WEEK THREE, LECTURE THREE: <u>PERFORMANCE</u>

I.   Centering Performance

A.   "Film begins with the human face" – Bergman

1.   Who is in the movie? Is the first question we ask.

B.   No single formal vocabulary for critically analyzing film performance; approaches to film acting are various and depend on close observation and description

1.   We act every day; acting is transposing everyday behavior onto film, as well as expanding the expressivity (and sometimes comprehensibility) of everyday behavior

II.   Performance as representation of the script

A.   Three of the four script elements are controlled by/incarnated through the actor: character, action, and dialogue (but not setting).

B.   Dialogue through the voice of the player

1.   Words – basic communication

2.   Intonation – the rise and fall of pitch creates meaning

3.   Pauses, pace

4.   Volume

5.   Silence

C.   Action through the body of the player

1.   Actions are content – they advance the plot

2.   Action and reaction – both important to performance

3.   Posture - the disposition of the body

4.   Gesture – the grace notes of action

a.   Shows psychological traits, can enhance delivery and characterize

5.   Business – Things to do during a scene; fills the screen space but does *not* advance the plot.

6. Facial expressions and reactions – especially the eyes

III. Character through the Properties of the Player

A. Player's Physicality

1. Voice – quality and texture, accents on words

a. Not used for expressiveness as much as in the theater, since the body, face, and eyes are more important.

2. Body – conveys movement, expressivity can be picked up by camera.

a. Actors have to be comfortable in their bodies.

3. Face/Eyes – the prevalence of the close-up (which privileges the audience who exclusively gets this view)

a. Importance of bone structure

4. Age – can't be faked the way it is in theater (although makeup technology as well as CGI de-aging have made it possible in certain contexts)

B. Player's Personality – metaphysicality, aura

1. Personality flows from physicality; it is abstract, yet palpable

C. Player's Talent – skills (can they dance, sing, drive, etc.?), oeuvre (variety and quality)

D. Player's Mythology – off- and on-screen stories about the player

1. Actors bring their previous work and baggage to their roles; stardom is a system of signification, and the public image of a star is carefully managed.

IV. Persona

A. Together a player's physicality, personality, talent, and mythology make up their "persona."

1. All of these bring a set of meanings with them, formed together the constitute the player's persona.

2. The person influences the writer and the audience.

3. Hitchcock – "casting is characterization."

B. "Persona" – from the Greek word for mask

    1. Greek theater used masks for different established character types and facial expressions, in order to ensure legibility from the back of the theatre

    2. The "mask" of the actor, tells us what the character is

C. The Persona of this semester's actors – consider the following aspects:

    1. Physicality

    2. Personality

    3. Talent

    4. Mythology

V. The Importance of the Player in Cinema

A. Our primary point of entry into a film – identification, attraction, etc.

    1. A persona works when it sells over time

    2. It is a receptacle for cultural values

        a. movie stars reflect the best and worst of society, and their personas are often embodiments of cultural desires/aspirations/ideals/fears/etc.

B. <u>Types of Players</u>

    1. The Non-Professional

        a. Cast because they look like/sound like the character

        b. This works on screen (not in the theater) because the camera/editing can shape the performance

        c. Natural reactions are the majority of the performance

    2. The Actor

        a. A professional (usually trained), has talent

        b. Uses persona as a vehicle to play different characters

    3. The Star

       a. The persona = the character; characters are often written to reflect or play against the existing persona

       b. Their mere appearance is appealing; they can carry any picture

       c. A business commodity – the person sells the movie

       d. Their presence signals to the audience about the film – genre, sensibility, etc.

    4. The Star-Actor

       a. A star with range/depth

VI. <u>Acting Styles</u>

  A. Pantomime/Presentational

    1. From Delsarte – elocution book on presentation; basic poses convey different emotions, ideas.

    2. American Delsarte system – Edward Barrett Warman 1892 – taking Delsarte's ideas and building a vocabulary of poses

    3. Broad gestures convey emotions, extreme style, exaggerated gestures

    4. Most common in early silent films

  B. Representational/Realist

    1. More realistic, scaled back

    2. Working from the outside in – uses appropriate gestures, expressions, costumes, etc. to convey the character.

    3. Business, silence, and reactions become important.

  C. Method Acting / Modern Acting

    1. Working from the inside out – the actor builds emotions from within, allowing gestures and expressions to naturally occur as a result

    2. The concept of ensemble – playing in relation to other actors

    3. Arrived in NY theater in the 1930s through Stanislavski, popularized by Lee Strasberg.

4. Perceptual Observation - immersion in the life of the character

5. Affective Memory – channeling own emotions into role, sense memory

6. Strasberg's Method became associated with mid-century male tortured stars; their performances, however, were the result of a combination of approaches, and some of their coaches (Misener, Adler, etc.) drew a direct connection to Stanislavski's ideals of developing a complex acting vocabulary drawn from personal experience, but not necessarily as extreme and uncontrollable as what the Strasberg "method" entails. Their approach was focused on research and textual interpretation, and they had much more of an interest in ensemble acting than Strasberg, and less of a psychoanalytical bent.

D. Classical

1. University-trained actors versed in a wide-range of acting styles

2. Take an intellectual approach using whatever methods are appropriate to the particular role

E. Improvisation

F. Star Turn – based on the actor's presence; personality carries the performance

1. The film is an exhibition for the star, i.e. Barbra Streisand. The Philadelphia Story could be considered a star turn for Hepburn, given the similarities between her persona and the character Tracy Lord.

VII. Critical Criteria for judging a performance

A. Expressive Coherence – looking and acting appropriately

B. Ensemble – playing together, listening, reacting

C. Relation to Setting – using props, belonging in the space and time naturally

D. Consistency

E. Complexity of Emotion – ability to convey different emotions at once

F. Ability to Convey Thought

G. Use of Beats

    1. Ahead of the beat – jumping on lines

    2. On the beat – in a rhythm

    3. Behind the beat – hesitant, many method performers like Brando, Dean

H. Casting – with/against type, miscast

I. Editing – are they given long takes, or edited together

J. The significance of entrances and exits – our first and last impressions

VIII. Director as Guide

A. The director controls much of the performance

    1. Casting, shooting, determining takes, editing

B. The director is the audience for the performer

C. Some directors work with the same performers, or even larger ensembles, over the course of their careers

D. Some directors (like Jordan Peele) start out as performers; their training and background helps them direct, as well as select performances during postproduction.