading when the actor has either ‘nailed it’ or is having trouble, for as Hopgood says, “a good director knows when you've nailed it” (Sergi 2011). Furthermore, most of the directors interviewed used phrases such as untruthful or unauthentic to describe performances that are not working, while Mills, who trained as an actor, was able to speak about the physical characteristics of the actors' while they are performing. Mills spoke about the actor's breathing, their level of relaxation, being able to see them think as actors not characters and distinguishing between seeing the actor and

seeing the character. Mills' actor training would have taught her to use her body like an instrument. This kind of training also teaches actors to have conscious control of their body and voice as well as a keen sense of the bodies, voices and behaviours of other actors. Hence, actors are explicitly aware of the elements that create a performance; like eye movement, breathing, facial expressions, gestures, body weight, intensity, position and presence. However, directors who are not trained in the techniques of acting would not immediately have the language to verbalise these aspects of what the actor is doing when creating a performance. This ability to assess the actors' performance and know when they are having difficulties, or when they are working well, is something actors can sense. However, it also seems clear that some directors rely a great deal on their emotional and psychological reactions to read and assess when an actor's performance is not working. And this is the topic I take up in the next chapter, where I explore how directors *know* an actor's performance.

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¹ Australian Screen Directors Association (ASDA) is now known as the Australian Directors Guild (ADG)

² Those interviews have been edited together in a documentary style format and are on a DVD entitled *Research Interviews*, which accompanies this exegesis. An abridged transcription of those interviews is presented as Appendix 1.

Chapter 5

How a Director Knows a Performance

This chapter seeks to understand how directors know an actor's performance; because it is only through knowing that the director can assess the performance. First, the position of screen acting within film scholarship is discussed to draw attention to just how recently film scholars have shifted their position regarding the contribution of the screen actor. The work of Naremore, Baron, McDonald, and Carnicke is discussed in some detail. The valuable insights into knowing performance that new discoveries in neuroscience and cognitive science, particularly the work of Hart, McConachie, and Nellhaus (2006), Enticott et al (2008), and Fairchild et al (2010) are also explored, along with further reference to the interviews discussed in Chapter Four. Last, the role that perception plays in directors ability to distinguish the individual elements of the actor's performance is examined.

Director Anthony Minghella (*Truly, Madly, Deeply* 1990, *The English Patient* 1996, *Cold Mountain* 2003) believes directing actors is a fundamental function of the director.

The job, as I understand it, of directing is to create a space in which actors feel empowered—and the more space you take up as a director, the less room they've got ... At the same time, if you do nothing, they can't see the space they're working in." (Minghella quoted in Kagan 2000, p. 153)

Comey makes it clear that directors should not automatically assume that directing actors is a skill easily acquired.

Many [directors] are under the misconception that because they have seen so many movies they understand acting. Developing an eye for performance is difficult and requires hard work, diligent study, and possibly acting classes, and even some acting to fully understand the craft. (Comey 2006, p. 61)

Furthermore, there is a belief amongst directors that instinct and intuition plays a significant role in their ability to assess an actor's performance. As Sarell says, "So, it's instinctive, and intuitive, but we're all equipped with these things, these abilities.

I don't think there is anything special about it" (Sergi 2011). When Michael Radford, director of *Il Postino* (1994) is on set he looks for the chemistry of the scene, for 'the tingle', and "... suddenly it happens. It's very hard to put your finger on what it is, but you know when it's not there" (Radford quoted in Kagan 2000, p. 148). As in other creative arts the belief in instinct and intuition is prevalent throughout the film industry and Judith Weston's book, *The Film Director's Intuition: script analysis and rehearsal techniques* (2003) is a fine example. Alongside such industry texts are scholarly texts which in the past have shown little interest in screen acting as an area worthy of film scholarship. According to Baron since Benjamin published his 1936 essay 'Work of Art', in which he "proposed that the screen actor should be considered an inanimate stage prop, chosen for its characteristics and inserted in the proper place" (Baron & Carnicke 2008, p. 12) film scholarship has been largely disinterested in screen acting. Paul McDonald believes that screen acting has been neglected along with sound and lighting design in favour of analysing the pictorial and montage elements of the film (McDonald 2004). He makes the point that it is the very complexity of screen acting that possibly makes it so difficult to analyse.

Since the decline of structuralist analysis and the emergence of star studies, film scholarship has diversified in its concerns. It may be wondered therefore why film acting should still continue to be an underdeveloped area of scholarly analysis. One explanation for this would seem to be the very complexity that acting presents to any serious work of film analysis. (McDonald 2004, p. 25)

Baron quotes Jeremy Butler¹ who noted that when major semioticians turned their attention to cinema they:

... were 'blind to performance', [and] that Christian Metz was 'remarkably mute about the position of actors' performances ... in his groundbreaking books, *Film Language* and *Language and the Cinema*.' In fact, performance elements have no place in Metz's system. Placing emphasis on framing and editing as key to film, he believed that spectators' primary identification was 'with the act of looking itself' and that identification with the story's dramatic characters was, at best, of secondary or tertiary importance. (Baron & Carnicke 2008, p. 49)

McDonald stresses this point when he says:

The absence of acting analysis from the existing body of film scholarship cannot be explained as merely a matter of accident or

neglect. Rather, this situation has emerged as film studies has developed an intellectual agenda with lines of inquiry that have firmly encourage a disregard for acting. (McDonald 2004)

Supporting McDonald's point of view Baron goes on to note that even after Naremore's insightful 1988 work, *Acting in the Cinema*, where he:

... deftly illuminates a remarkable range of expressive techniques and effectively makes the case that film acting can be far more complex than simple performing. Some observers who acknowledge this complexity still categorise screen performance as 'received acting', that is, a performance in which the representation of characters does not arise from the agency, talent, or labor of the actors, but instead through the costuming, makeup, lighting, editing, and sound design choices made by other members of the production team. (Baron & Carnicke 2008, pp. 12-13)

This position towards screen acting is difficult to fathom when viewing films where the *mise-en-scène* of certain scenes is so minimalistic compared to what the actor is delivering through their performance. For example, in an early scene in *Black Swan* (Aronofsky 2010) Natalie Portman, who plays Nina Sayers, discovers that she has been selected to play the lead role of the Swan Queen. Upon learning this unexpected news Portman/Sayers rushes into a toilet cubicle to call her mother on her cell phone. This scene is presented as a single shot, which appears to be lit from an overhead fluorescent lamp that minimises any shadows. Portman/Sayers, framed in a tight mid-shot, presses herself backwards against the door of the cubicle for the duration of the scene. The make-up and wardrobe are both relatively neutral and understated. If Portman/Sayers was removed from this scene there would be little left. This short scene is highly dramatic and emotionally charged primarily because of Portman/Sayers' performance and not solely the *mise-en-scène*.

Over recent years there has been a shift in scholarly attitude towards screen acting. It is becoming more widely accepted amongst some film scholars that screen acting does play a more significant role in the organisation of a film's meaning than Benjamin, Metz and others may have originally suggested. Yet, even some of these current scholars have difficulty in determining to whom to attribute credit for the performance. For Lillian and Helen Ross, "There's no way of distinguishing what the director does and what the actor does. You can't tell by the screen how it came about" (Ross & Ross 1984, p. 308). Extrapolating Ross' point there is also no way of

knowing whether the re-creation of the performance is the work of the director or the editor. As Wollen (1987) and Bare (2000) say for most films there is so much creative ‘noise’ coming from other crew members, including actors, that it is difficult to decipher what is the work of the director. To suggest that an editor is merely a button pusher is to remove all agency from the editor. Directors carefully select editors for their creative ability and insightful input in helping shape the film. Martin Scorsese has worked with Thelma Schoonmaker on many of his films. It is also problematic to even suggest that what is seen on the screen was solely approved by the director, because for many films it is unknown to what extent the producer, or possibly even the distributor, had input during the editing stage and who had control over the final cut. The only aspect of the entire on screen performance for which there is any certainty is that the actor created that portion that exists for the duration of a single shot: be it three-seconds or several minutes. It seems pointless to try and distinguish whether what the actor performed was the sole creation of the actor, or whether the actor was simply following the performance instructions of the director. To follow this path would then question to what degree did the director interfere with, rather than collaborated with, the production designer, cinematographer, composer, etc. Roman Polanski’s on set creative methodology is quite actor centric, “I always set up with actors, without thinking of the camera. I observe them while they rehearse, and then later I try to film it” (Sherman 1976, p. 118). As director Franklin Schaffner attests that actors not only contribute towards the shaping of the performance, but their creative contribution can also alter the director’s pictorial intention for the scene.

And suddenly, you discover you have staged a master because, goddamn it, that’s the way it really has to be. And an actor will come up with a moment which changes the texture, the intent of everything you have planned. He’s right. And now suddenly you have to scurry to accommodate that. It’s a marvelous moment in filmmaking when you discover that you were totally wrong. That somebody’s concept was really great. It’s marvelous. (Schaffner quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 143)

Not every director is as antagonistic towards the creative agency of actors as Michelangelo Antonioni who saw himself as a master puppeteer, because for him, the majority of what the actor does, their looks, gestures, movements, and vocal tones should all be decided by the director (Carnicke 2004, p. 45). Many celebrated

directors have stated that what they hope for from their cast is to be surprised by performances that go beyond anything they had imagined.² In 1969 director John Frankenheimer remarked that the contribution actors make to a film has been greatly overlooked (Pratley 1969). Michael Radford makes this point.

And on the last day of shooting [of *Il Postino*], when I thought he was going to go for his heart transplant operation, I just went up to him and I said, “Massimo, these are the shots—just read the shot list that we’ve done.” And he sat on the bed and he read this shot list. And when we got into the cutting room, it was the most powerful thing I’d ever seen. I actually had tears in my eyes when I was watching it. And it was better than I could have ever imagined. (Radford quoted in Kagan 2000, pp. 150 - 151)

Steven Spielberg goes even further when he speaks of working with actor Djimon Hounsou during the making of *Amistad* (1997).

Djimon [Hounsou, who plays Cinque, the leader of the slave revolt] is such a gifted individual that I wish I could take credit for his performance. I didn’t have to do anything with him. He was in character. His mood was right. He understood every breath he took and why he had to take that breath, and he made my job really easy. (Spielberg quoted in Kagan 2000, p. 162)

Naremore also acknowledges that screen actors approach their work with professionalism.

All good movie actors know their lines, understand their character, effortlessly hit their marks, and have the ability to use props and costumes in expressive ways; but beyond such rudimentary qualities, the evaluative criteria for acting are much too various to list. The problem is exacerbated because acting in movies can be significantly manipulated in the editing room and because some of the best performances are virtually invisible, especially when an actor doesn't seem to be doing anything special and doesn't change from film to film. (Naremore 2006, pp. 61-62)

Naremore is correct in suggesting that it is extremely difficult to list the full extent of evaluative criteria a director might use in assessing an actor’s performance. In doing so he highlights the very nature of the problem when it comes to discussing how a director assesses an actor’s performance, as well as the difficulties scholars and professionals face when analysing and discussing this aspect of directing. As Ekman and Friesen discovered in their landmark study *Emotion in the Human Face* (1971) the human face is capable of producing at least 3,000 meaningful facial expressions

(Conniff 2007, p. 48). As both Szabó, and Fiennes stated seeing the birth of a new emotion on the face of an actor is for them the most important moment in an actor's performance (Berlinale 2011). So where Ekman and Friesen were able to 'painstakingly' identify individual facial expressions frozen in time in order to distinguish the difference between one expression and another, the film director, on set as the camera is rolling, is confronted with an actor who is constantly altering their facial expressions on a moment by moment basis as the emotional ebb and flow of the scene unfolds. Furthermore, the possible meaning of an individual facial expression, which is both an emotional stimuli and a part of the actor's communication system, becomes further complicated because it occurs as part of a continuous string of other facial expressions. In this context an emotional facial expression serves two key functions: as a stimulator it can potentially trigger an emotional response from the spectator, as well as communicating to them that the actor/character is experiencing a certain emotion, which then feeds into the narrative. Essentially, this is what Kuleshov discovered in the early 1920s.

When discussing an early scene in John Cassavetes', *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974), Baron highlights how the character Mabel Longhetti, played by Gena Rowlands, expresses a string of varied, though nonetheless connected, emotions all in very short period of time, "In the space of three seconds, the expressions that pass across Rowland's face and through her eyes convey Mabel's flutter of varied emotions" (Baron & Carnicke 2008, p. 42). All of which the director must observe, register, accurately interpret and evaluate, against their preconceived requirements for the character and the scene. Furthermore, researchers Righart and de Gelder (2008) argue that facial expressions are not perceived in isolation and are usually encountered within some form of emotional context which plays a significant role in how accurately that facial expression is recognized. In their study, when the surrounding emotional scene was congruent to the facial expression displayed, participants in the study more accurately recognized the facial expression, and when the surrounding emotional scene was less congruent, accurate recognition declined. Eisenstein (1970) believed that as long as the details of the emotion the actor is trying to express in their performance are similar enough to the expected details one would associate with that emotion then it is possible to stimulate that emotion within the actor, and therefore be seen and understood by the audience. Wickert makes a

similar point, “When you want the audience to understand the thinking processes inside the character, then the behaviours need to be consistent with that” (Sergi 2011). However, for the actor, director, and audience, facial expressions are primarily the external representation of internal emotions and psychological states. This is what Stanislavski described as the ‘inner creative state’ and ‘outer creative state’. The union of these two states produces the ‘general creative state’, which Stanislavski believed was the natural working state for the actor.

Then every feeling, mood, experience you have created is reflected externally. It is easy for actors to respond to all the tasks the play, the author, the director and they themselves have created. All the mental and physical elements of their creative state are on the alert and answer the call immediately. The more directly, vividly, precisely the outer reflects the inner, the better, the more broadly, the more fully the audience will understand the life of the human spirit you have created. That was why the play was written, why the theatre exists. *The general creative state is the working state.* (Stanislavski 2010, p. 583)

As the actor performs the scene the emotions they are experiencing are hopefully being communicated through the full range of the expressive capabilities of their bodies. McCallum (2000) states in an article about the rehearsal techniques of William Hurt and Robyn Nevin that actors must not only find within themselves the most appropriate emotions, but they must also shape those emotions to suit that particular moment in the life of the character within the overall story, and then control the expression of that emotion so that it is communicated at the most apt time and in the most suitable way.

He [Hurt] returns always to the specifics of the play, though, and so does Nevin, reflecting on the role of emotion in the process of the actor. She is fascinated by the problem. Actors need to find emotions in themselves to play their roles but then must shape those emotions in a way that is repeatable and won’t put too much stress on them. She quotes Samuel Beckett: artists need to find ‘a form that accommodates the mess’... Audiences, she adds, get put off by the sort of ‘out of control emotional expressions’ that some actors wallow in. (McCallum 2010, p. 7)

For Harrison Ford the emotions he experiences as an actor need to be emotions that he understands, has empathy with, and is able to control the expression and delivery of in a realistic way at the proper time and in an understandable manner.

Neither am I like or unlike the characters I play. I create a character out of those things that I hope will tell the story. I try to behave emotionally and realistically in the context of the moment. So I don't have anything to work with except my own experience, my own understanding, my own empathy. So if you see a character that I play, as different as the character may be from me, the emotions are emotions that I understand and that I feel I can convey. (Ford quoted in Pringle 2010, p. 15)

According to Conniff (2007, p. 52), “emotional expressions are highly nuanced, and some of the most interesting emotions occur in uncontrolled ways.” Wickert feels that it is when the actor is wholly absorbed in their character, when their personality has receded the most, and the personality of the character has been given enough space to become fully present that the actor's performance techniques begin to diminish sufficiently for the actor to *'be'* the character, rather than *'play'* the character:

I'm looking to see whether in their attempt to be like the person, to appear to be the person in the situation that the scene requires, that they have verisimilitude. That they have the attributes of that person, or as I imagine it to some extent. But they also will reveal general human traits in their behaviour which support that. In other words, you will see, if they are working well, then they would have triggered their autonomic process. That is, spontaneously, and outside the control of the actor, bits of behaviour will start to occur which will support the intention. (Wickert quoted in Sergi 2011)

This is similar to the point that Dyer makes that it is predominantly through those moments of unintended or uncontrolled action that audiences perceive that truth and honesty is to be found, “Authenticity is established or constructed in media texts by the use of markers that indicate lack of control, lack of premeditation and privacy” (Dyer 1991, p. 137). Cate Blanchett feels that people, in general, have a certain distrust of words and physical actions carrier a far greater sense of believability, hence the old adage that *'actions speak louder than words'*:

I believe film is a much more literal medium because we receive images as the truth. We often mistrust words. But once you see something, once you see Barbara stroking Sheba's arms, then we receive this as having a certain meaning. (Cate Blanchett quoted in Porton 2007, p. 18)

Cowan sees these moments of truth in a very similar way, “Normal actors have rehearsed a performance and they're controlling it. They are not in the unknown.

They're not facing the unknown. They're not brave at all" (Sergi 2011). For Mills this means actors responding and reacting to each other through the events of the scene, rather than performing (Sergi 2011). While Sarell sees it as the actors appearing like real people:

What you're doing is making sure that they're behaving like complex people. That they look like people in a real world. For me that means they are functioning on two levels. We're trying to get them to appear like they are functioning on a conscious and unconscious level; because that's the way you and I operate in the real world. So if our characters on the screen function like that, we will believe them. (Sarell quoted in Sergi 2011)

If the ability of the director in knowing an actor's performance is to be understood beyond instinct and intuition, beyond having a very finely tuned emotional meter or highly sensitive mirror neurons that are capable of empathising with authentic human behaviour and distinguishing the honesty and sincerity of the performance, then it is necessary to further unpack what the director is doing. It is here that Hart, McConachie, and Nellhaus offer some possible answers with their adaptation from cognitive science of image schemas and rich images into theorizing embodied knowledge and theatrical performance. However, before exploring the insights that image schemas and rich images may offer it is necessary to discuss why they may offer a way of understanding what is occurring when a director assesses an actor's performance. As an actor, Hopgood is unsure how a director knows when he achieves a quality performance, "How do I think he [the director] knows when I've nailed it? I have no idea" (Sergi 2011). Mills expresses a similar point of view, "That's a very good question. I can see it, but I'm not sure I can describe it ... It's difficult to ask, how do I know when I'm happy. What are the signs that I'm seeing?" (Sergi 2011).

This is significant because for many directors their comprehension of what Naremore calls the evaluative criteria remains largely unarticulated, subjective and is often centred primarily within their own emotional, psychological and intellectual reaction to the performance. In other words, the knowledge lies buried within their minds and bodies rather than from some form of conscious outward analysis of what they see and hear the actor doing. Therefore it seems that many directors rely upon intuitively and instinctively knowing when the actor has achieved a good performance, which

seems to be an overly subjective and possibly uncontrolled and inaccurate way of knowing. When asked how they know when the actor has achieved an authentic performance many directors will often say that they ‘just know’ or they can ‘feel it’. They say can tell when the performance is simply not authentic, just as they can tell when it is working. Lane, expresses this point, “It’s feel and know. So when it’s working I feel it’s working and I know it’s working. So the heart and the head are both having an excellent time” (Sergi 2011). Hoas expresses a similar approach. “But I didn’t call ‘cut’, I just let it happen, and when I saw the rushes I just knew that that worked” (Sergi 2011). As does Cowan, “I know because it’s natural ... I personally get a feeling of elation. I know it when I see it ... It looks like someone looks like when they’re telling the truth” (Sergi 2011). However, there is more going on than simply subjective sensing for when these actors and directors were questioned further they began finding additional ways of describing what they are looking for and what they see and experience. Hopgood again:

I can only imagine I have reached the point that he imagined the character should reach, or that I should reach. I can’t really answer that question, except to say, that they either know you’ve given the best performance they’re likely to get out of you [or they don’t]. (Hopgood quoted in Sergi 2011)

In the previous chapter Wickert described how he believes that directors seek to realise that which they “imagined” and Lane spoke about how she has to imagine the scene fully realised before she can shoot it (Sergi 2011). Director Oscar Williams says very much the same thing, “You have an idea of what it’s going to look like, what you want to do. And because you have an idea of what you want to see, you shoot it that way” (Oscar Williams quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 6). For some this may come as no surprise and may be considered obvious. However, as David Bordwell states in his article about the function of the actors’ faces in *The Social Network*, (Fincher, 2010), where he seeks to examine how expressive an actor’s eyes really are, investigating the obvious can, at times, be revealing. “At this point you might be getting impatient with me. Isn’t this all obvious? Of course the actors use their faces—they’re *paid* to do that. But sometimes going obvious can get us to notice things” (Bordwell 2011). As mentioned earlier Hart, McConachie and Nellhaus have adapted recent developments in cognitive science to propose alternative understandings of theatrical performance, actor agency and the performance strategies of theatrical

personnel, such as playwrights, directors, and designers, who they see as essentially functioning to solve artistic, narrative and technical problems. According to McConachie, “cognitive studies provides a valid framework for understanding the potential truth value of many theories and practices that we presently deploy in theatre and performance studies” (McConachie & Hart 2006, p. ix). It could be argued that they are similarly applicable to screen performance studies. One of the approaches McConachie and Hart have adapted positions theatrical performance and communication from the point of view of knowledge acquisition from within an embodied knowledge experience, where knowledge of theatre, actors and performances is acquired through observation and engagement with the performance. They argue that the embodied knowledge of the performance is acquired through sensorimotor, physical, sensual, and social experiences. McConachie and Hart structure their argument around the work of “... cognitive linguist George Lakoff and cognitive philosopher Mark Johnson [who] adopt an epistemological position of ‘embodied realism’ [and] reject both objectivist and relativist epistemologies for a qualified form of realism ... for Lakoff and Johnson, assumption-free observations are not possible” (McConachie & Hart 2006, p. xi). Within this theoretical approach to understanding performance the role of image schemas and rich images plays a functional role by providing an epistemological mechanism where actions perceived can be mentally processed, understood and can form part of a person’s knowledge.

Image schemas are gestalt-like abstractions of sensorimotor experiences, stored in minimalist – and thus easily retrievable – outlines in the memory ... Once developed and stabilized, image schemas are used to structure higher levels of cognition via a process of ‘metaphorical projection’, which forms ‘primary metaphors’ and ‘complex metaphors’ that enable the brain to categorize and assimilate both familiar and new experiences. (Hart 2006, p. 37)

For Nellhaus:

Image schemas, according to contemporary cognitive science, are conceptual structures arising from sensorimotor and in some cases social experiences. They are not fully-fledged images or mental pictures, since they lack particularity and detail: they are abstract or recurrent patterns – tropes, if you will, of space, time, material and action. (Nellhaus 2006, p. 76)

So for McConachie, Hart and Nellhaus climbing a set of stairs or driving a car forms part of the complex social image schemas that the majority of humans possess. The

same seems to apply to the role of film director. When many young students who have never before directed an actor step onto the set they seamlessly adopt a persona and methodology which appears largely informed by the image schema of ‘the film director’ they have acquired that is based on the social construct of ‘the film director’. Whereas, rich images are, “the detailed, concrete, and often language-based manifestations of underlying image schemas or nonmetaphorical visual images” (Hart 2006, pp. 41 - 42). Therefore, it may prove useful to consider a director’s reading of an actor’s performance as a form of embodied knowledge acquisition, which is made up of specialised, or unique, forms of personal variants of image schemas and rich images. For as we have seen from the directors and actors in earlier chapters it is not uncommon for directors to form mental pictures when they seek to visualise the actions of the film, including the actor’s performance, as described in the screenplay. These images are predominantly ‘gestalt-like abstractions’. Steve Katz describes something similar regarding visualization.

Each stage of the process, which requires dedication and a sense of fun, is most active when we are open to new ideas. Most often these appear as fragmentary, illusory images or incomplete thoughts that must be discovered. And discovery comes as one stage on the working process. (Katz 1991, p. 5)

The director may also explore the construction of a form of rich images when they storyboard, or use other means to detail what they saw in their ‘mind’s eye’. Although, McConachie, Hart and Nellhaus are seeking to understand “theatre [as] a model of social agency [within a] communication framework” (Nellhaus 2006, p. 92) their application of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodied consciousness through cognitive science and critical realism’s notion of embodied knowledge appears to mirror how directors describe the viewing and experiencing of an actor’s performance. For as McConachie and Hart point out, “Critical realism recognizes the key role of embodied knowledge as a foundation of people’s knowledge of the world; but it also points to the enormous amount of knowledge people necessarily gain second-hand via discursive practices” (McConachie & Hart 2006, p. 10). Within performance this seems to point to an understanding of knowing what is and is not ‘authentic human behaviour’. This alludes to Milne’s (1922) notion of ‘emotional experience’. One of the activities that may be occurring when a director is assessing an actor’s performance is that they are evaluating what they see and hear the actor

doing against their self-generated, pre-constructed mental projections of what the performance should look, sound, and most importantly, emotionally feel like. These projections are the result of the director imagining the actor's performance within the context of known human behaviour when they read the screenplay. Like image schemas these imagined performances stabilize over time. As the director goes over and over the scene in their mind, as they consider its subtext, nuances and subtle variations, or as they discuss the scene with the actors, these imagined performances begin to formalise and stabilise. Indeed, as the director comes to better understand the function of the scene within the film's narrative the clearer the imagined performance becomes. When a director rehearses the scene with the actors they are continually evaluating, comparing and testing what they imagined against what the actor is offering as creative choices. As Lakeoff and Johnson point out:

Cognitive science provides a new and important take on an age-old philosophical problem of what is real and how we can know it ... Our sense of what is real begins with and depends crucially upon our bodies, especially our sensorimotor apparatus, which enables us to perceive, move, and manipulate, and the detailed structures of our brains, which have been shaped by both evolution and experience. (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, p. 17)

As Lane says, when a performance or scene is working she knows it is working and she can feel it is, both her mind and her body are involved in sensing and evaluating (Sergi 2011). Consequently, one of the key mental and bodily actions that a director engages in is what Lakeoff and Johnson (1999) described as 'empathetic projection', where the director projects their personal values and their unique embodied knowledge onto the actor as the actor is performing, by both imagining and experiencing what they believe their actor is experiencing. Thus, the director who is spectating from a position of privilege, and who also knows that what they are witnessing is a fiction, is able at the same time, to evaluate the actor's performance against their previously imagined image schema. They can also empathetically project themselves into the situation that the actor is experiencing and allow the reality of the actor's emotional and psychological experiences to affect their own emotional and psychological state. This is similar to what Mark Seton identifies in his search for the "intangible quality of experience between actors and audience" (Seton 2004, p. 3). He feels that, "In the context of acting, other bodies, perceiving a performance, interpolate their interpretations into the experience of the observed

performer. Therefore, those who recognise particular qualities in a performance will inevitably misrecognise other qualities that recede, in the same moment of recognition” (Seton 2004, p. 21).

As Hart posits, “The more visceral the appeal ... the more it resonates throughout a given spectator’s inventory of embodied knowledge” (Hart 2006, p. 43). How some directors react to this empathetic projection seems to play a significant role in their determination of the merits of the actor’s performance. For as Enticott et al (2008) discovered there is a close correlation between how well an individual is able to interpret another person’s emotional facial expressions and the degree of mirror neuron activity in their brain. Their study showed that people who have greater mirror neuron activity are better able to distinguish another person’s facial emotional expressions, which therefore increases their ability to more accurately interpret another person’s intentions, and consequently evoke empathy. Their work has been supported by Fairchild et al (2010) who discovered in their psychiatric research into adolescent females³ with conduct disorder that the size of the insula and amygdala regions of the brain, which manage empathy and emotional perception, can vary significantly in individuals. This research appears to suggest that not everyone is able to correctly distinguish another person’s emotional state, or empathise with them and their situation. This ability to recognise emotions, interpret actions and comprehend how other people are feeling, seems to differ across the population. This may go some way towards explaining why some people, including directors, are able to better respond to and distinguish the emotions expressed by actors, or even, perhaps, why some people consider certain actors better performers than other actors.

This appears to be the point that Hopgood makes when he says that when he is performing he can “feel a level of excitement coming back [from the director]” (Sergi 2011), and Campbell, who states that as a director, “It’s a sort of abstract thing that happens. You feel a greater connection to whatever is happening at that immediate time” (Sergi 2011). This belief that some kind of psychological and emotion connection occurs between director and actor during a performance appears to be supported by Hart’s view, “that the language of a performance is itself sufficiently isomorphic with the embodied structures within the minds of speakers and listeners to inspire a *coupling* with those structures and thus a promoting of them

into a state of readiness for further use” (Hart 2006, p. 43). Furthermore, for the actors and directors interviewed being able to perceive the actor actively listening during a performance also appears to be a key indicator of the actor living the moment and being engrossed in their engagement with the other actors. Mills believes she can distinguish if the actor’s “attention of listening is very clear. I can see clearly that they’re listening” (Sergi 2011). As does Sarell, “One of the things that I’m watching for very closely is, are they listening and are they hearing what’s coming in, and are they processing it and are they therefore now making their next choice about what they’re going to say next” (Sergi 2011).

This suggests that directors who are closely watching the actors’ performance believe they can notice the physical characteristics of when the actor is genuinely listening to the other actor, and, as importantly, mentally processing what they hear before any reaction occurs. This authentic listening appears to be credited with considerable significance by directors, because when they speak of unauthentic performances one of the key indicators they often cite is actors who are not truly listening, but are simply waiting to hear the next dialogue cue so they can deliver their next line of dialogue. Actively listening also feeds into genuinely being affected and reacting to the other actor, and/or the physical happenings around them. Hence, an actor who is in the moment and living the reality of the scene is then able to react with honesty to what is happening to them. When actors perform, in this manner they create a unified circle of action and reaction that continuously builds until the scene ends. So when the director calls ‘action’ and the first actor ‘does something’ or ‘says something’, then this should affect the second actor who reacts, either verbally, physically or both, to what the first actor did. Consequently, the second actor’s reaction should cause the first actor to also be affected in a new way and then they too react. This triggers a chain-reaction of actors being affected by each other through actions and reactions.

... the consistent, essential ingredients always entail behaving, listening, and reacting in an understandable and believable way within the parameters of a specific work. Explicitly and implicitly, the actor must harmonize every infinitesimal detail to realize an effective performance. (Carson 2006, p. 60)

This ability of an actor to be genuinely affected by the actions of the other actor is something that directors believe they can perceive and register. For Wickert this is

part of the evidence that he needs to see in order to be convinced that the actor is portraying complex human behaviour.

The most important thing is, can I see complex human behaviour, and does it reveal details of human behaviour that sustain authenticity. Am I capturing an authentic human behaviour that the audience will recognise and be drawn towards and hopefully empathise with? Because that's the purpose. The purpose for me is to get audiences to recognise and empathise. So they will be participating in the thinking process of the character being seen. (Wickert quoted in Sergi 2011)

As it is for Sarell:

Do I believe them? Are they listening? Do they not know the future, are they just waiting with expectation, the hope that what they want to happen will happen, but waiting to see what will happen next? So you watch to see whether they are engaged in that interactive process, which is actively listening, seeking what they want, and not trying to do other things, like be an actor, or deliver that bit of big print, or play with the props because they're meant to be busy, or those sorts of things. (Sarell quoted in Sergi 2011)

For Mills on the other hand a complex duality occurs during the performance. She believes that actors are not so much working as an actor, because she loathes seeing acting, but rather they are working as themselves.

When an actor works with another actor, they're not working as characters. They're working as 'themselves' in a sense and the words are secondary. So they don't have to make the words work, and they don't have to give emotion to any of the words. All they have to do is affect this other person and be affected by the other person. And that's how I think it works. (Mills quoted in Sergi 2011)

Robert Altman makes a similar point, "What I'm looking for instead of actors is behaviors, someone who will bring me more" (Altman quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 161). As does Michael Winner, "Now Marlon [Brando] took that [theatrical] acting and turned it into film acting, which is really behaving" (Winner quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 162). This notion that quality film acting is more about how the actor behaves than their ability to act was picked up by John Ellis in 1982, when he wrote, "Underperformance is not a question of restraint or lack of histrionics. It is a question of producing the effect of behaving rather than performing" (Ellis 1992, p. 104). This was then further developed by Paul Coughlin in 2008 who pointed out that one of the elements of 'authentic' acting is to be found in the link between sociology and

acting, because “capturing character requires an imitation not of character but of behaviour” (Coughlin 2008, p. 243).

However, within this constant play of action and reaction in creating behaviour lies a trap for the actor, because the amount of time it takes for an action to occur and for the actor to be affected and react can be very quick, by which time the other actor should have moved on and new actions are happening. As Peggy Phelan points out, it is helpful to think of “performance as that which disappears” (Phelan 2003, p. 293). So the amount of time an actor holds onto a moment of action or reaction, a moment of seeking to affect and be affected, has a very real impact on the flow of a scene. If an actor holds onto a moment for too long a period of time before moving onto the next moment then the natural flow of the scene might be interrupted and in narrative terms the audience may move ahead of the actor. This is exactly what Wickert pointed out when he said that as a director he seeks to create situations where the audience can empathise and participate “in the thinking process of the character” (Sergi 2011). Thus, if the audience is actively engaged in the flow of the scene and the second actor hangs onto a moment for too long, or is stuck playing one action (perhaps because it feels safe) and consequently momentarily ignores how the scene is evolving around them then a situation could occur where the audience is now reacting to the next moment that has just happened, which was created by the first actor, while the second actor is still playing the previous moment and ignoring, or pretending, that the newest moment has not occurred. Mills makes this exact point.

Another difficulty with actors playing the action dutifully is that when they get affected, and a moment of their being affected happens, then they can't hang onto it. They've got to let it go. And that's in a sense the truthfulness of the moment. That's as long as it lasts. Let it go. Be open, ready. Because the next thing's happened. So in that sense the moment is very quick. And that is why the breath is very important, because if you keep breathing, you'll keep shifting what you're feeling, and what's happening, and in that sense the moment goes. (Sergi 2011)

A look, a glance, a thought, a gasp, a frown, a shudder can be over in less than a second and once it has occurred a space exists for a new moment, which the audience is already looking for the actor to fill. This is what Szabó and Fiennes were talking about when they spoke of witnessing the birth of a new emotion on an actor's face. Or what Mills alludes to when she recounts how one director once told her to, “Just

think it. That's all you need to do" (Sergi 2011), because the camera will find the external reaction to the thought in her eyes, across her face and possibly her whole body. In an authentic performance this is constantly happening. As Cate Blanchett says, "in film acting you're often encouraged to find internal connections and the camera will find your performance" (Blanchett quoted in Porton 2007, p. 19). Hopgood makes the same point, "You can tell instantly when you see a performer like that. They just say – I'm going to live. Bring the camera to me and I'll live. And you catch me living it" (Sergi 2011).

However, to engage with this constant flow and creation of moments, some of which are fleeting, the director must not only be sufficiently literate in reading emotions in order to interpret their intentions, but they must have the ability to perceive the minute details of the actor's performance with great clarity. This ability to perceive subtle nuances and fine details that others may not notice is a fundamental factor to reading the actor's performance, for as Steven Katz says, "In the arts, technique is largely a matter of improved perception. In music, for example, this means learning to hear more accurately; in film it means learning to see more precisely" (Katz 1991, p. 173). This ability to have a heightened sense of perception appears fundamental to assessing the full complexity of an actor's performance. During the making of *Tom and Viv* (1994) Miranda Richardson at times felt unsure of her performance. When this occurred she would turn to the director Brian Gilbert. Richardson praised Gilbert for not only being supportive, but also for being confident in what he saw in her performance. In other words she praised him for his acuity of perception, (Zucker 1997). Meryl Streep makes a similar point regarding when she worked on *The Fantastic Mr Fox* (Anderson 2009).

He's very demanding (says Streep of Wes Anderson). He hears everything, even a quasi-breath. It's almost like he's tasting, tasting, tasting ... 'Right that's enough salt.' It's more like working with a composer, as if he was hearing music inside his head and you couldn't hear it. (Streep quoted in Teeman 2009, p. 17)

Streep goes on to discuss how she too looks deeply when she is seeking the essence of human behaviour.

I like observing behaviour and what catches the eye, what makes us read each other so closely. Ever since movies began we have read each other more closely. (She makes a frame to her face). The pores.

The fashion for photography that goes into Gordon Brown's nostrils and tear ducts ... we see do deeply into each other, even as our understanding seems shallower and shallower. To see deeply you have to look deeply and feel where you are. (Streep quoted in Teeman 2009, p. 17)

Eleanor Coppola (1993) believes that Francis Ford Coppola's talent lay in the quality of his perception.

Francis works by getting the emotion of the scene going and asking the camera to capture it...His talent is the ability to discriminate, the ability to see a moment of truthful acting and distinguish it from all the others. (Coppola 1993, p. 121 + 138)

Although Sydney Pollack did not believe acute perception could be taught, nonetheless, for him it is a fundamental tool that a quality director has to have.

If a director cannot tell the difference between a fake bit of behaviour and a true bit of behaviour, they have no business directing. It's not something that can be learned. You have to know the difference between truth and fiction. How do you teach somebody the difference? You can't. It's something intuitive, you just know it. It's called perception. Somebody is or isn't perceptive. That's all you have, as a director, the ability to recognize reality in behaviour. (Pollack quoted in Stevens 1997, p. 26)

Director Buzz Kulik believed that the genius of William Wyler, who according to Kulik often had difficulty articulating performance notes to actors, was that he had incredible perception.

... his genius was that when he saw what it was like ... he recognized it, which is an incredible thing, because there are so many times when we see something that's great and we're not aware that it's great or we're not sure it's great. (Buzz Kulik quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 163)

Renoir is quite blunt about this aspect of directing.

The trouble with us human beings is that we are often very stupid. Things are in front of us, we don't see them. An actress rehearses with a beautiful face full of emotion — you don't see it. You think of your camera angle. I'm not for that. (Renoir quoted in Sherman 1976, p. 190)

Acute perception allows the director to truly see what the actor is doing and the intent behind their actions. This enables the director to go beyond simply feeling the actor's performance on an emotional and psychological level and to actually see the

details of the external expressions of the performance and assess the authenticity of those individual elements that define the behaviour. According to Mills when this occurs the director is able to distinguish tangible aspects of the actor's performance.

It's something about the sensitivity of a director with their actors. I guess a bit of experience and knowledge. But I also think there's always little changes that go on because of the other part of playing an action, which is to play an action in response to what someone is giving you ... And that's very fine. Quite subtle in some ways, even though it's really strong and powerful. (Mills quoted in Sergi 2011)

Mills goes on to highlight several external actions that she believes are some of the primary indicators of an authentic performance and once the director extends their perception they begin to observe these elements that remain somewhat invisible to the untrained eye.

There are lots of different signs. The time's gone, and the scene is over very quickly. The energy moves back and forward between the actors in a way that seems seamless and easy. The attention of the actors is quite focused, but not in a tense way. In an almost relaxed way, even if it is a tense scene. The actors are bang in the middle of their bodies. Bang in the middle of what they're doing with each other. So even if there are pauses, there is still movement and flow between them ... I can say it's something to do with their breathing. It seems to be continuous. And something in their faces change. It's sort of like a continual change. Or something in the eyes is quite alive. (Mills quoted in Sergi 2011)

Mills, who initially trained as an actor, describes what was not described by any of the directors that were interviewed nor by any of the many highly regarded directors quoted in the numerous texts that have already been cited or appear in the bibliography. This is not to suggest that Mills possess a unique understanding of how to assess an actor's performance, but rather that this approach to observing and describing an actor's performance is not necessarily what immediately comes to mind for directors.

As has been discussed earlier in this chapter when many directors first speak about how they read and assess an actor's performance they often describe how it effects them or grips them or draws them in, or how they can just feel when it is right. Their language reveals that their primarily evaluative centre is located within themselves and how they experience the actor's performance, rather than being dually focused

and thus including in their evaluative process their perceptive observations of the myriad tiny aspects of the actor's behaviour that combined together become the performance. However, I suspect that capable directors do pick up on these minute aspects of physical behaviour, but they do so in a way that is difficult to realize and verbalize. Their knowledge of all these subtle details exists to a significant extent as tacit knowledge that has been acquired over time and with conscious experience, and much trial and error.

Thus, directors read and know an actor's performance by utilising their sensorimotor apparatus, which is influenced by their mirror neurons, and the insula and amygdala regions of their brain. This combines with Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodied consciousness and Hart's notion of kinaesthetic and perceptual interactions through which they 'know' what experience and training as directors enables them to 'perceive'. To this they add what they 'feel' emotionally, psychologically and intellectually and what they 'connect to' through Lakoff and Johnson's notion of empathetic projection. And all this is operates alongside their individually acquired store of distinctive tacit knowledge of acting, performance, cinema, society and most importantly authentic human behaviour, or Milne's (1922) notion of emotional experience, and the unique socio-cultural, historical, geographical, educational and genetic aspects that make them the individuals they are.

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¹ Butler, Jeremy G., ed. *Star Text: Image and Performance in Film and Television*. Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1991.

² See Kagan (2000), pages 123 to 167. Jeremy Kagan interviews directors of the calibre of Clint Eastwood, Steven Spielberg, Anthony Mingella, Rob Riener, James L. Brooks and others. Almost invariably they all seek to encourage the creative input of their cast.

³ Both Fairchild and Calder, et al have recently written a paper which is to be published in the American Journal of Psychiatry, titles, *Brain structure abnormalities in early-onset and adolescence-onset Conduct Disorder*, that show similar results in adolescent males. Please see this website <http://www.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/bibliography/articles/7213/> accessed 1 April 2011.

Conclusion

At the Moment of Creation asked the question: How does a director read, know and assess an actor's performance on set while the camera is rolling?

A multi disciplinary approach was adopted to answer this question. The literature review examined the views of directors and actors, industry specialists, and film scholars. Several theoretical frameworks, including film studies, performance studies, creativity studies, phenomenology, psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, cognitive science, and neuroscience were examined to consider the question from different perspectives. Interviews were conducted with Australian actors and directors and I called upon my twenty-five years experience as a director, and sixteen years as an academic teaching film and television production.

In the Introduction, which also included the literature review, I examined the extent to which leading texts and scholarly articles discussed this topic of directorial practice and I demonstrated that overall this area is underrepresented in industry and academic discourse. Chapter One discussed how the visual style of *Gingerbread Men* was selected, primarily because the use of the long-take, single shot per scene technique tested my ability to correctly read and assess the performance of the actors on set. This cinematic style also proved to be the best way of maintaining the authenticity of the actors' performance right through the production process, because I could not re-create the performances in editing. I also illustrated how the intensified continuity shooting style describe by Bordwell (2005) allows the director and editor to re-create the performance in the editing suite so that the performance seen on the cinema screen could, potentially, be quite different from that created by the actor on set; and that editors regularly 'save' performances.

Typically on a film set any crew member is able to call upon the professional opinion of their colleagues to assist in making a creative decision. However, as was explored in Chapter Two the role of the director demands that they do not consult with either the cast or the crew when evaluating the actors' performance and their calibre as a director could be called into question if they appeared indecisive when exercising

their judgement in this matter. This places the director in a creative position that is fundamentally different to that of any other crew member. Consequently, it forces the director to locate their knowing solely within their own experience, rather than the collective decision-making that occurs with all other aspects of filmmaking even though the director may have the final word.

The perception among some directors that they are an audience for the actors' performance and how they almost without realising it adopt this position from which to evaluate the actors' performance was discussed in Chapter Three. Here I argued that according to Lakoff and Johnson (1999) assumption-free observations are not possible, and so it is unfeasible for directors with all their prior knowledge of the character, the screenplay and the film's narrative to experience the actors' performance in anyway like a cinema audience who primarily use the actors' performance as a way of making sense of the film's narrative. Instead whether they are aware of it or not directors are decoding the constant stream of facial, physical, verbal, emotional, and psychologically complex language signifiers embedded in the actors' performance as a way of ensuring that only the correct communication messages are being transmitted to the audience so that the audience makes the most appropriate determinations regarding the character and thus the narrative. In essence, directors seek to eliminate all confusing performance signs and signifiers from the actors' performance.

Chapter Four used the information gathered in the research interviews with directors and actors regarding how they distinguished when an actor's performance was not working as a means of shedding light on the indicators of a satisfactory performance. The comments and opinions from these directors clearly indicated that they primarily base their determinations regarding the actor's performance on how they emotionally and psychologically react and how honest and truthful the performance felt or appeared to them: all intangible metrics. Essentially, if the directors were able to suspend disbelief during the performance, if they felt the actors were being sincere and in the moment this was sufficient for them to deem the performance satisfactory. Apart from Mills, who initially trained as an actor, there was little reliance on conscious observations of the full gamut of external attributes of the actor's behaviour as indicators of how well they had transformed themselves into the

character. For as was shown some scholars believe screen performance is more about behaving like the character than acting. What was also apparent from the actors interviewed was that directors made actors feel insecure if they could not differentiate whether the actor was having difficulty with the performance or had 'nailed' it, which had a detrimental impact on their work.

In Chapter Five I argued that the study of screen acting is an area of cinema studies that has been largely overlooked until recently, thus affording academic space for further valuable research and in particular the development of a more sophisticated language for discussing and evaluating screen performance. I then discussed how recent discoveries in neuroscience, mirror neuron theory, cognitive science and embodied knowledge could be useful tools in demystify how directors firstly know and then assess an actor's performance. Consequently, I was able to show that not every human being is able to distinguish, with the same degree of accuracy and depth, the emotional reactions of other people and yet the ability to read and interpret facial expressions is essential to achieve empathy, and empathy is necessary for the director to fully engage with the actor and the character. Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) notion of empathetic projection is indeed what a director does. Furthermore, I demonstrated that that not everyone is able to correctly perceive all the infinitesimal details of the actors' performance which are necessary to truly know and be able to assess the performance. Therefore acute perception and emotional experience are essential requirements for the director.

However, another illuminating outcome from my research has been the realisation that the intensified continuity shooting style potentially removes a great deal of creative agency from actors, because the director and editor can create not only a performance that the actor may not achieve on set, but also an interpretation of the character that the actor did not seek to construct. This is the style adopted by James Cameron during the making of *Titanic* (1997), "I made a decision early on to just say to everybody [the actors] going in, 'We're gonna shoot a lot of takes, so you've got a lot of room to figure it out.' We gave everybody permission to explore, to screw up, to find different ways of doing the scene on film" (Cameron quoted in Kagan 2000, p. 153). Creatively, this places the actor in a position unlike any other major creative contributor to the film. Although modern digital post-production allows the director a

great deal of opportunity to alter aspects of the film when it comes to the production design, wardrobe, make-up, props, etc, generally speaking the director does not radically change what was previously agreed upon with these crew members. Even the cinematography, which can be significantly digitally enhanced, also generally remains within the creative range discussed with the cinematographer prior to and during production, and cinematographers regularly are involved in determining the final look of the film. But as the Cameron example demonstrates, a director who adopts the intensified continuity approach, and has the resources to film a large number of takes, can become the sole definer of the character by asking the actor to continually provide a broad range of varying performances for all the multitude of takes and shots that make up every scene. This ultimately allows the director to make the final choices that shape and define the character in the editing suite, rather than on the set in collaboration with the actor. However, the long-take single shot per scene approach used in *Gingerbread Men* allows the actor greater creative agency, because although the director may shoot a number of takes, and might be the sole determiner of which take is ultimately used in the film, the creation of the character in that take which lasts the entire scene is wholly that created by the actor. For me as a director this was a profound revelation and it will greatly influence how I choose to work in the future.

This exegesis has sought to shed light on how directors know and assess actors' performances. Hopefully, through the research, analysis, and discussions that are contained herein I have demonstrated that this has been achieved. I also hope that my work will be of use to young filmmakers, and novice directors in assisting them to better understanding how important directing actors is within the range of directorial duties and that the pictorial elements of the film are but one element, and not necessarily the most important element. I also hope that my work is of value to film scholars in general, particularly those who are now turning their attention to studying screen performance.

Further Research

The link between directing, acting, performance and cognitive science and mirror neuron studies is worthy of further research. Studies conducted so far have either

involved general population samples, or people suffering some kind of psychological disorder. I believe there are great possibilities to study the mirror neuron activities of well established and capable actors and directors to see if their ability to correctly distinguish emotions in others is greater than the general population. My suspicion is that because actors and directors continually do this as part of their regular work practice they are likely to have greater mirror neuron activity than a typical member of the general population. This is research I hope to pursue in the near future.

Kagan, J. (ed.) 2000, *Directors Close Up: Interviews with Directors nominated for Best Film by the Directors Guild of America*, Focal Press.

Appendix 1

Abridged transcriptions of interviews with Australian directors and actors

The following is an abridged transcription of the on-camera interviews that appear in the *Research Interviews* DVD that accompanies this dissertation. All the interviews were conducted at the Australian Screen Directors Association annual conference, held in Melbourne, Australia, in September of 2002. All the directors and actors interviewed attended the conference and two of the interviewees, Richard Sarell (director) and Margaret Mills (actor/dramaturge/director) presented at the conference on the subject of the actor/director relationship, rehearsing actors and directing actors for a scene.

Following is a brief rundown of some of the productions the interviewees have been involved with. Solrun Hoaas, who sadly passed away on the 11th of December 2010 is best known for her films *Green Tea and Cherry Ripe* (1989), the feature film *Aya* (1990) and the documentary *Rushing to Sunshine: Seoul Diaries* (2002). Jo Lane directed the television movie *Glued to the Telly* (1995), the television documentary *The Comedy Company: So Excellent* (2002), the video game *The Dame Was Loaded* (1996) and the long-running television series *The Comedy Company* (1988 - 1990).

Laurie Campbell, also known as Laurie Agard (her maiden name), had recently immigrated to Australia from the United States. At the time of the interviews she had made several independent films and documentaries as a writer/director in the USA, including *The Frog and the Wombat* (1998), *Broads Abroad* (2000), and *Fast Women* (2001), as well as directing episodes of the Australian television series *Wicked Science* (2005).

Richard Sarell is one of Australia's most prolific television directors. His directing career spans three decades. Starting with *Home and Away* (1989), and followed by, *A Country Practice* (1992), *Water Rats* (1996), *All Saints* (1998), *Murder Call* (1998), *Blue Heelers* (2000), *Neighbours* (2002), and *MDA* (2003). At the time of the

interview Andrew Vial was an independent filmmaker living in Melbourne, who developed, produced and directed his own productions.

Apart from being one of Australia's most regular working cinematographers during the 1970's, 80's and 90's working on such productions as *Promised Woman* (1975), *Pure S* (1975), *The Love Letters from Teralba Road* (1977), *Dimboola* (1979), *Dead Easy* (1982), *Emma's War* (1986) and *Backsliding* (1992) Tom Cowan also directed *The Office Picnic* (1972), *Promised Woman* (1975), *Journey Among Women* (1977), *Sweet Dreamers* (1982), and *Orange Love Story* (2004). Tom was also Co-Head of Directing, along with Ross McGregor, at AFTRS in the mid to late 1980's.

Tony Wickert directed for several television series in the United Kingdom in the late 60's and 70's, such as *Boy Meets Girl* (1967), *Thirty-Minute Theatre* (1967), *Detective* (1968), *Gazette* (1968), *ITV Saturday Night Theatre* (1969), and the documentary *Fly a Flag for Poplar* (1974) before emigrating to Australia. Tony was also Co-Head of Directing, along with Murree Hutchinson, at AFTRS in the early to mid 1980's.

Margaret Mills, has appeared as an actress in *Bachelor Girl* (1988), *Golden Braid* (1990), *A Country Practice* (1994), *Dead End* (1999), *Blue Heelers* (2001), and *Corroboree* (2007). She has worked as a teacher with Lindy Davies at the Victorian College of the Arts Drama School.

Alan Hopgood is one of Australia's leading film industry figures. His has appeared as an actor in as diverse a range of productions as *Bellbird* (1972), *Neighbours* (1986), *The Flying Doctors* (1988), *Blue Heelers* (2000), and *Something in the Air* (2001) as well as key feature films such as *My Brilliant Career* (1979), *The Blue Lagoon* (1980), *Roadgames* (1981), *The Man from Snowy River II* (1988), *Evil Angels* (1988), *Knowing* (2009), and *The Cup* (2011). He also wrote for a great many television series, such as *Bellbird* (1967), *The Flying Doctors* (1987), *Neighbours* (1989), *Pugwall* (1991), and the feature films *Alvin Purple* (1973) and *Alvin Rides Again* (1974).

Two of the interviewees, Tony Wickert and Tom Cowan taught me when I was a directing student at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS), from 1985 to 1987.

Considering the size the transcriptions would have been had I transcribed the full length of the *Research Interviews* DVD, which runs for over seventy minutes, I elected to abridge the transcriptions for this appendix so as to highlight the most salient points. In addition, I have to some extent smoothed out the phrasing and sentence structure and grouped each interviewee's comments under four broad groups of questions so as to make for more coherent reading. This way the reader can follow each interviewee's responses in a manner that more closely resembles the unfolding discussion I had with them at the time of the interview. These are:

1. *The following are responses to the question, "How can you tell, or what are the indicators of, bad directing and good directing?"*

2. *The following are responses to the question, "How can you tell, or what are the indicators, that a scene has been poorly realised?"*

3. *The following are responses to the question, "When you are watching a scene being performed how do you know, or what are the indicators, that the scene is not working, or the actors' performance is poor?"*

4. *The following are responses to the question, "During a take how can you tell, or what are the indicators of, a good performance: i.e. while you are watching the performance as it is being created?"*

This is not how the interviewees appear in the *Research Interviews* DVD, which although it is not presented as a documentary, for it is solely a collection of talking heads, it has none-the-less been edited in a documentary fashion and the interviewee's responses have been inter-cut and juxtaposed with each other in a manner that flows as a piece of visual and audio communication.

The following are responses to the question, “How can you tell, or what are the indicators of, bad directing and good directing?”

Alan Hopgood

What is bad about their direction is that they make you feel insecure.

In television the worst thing is to feel that your performance is only part of the whole process. So if something technical goes wrong and that takes precedence over the performance you might have given—that’s a very unsettling feeling.

A bad director confuses you with their direction. So you’re going along and they make you do a turn and go in the other direction. And you finish up going nowhere.

Whereas the other type of director, that is totally at one with you, everything else melts. And you feel that he is at one with your performance so much that it doesn’t matter what else happens it’s what he’s extracting from you or what he’s allowing you to give is so important.

I like to feel I can rely on a director to give me the level. Because I claim you don’t know. Some actors say they can see themselves, like the third eye.

A good director knows when you’ve nailed it. But you also know when you’ve delivered. And you’re at one with him or her and he says, “That’s a take”. And you say, “Good. That’s as good as I can do.”

Margaret Mills

A bad director can’t hear you or see you. Doesn’t listen. Doesn’t know their own script. A bad director won’t see the choices you’ve made. Won’t see the good things you’ve done. Won’t see where your difficulties are. They won’t be looking at your whole body. Good directors look at your whole body. They look at your breathing. They look at your eyes. They look at all the tension in your body or not.

Bad directors don’t give you a sense that you’re terrific and that they trust you. I know this is crazy—and that they like you. I think that’s a good thing to feel as an actor. And they get anxious when you’re not giving them what they want.

And I'm thinking one of the best [pieces of] direction I had early on was, "Just think it. Just think it, that's all you need to do". Most actors, especially who come from the theatre, need to be told that and reassured that. Because they're desperate to show. Because they're not used to what the camera does.

It's something about the sensitivity of a director with their actors. I guess a bit of experience and knowledge. Knowing. I've done it from acting and from watching really good directors. But a lot of young filmmakers they want to make films, but they haven't worked with actors.

The directors that I love working with, and that I usually do work with, are ones that love working with actors. They really find something wonderful about actors and wonderful about that relationship. Between them is a relationship of trust and need. And as an actor I need to feel free that I can do all these sorts of things and you'll see and hear it.

Tony Wickert

You're trying to realise that which you imagined. When directing the chief task is to be a realiser. In other words you translate from text to screen. From one mode of communication to another.

What directors look for is, they imagine their outcome and they try to see to what extent they have realised their outcome.

Well the issue of right is an interesting one, because I don't think you ever get it right, all you do is you fashion a version of it. That's today's version. And it can be realised in many ways. There are no 'rights' in this. There are multiple appropriate.

Other things are much more revealing of what's going on. The pitfall that most actors fall into is the notion of controlling their output. And so I try to work with them and say, we share this responsibility, director and actors. Let's be clear in our own minds about what the character is trying to do at this particular point. And so, rather than let them think about acting I need to lead them away from things they might have learnt in acting school like mannerism. All stuff which mimics other actors and acting and

things like that. That's what I've got to do, and to do that I've got to cast them appropriately.

Richard Sarrell

What you're doing is supporting them in not falling into the pitfalls. Because what I think essentially directing is about, is as much as anything, stopping the mistakes from happening.



The following are responses to the question, "How can you tell, or what are the indicators, that a scene has been poorly realised?"

Richard Sarell

The acting hasn't been believable in the telling of the story.

There are two options. One is that the story hasn't been told. So it hasn't been realised. The other one is that the acting hasn't been truthful or believable in the telling of the story. But everybody can tell whether the story has been told, in which case it has been realised. It may not be truthful, but at least the storytelling has been realised. And you can come out going, "Okay I got the story. The actors were shit, but I know what story they were telling". So I suspect you can probably get away with not having terribly good performances if the story is well told.

Tom Cowan

Oh well, hell, that's a hard one.

Solrun Hoaas

I find it hard to answer that in abstraction, because I think it's really, it is an intuitive thing in relation to what's going on, in relation to the specific scene and that's something that changes.

Tony Wickert

Well, what makes me think it has been poorly realised is that they haven't got complexity. Mostly it's that. They haven't captured human complexity. That's the main issue for me. The next one is that they haven't recognised, as a director, how to sort out of the myriad issues that arise in the making of a scene - which are the most important. Sorting them out. Working out that this moment matters more than others. In other words, this is crucial other things don't matter very much. Also lacks something else, a human dimensionality. I couldn't see the mental processes that went on in there at all, so they were hidden from me.

Jo Lane

Again it's a feeling. I haven't felt honesty. And I can name the films and I just can't be bothered... Where was the director in that scene?... and for me it's very obvious.



The following are responses to the question, "When you are watching a scene being performed how do you know, or what are the indicators, that the scene is not working, or the actors' performance is poor?"

Tony Wickert

You mostly see attributes of the person who is playing the part, which are irrelevant.

Well, they're self conscious. The person who is playing the part isn't in the moment of the character. They're in own moment. They're in their own life, and they haven't managed to surrender themselves sufficiently to the imagined situation. After all it's the actor's task to imagine that this story is a reality and so being able to convince themselves is part one of being an actor. Part two then is, of course, to take on the attributes of the character at that particular time. So that's what I'm looking for.

Solrun Hoaas

They [the actors] were over-doing it and playing to the camera.

It was the interaction between the characters, in the performance, it felt stiff and awkward. And I felt that part of the reason for that was the actors hadn't had a chance to rehearse it properly.

Tom Cowan

I think it's just falseness. Not really being alive to the moment. There's also elements of storytelling and the attitude of the director. What their philosophy is?

That's what they [actors] feared. Their fear of the unknown. What I'm training the actors to do is go with that fear. I don't want them to know what's going to happen next. I want them to be alive to that moment.

Margaret Mills

The actors are uncomfortable. It's just not flowing between them like normal talk. Or I'm bored. Unsatisfied. I'm unsatisfied with a lot. It's not interesting enough. I get what you're doing [the actor]. It makes literal sense. I'm not drawn in.

I see people [actors] stuck on the other person. Like they're fixed. I see them hesitate. You see all sorts of hesitations. You can see people [actors] think[ing], "that's not very good". Do a whole lot of thinking [as the actor not the character] rather than responding.

The words come out funny. You have a sense that they're trying to hide in a way. Trying to show something in order not to be seen. You can see that. It's quite fine I think, and you know what, not everyone can see it. And when I think about actors that I have seen over the years, and you talk to other people and they say, "She's great", and I'll go "What, I don't think so".

The trouble with the actions with some actors, is you say, "okay play this action", so they play it, play it, play it, and even if they get given a whammy by the other actor, if they say something that really hurts, they may, like good actors, because actors

want to please, they might let that [the whammy] go, because they got to then completely play their action. Whereas, if as well as playing their action, they're letting themselves be affected, which is the second part, then when they get affected and they actually can't speak, well I guess that's a long moment.

Laurie Campbell

When I'm watching a scene that is not working what usually happens is I'm bored. If I find I'm suddenly not engaged, or if I'm thinking about something else, then it usually means that there is something that's not quite there.

Jo Lane

The signs that it isn't working is this space that I feel. It's like a bit of a dread. It's not like it's one particular thing. Suddenly it feels like it's all at sea. It doesn't have a thread that everyone is holding onto. Everyone is doing their own thing. We're not all together doing, hanging onto the same piece of rope to go to the same place. And when all that's happening it's an awful, empty, black, cold feeling. It's awful when it's not working.

Richard Sarrell

Not listening. They are committed to playing the emotion. So you'll find actors desperately trying to get in touch with their emotional core, or whatever label they've put on that. And in which case they start thinking about themselves and they stop thinking about [the other actor] and what effect this story is going to have on the other [actor]. So they take the interactive thing out of it, and start doing self indulgent things.



The following are responses to the question, "During a take how can you tell, or what are the indicators of, a good performance: i.e. while you are watching the performance as it is being created?"

Alan Hopgood

How do I think he [the director] knows when I've nailed it? I have no idea. I can only imagine I have reached the point that he imagined the character should reach, or that I should reach. It's particularly difficult, of course, when you're dealing with a group scene. You may be giving a fantastic performance, but your co-stars not, or vice-versa. That's very difficult. I can't really answer that question, except to say, that they either know you've given the best performance they're likely to get out of you [or they don't]. But you can also feel a level of excitement coming back. The best directors that I've worked with really make you feel so special. And that's not a bad skill when the director has so much else to cope with.

The believability, the relaxation, the fact that I'm not aware of the acting process.

And you can tell. You can tell instantly when you see a performer like that. That they just say, I'm going to live. Bring the camera to me and I'll live. And you catch me living it.

To me it's very much the eyes. It's the fact that you can go through the eyes to the truth of the person.

Laurie Campbell

I don't know if there would be specific indicators, but there was a little girl who I've just finished directing who I could tell if she was listening to what the other girl was saying or if she was imitating ... you could just sort of see in her eyes. Sometimes there was a connection to the whole body from the stomach up where you can tell that they're engaging or listen to the person that's across from them. And I think, probably, that would be the biggest indicator.

Sometimes the more professional actors like Lindsay Wagner who's done so many things, has so many tricks that she's just used to doing. I found myself watching her to find out what she was doing. Trying to learn from her more than knowing an indicator.

How did the honesty materialise? I think they're able to find something else inside them that relates to the character. So it adds another dimension and you can just sort

of feel. It's a sort of abstract thing that happens. You feel a greater connection to whatever is happen at that immediate time.

I think something just sort of magical happens and it's almost as if you connect with whatever the actor's connected with. If there's a scene where there's an actor crying and I feel myself sort of feeling weepy. Or if it's a kid that's crying and I felt incredibly maternal and protective. That sort of made me feel like it had happened.

Tom Cowan

I'm trying to capture a certain grace ... Because I'm not really looking for perfect performances in my film. In fact I'm not looking for characterisation even. I'm looking at the inimitable. The person. I'm not looking at an actor. I want to find a person and all their strengths and fears.

I just see two people [actors] responding to each other and I suppose it's the grace with which they do it that elates me. But what I'm seeing is just people relating like they would be in a bus. It's all within the context of the unfolding story. But they're not there to tell the story. An actor is not there to try and convey the story to the audience. The actor is there to be there and do the action of the moment.

Trying to seek that moment of truth in ourselves and from the other.

Well, I know when I've got it if I can follow them with the camera. I know because it's natural. They're [the actors] are not blocking. Normal actors have rehearsed a performance and they're controlling it. They are not in the unknown. They're not facing the unknown. They're not brave at all. They've got it all worked out and they're giving it to you. Just like a politician will give you the line. I'm not looking for that in my films.

It looks like someone looks like when they're telling the truth.

You get certain surprising things happening. A surprising reaction, but a true one.

I personally get a feeling of elation. I know it when I see it. And you know it when you see someone telling the truth. But when someone is blocking their impulses. It actually is sort of neurotic.

Jo Lane

I know what I'm trying to achieve, but I've only through doing mileage, doing it many times, have I now the ability to know when I've achieved it. That it's doing on the screen what I wanted it to do. What I intended to have happen.

So I'm actually getting what I want. And I don't know how I'm getting what I want now, because I'm not aware of the process anymore. But what I am finding is that actors ... are much more responsive to me than they have ever been before ... I'm focused on the end result and I'm judging everything that's happening to whether or not it's meeting what the end results requiring. And being flexible enough to say that if something new comes up, if it's fitting in or in fact improving on what I thought it could be. So I'm not trying force things into some sort of shoe box. I'm quite comfortable to allow things to happen.

A beautifully directed scene is a joy to see. And it's clear to me. When the screen disappears then it's been well directed. And that's really obvious.

I know if it's working because it's just unfolding in front of my eyes. And everyone else knows it too.

It's feel and know. So when it's working I feel it's working and I know it's working. So the heart and the head are both having an excellent time when it's working. Having said that, there have been times when it's not working for other people, but I know I'm getting what I want, because I can't explain to them why I need it. But I know I'm getting it. And I know why and I know the timbre I want it to have.

I don't know, you just do. I just do and I watch that take I just know if it's honest. And that's where it's know and feel. So the heart and the mind are both sensing. My honesty aerial is up and if it's not getting twiggled then I know it's not honest, and if it is then I know we've got a great take.

Now when I watch a take, as it's happening, I'm totally transporting myself into a time in the future in a place that isn't this set that's perhaps a theatre or a living room and a screen, and I'm watching it. And I'm letting it get to me, or feeling that it's not getting to me. It's not connecting to me. And often I've said to actors, "I just so didn't believe what you just said". And they go, "Oh I know. It didn't feel right."

And everyone else goes, “That looked like the same take as the last one.” And I go, “No it wasn’t. It was completely different.” So I’m connecting somehow to something that other people maybe aren’t even seeing. And you know. Now I look at a take while it’s happening and I believe it. I’ve lost the vision of the screen [the camera monitor]. I don’t know where I am. I’m totally connected to what’s happening within the set. I’ve forgotten there’s a TV there [camera monitor]. I’ve forgotten that there’s a room around me. It’s a two way through put to a story.

Solrun Hoaas

When I’m watching a take one of the things that tells me it works or not would be whether it actually has the emotional quality and that that emotional quality has some truth in it. That it’s genuine. Authentic. That there’s a sense of authenticity in the performance.

I think any director brings a lot of baggage to what they’re doing. Not just training, analysis before hand, the preparation for a particular film. But you also bring whatever cultural baggage you have, whatever background you have to it. And those things all come together in terms of determining the decisions you make.

But I didn’t call “cut” I just let it happen and when I saw the rushes I just knew that that worked.

Well it was for one thing the quality in her and the gesture, the expression, the emotion that came out of her that was really very strong. And also the fact that it was right for the character to react in that way to him throwing the sea urchin at her.

I actually love when that sort of thing happens, because in my documentaries one thing I have learnt is that often the things that I have least predicted, and least expected have been the best. And I think you can translate that into making features. It doesn’t mean that you don’t prepare. It doesn’t mean you don’t have things planned, but to be open to that kind of totally unexpected thing that can make it just that much better.

Whether you feel that there is something authentic in the emotional quality that’s coming through.

Richard Sarrell

What you're doing is making sure that they're behaving like complex people. That they look like people in a real world. For me that means they are functioning on two levels. We're trying to get them to appear like they are functioning on a conscious and an unconscious level; because that's the way you and I operate in the real world. So if our characters on the screen function like that we will believe them. One of the things that I'm watching for very closely is, are they listening and are they hearing what's coming in and are they processing it, and are they therefore now making their next choice about what they're going to say next.

We are all expert communicators. Because on a second by second basis we're listening to each other to see what the communication is about and how we're going to make our next choice. The problem is with actors and directors and writers is that all our personal baggage, all the chips on our shoulders, all our psychoses, get in the road of just simply looking at that and seeing what's there.

The best thing you can do as a director is be like an actor, which is get as much of that clutter out as possible and listen to what's going on.

Two things: do I believe them and is the story told. Do I believe them is: are they listening, do they not know the future, are they just waiting with expectation, the hope that what they want to happen will happen, but waiting to see what will happen next. Because we always have a hope and expectation. I say something to you in the hope, or expectation, of a response. So you watch to see whether they are engaged in that interactive process, which is actively listening, seeking what they want and not trying to do other things, like be an actor, or deliver that bit of big print, or play with the props because they're meant to be busy, or those sorts of things. Whether they're getting on with doing the job of interacting.

If I've watched them all the way through and I've believed them, that they're listening and they're engaged. And the next question is; was the story told. And if both those things are done you go "cut" terrific let's print it. Then somebody says, "there's a boom in shot", or they're out of focus. And you've got to do it again and so you start watching all over again.

So, it's instinctive and intuitive, but we're all equipped with these things, these abilities. I don't think there is anything special about it. The thing you need to practice is to try and not let all the other shit of life get in the road.

Tony Wickert

To some extent it's an experience to do with having done it before. In other words, doing it helps you check yourself. You're able to evaluate your own decision making of the past and say "Ah, when I did that, and I used that as a criteria, then ... I can see now that a more complex criteria needs to be at play".

I'm looking to see whether in their attempt to be like the person, to appear to be the person in the situation that the scene requires, that they have verisimilitude. That they have the attributes of that person, or as I imagine it to some extent. But they also will reveal general human traits in their behaviour which support that. In other words, you will see, if they are working well, then they would have triggered their autonomic process. That is spontaneously and outside the control of the actor, bits of behaviour will start to occur which will support the intention.

The most important thing is, can I see complex human behaviour and does it reveal details of human behaviour that sustain authenticity. Am I capturing an authentic human behaviour that the audience will recognise and be drawn towards and hopefully empathise with? Because that's the purpose. The purpose for me is to get audiences to recognise and empathise. So they will be participating in the thinking process of the character being seen.

I think actors are very good at knowing these things too. They know when they've been there and they also know their capacity to revisit. Get back and do it again.

It isn't so much that I'd understand it. Anybody would understand it, because it has the attributes of human behaviour that you and I can identify with. That's the quest. The quest that I'm on is, can I create events, situations as a director that people can recognise, because recognition leads to empathy. And if they do empathise then they surrender their position as audience and begin to participate in the narrative.

When you want the audience to understand the thinking processes inside the character then the behaviours need to be consistent with that. One of the key parts of that is the process called 'beat'. Where an actor, playing the character, recognises that the character needs to process the thoughts that they're having and they need to let the audience know in some way.

Beats are the crucial moment by moment components that confirm for me that the actor has a grasp of what they're trying to do, and also because of the concept of beat if an actor and director both understand it they can then go back and renegotiate for it to be on goingly improved.

Margaret Mills

And I would have liked it because it just felt true to me. True being that it has an emotional impact on me. [*When speaking about actors reacting to each other, being in the moment*], Mills says, "Let actors do that also on camera, because it's also a very easy thing for them to do. It takes the focus off how well they're 'performing', or what they're doing, on simply responding and reacting. Hence, they're in the moment, hence the camera catches a whole play of feelings. And I enjoy that. I enjoy seeing that on film.

But I also think there's always little changes that go on because of the other part of playing an action, which is to play an action in response to what someone is giving you. So there always will be little changes.

My own perception has changed over the years. I don't think I would have seen value in what I see, say for example that Jo did. I don't know that I would have even perceived it five years ago. And in a sense I've changed who I like, in terms of actors, because my perceptions changed.

I know this is true for other people as well, because I've seen directors bow down to actors who can cry. Just burst into tears and cry, or get really angry and then cry. And I know that's like falling off a log for some actors. It's easy. But some directors find that very powerful acting. Where as I feel that's just one of your tricks for some people.

It's being able to keep in with the other person and that move back and forward and to be truthful in the moment, which is sometimes very surprising. And that's very fine. Quite subtle in some ways, even though it's really strong and powerful.

It's being fine tuned, more and more. And more on the floor now as an actor it feels like being stripped away and away. I've been praised for things I'd never do again, because I don't value it anymore.

There are lots of different signs. The time's gone and the scene is over very quickly. The energy moves back and forward between the actors in a way that seems seamless and easy. Very easy. No matter how horrible the scene is it goes back forward in a way that just flows. The attention of the actors is quite focused, but not in a tense way. In an almost relaxed way even if it is a tense scene. The actors are bang in the middle of their bodies. Bang in the middle of what they're doing with each other. So even if there are pauses there is still movement and flow between them.

Another difficulty with actors playing the action dutifully is that when they get affected and a moment of their being affected happens then they can't hang onto it. They've got to let it go. And that's in a sense the truthfulness of the moment. That's as long as it lasts. Let it go. Be open - ready. Because the next thing's happened. So in that sense the moment is very quick, very quick. And because you're so happy playing your action you don't want to let it go sometimes, but that's part of what you need to do constantly. And that is why the breath is very important, because if you keep breathing you'll keep shifting what you're feeling and what's happening, and in that sense the moment goes.

So you've got an actor working well in the scene and yeah the story's being told and that's good. I would say that my dissatisfaction [as a director] is I'm not seeing anything that surprises me. It's good, it tells the story, but I'm not really hanging on every moment as if I'm living it at the time. Because if it's not going well, or going marvellously, then it would probably be because the actor really wasn't quite comfortable with what they were playing with the other actor. Some actors are very good at giving you the story, but only occasionally do they reveal themselves.

That's a very good question. I can see it, but I'm not sure I can describe it. And in a way it's a bit like knowing your actors. You just know they're in the middle of it. They look all of a piece.

It's difficult to ask, how do I know when I'm happy. What are the signs that I'm seeing.

I can say it's something to do with their breathing. It seems to be continuous. They're not holding their breath. And something in their faces changes. It's sort of like a continual change. Or something in the eyes is quite alive. Their attention of listening is very clear. I can see clearly that they're listening. When they go to speak they speak easily. The breath comes easily as opposed to their breath is being held, then they have to do a little lurch to the next statement. That doesn't happen. And it's something also about my attention. If I'm drawn into to what's going on between them. And I'm not drawn in as a director. [In other words if she is not consciously analysing the actors performing] If my attention is on what the story is. Then I know it's okay too. We're very happy when the story's being told and I'm not even thinking about it.

This is my new interest. When an actor works with another actor. They're not working as characters. They're working as 'themselves' in a sense. So that, I would give the actors an action to play, that is to get the other actor to do something very practical. Very do able. And they can see when they're doing it. So it's something achievable. So that's where their concentration is. And the words are secondary. So they don't have to make the words work. And they don't have to give emotion to any of the words. All they have to do is affect this other person and be affected by the other person. And that's how I think it works. That's where I'm at that the moment.

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