

Introduction

When I was young, I featured in two films and since I have questioned how the people, I met on set were able to make a living from it. In this essay I will focus on the idea of acting as a profession, more specifically I will be focusing on extras as a profession. I chose this due to me being surprised at the amount of people who act as extras as a full-time job. Initially, I thought a lot of people start as extras in the hope to make a good impression and gain opportunities to further their careers into main roles in movies or series due to the high level of competition in the industry. However, during some background research I found that many people choose to stay as an extra due to more available opportunities and lower barriers of entry for those opportunities.

Prolonged training and formal qualification

It can be suggested that a profession requires a body of theory. This is seen in acting schools which give formal training on acting techniques and an in-depth overview of the profession and what it entails. Some of these schools will include acting as an extra in their curriculums with on set experience and training for auditions. This being said being an extra does not require training or a qualification. Furthermore, being an extra is often seen as valuable experience for main screen acting. This leads me to assume that being an extra does not meet this expectation of being a profession. This can be disputed when acknowledging Greenwood's seminar work on the attributes of a profession. This argument though is problematic as when looking at Greenwood seminar work on the attribute of a profession. Greenwood states that a profession does not absolutely require formal training and instead attributes such as service orientation, specialized knowledge, autonomy, responsibility, adherence to ethical standards, and recognition by the community.

Group and community.

There is a large community of actors, this is due to the large supply of actors which are interested in the job as a career, an opportunity to earn money or simply by personal interest, which creates a sense of group. In engineering, one of the aspects that creates the impression of a profession is the Engineering council which is responsible for a large structure in the industry. The same can be said for extras which have multiple communities, examples and sources, and unions which offer memberships. These offer opportunities for publicity, networking and contracts with low budget movies requiring a lot of background acting. This helps both the actors and producers as movies and series require a large number of extras and these unions help organise this. Memberships aren't open access and require a full application with vetting and eligibility checks.

Autonomy in the workspace

Another topic put forward by Greenwood is flexibility in the workspace, which is referred to as autonomy. Flexibility refers to a person being able to choose when they work, and which job the person choose to accept. Looking deeper at autonomy, which in this case refers to the extras being trusted to act well on set without input from a director or manager. This is because extras are not as important to the project as the lead actors so directors cannot give extras the same amount of attention. Therefore, extras are entrusted to complete their job and will simply be removed from the role if they are deemed unsatisfactory for the role or act unethically.

Ethical behaviour

Ethics are another key part of a profession, which is amplified by the large influence movies and series can have on people. On an industry level this can be controlled through the use of age restriction, this is to protect younger audiences from profanity, drug use, nudity and sensitive topics. This however fails due to changing perspectives through time of certain topics, an example of this is racism in older movies which was not considered problematic at the time they were made. The personal ethics of actors therefore comes into question to not put forward something they deem unethical or that would be of negative influence to the viewers. Some topics are however clear cut and members of unions can be removed due to violations of an ethical code.

Social view

Looking at a social view, commercial market forces to fulfill their vital role in the society as entertainment is such an important part of our lives. In film movie and television extra are often overlooked and might be argued as not crucial but they contribute to the authenticity and richness of the story conveyed. When looking at extra the government support ensures that extra maintain a minimum standard of competence.

Protectionist view and vital to well-being of society

However, the optimistic view of extras as professional is tempered by a business perspective. With this view a small group of individuals within the industry may seek protection from the government to maximize their profit. This protectionist approach can lead to professional institutions which would restrict the access to the profession. This would create a monopoly in background acting which would result in inflated fees while limiting the competition. From this view it is hard to look at background acting as a profession. A lot of people do this more as a hobby and in countries like New York or California there is a large demand for background actor.

Conclusion

In conclusion it is hard to consider background acting as a profession. People manage to make a living out of this job which allows us to question whether it is or not a profession. It is interesting to look at more than the professional view which does lead to training. Using Greenwood, we access a different view and allow us to break down a profession using different perspective discussed above. Arguably background acting does qualify in some aspect as a profession but always has a counter argument which draws it back to it being a hobby or a stepping stone in an acting career.