

# The Power of Acting: When Performance Makes or Breaks a Film

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**Abstract:** *Acting is commonly considered the soul of cinema. While storytelling, direction, editing, sound, and cinematography hold their importance, it is an actor's performance that essentially breathes life into a film. Diving into the depths of how an acting performance with layered nuances draws and shapes cinematic narratives and audience psychology, the paper takes the viewpoint that good acting can raise the level of a poorly written or structurally weak movie and create a stirring and unforgettable piece of art. Focusing on international cinema, this paper looks at how layered performances breathe emotional depth, sincerity, and psychological complexity into the storyline; a dimension the written script would normally lack. The paper also delves into the psychological and emotional impacts of a potent acting performance on the audiences. Acting can very well be a medium through which individual perspectives are challenged, empathy is created, and transformations are somehow fostered. The study affirms the potency of acting as the mechanism revitalizing cinematic narrative and possibly transforming the landscape of viewers' experiences, through the analysis of the interaction between skill, character embodiment, and emotional resonance .*

**Keywords:** Acting; Cinema; Performance Studies; Film Impact; Emotion; Audience Response; Character Embodiment

## 1. Introduction

Cinema is truly a multidimensional art, and though acting is considered the main axis for emotional appeal, it is really the interplay of all other elements. The movie can have high - budget filled with dazzling special effects and perhaps even a decent script; but if the actor is not genuine, it all falls flat. But give a great actor a dull scene, and he transform it into a compelling scene. Acting in its best form is acting that involves truth, connection, and transformation; it is about becoming one with the character .The purpose of this article is to explore how powerful acting performances contribute to a film's emotional and narrative strength, sometimes compensating for weaknesses in script or direction.

There have been movies that did not work for us, with *The Room* (2003) being cited as one of them. Now, what makes it so notoriously bad is not just the clumsy scripting or the awkward directing - turning to the acting. Lines that should have been emotional become hilarious. Characters feel hollow, and to that extent, the audience feels detached. It becomes almost impossible to emotionally invest when the performances fail to correlate with any real human behavior.

This contrasts with the actors who completely disappear into the role, who for some reason we consider to be great: Leonardo DiCaprio, Jim Carrey, Sylvester Stallone and Heath Ledger. The raw intensity from DiCaprio in *The Great Gatsby*, the emotional depth from Carrey in *The Truman Show*, the authenticity of Sylvester Stallone in *Rocky* or Heath Ledger's complete embodiment of the character the Joker in *Batman: the Dark Knight*; those are performances that strike a chord, not merely by what's in the script, but what the actor brings out of it. They stir something within us. They make us care; they draw us into the film without questioning the authenticity of the character.

This study highlights the significance of acting as an integral force in cinematic storytelling, with the potential to enhance audience empathy, elevate narrative depth, and redefine a film's reception and legacy.

## 2. Literature Survey

The meaning of acting in cinema has long been a point of scholarly discussion. In "An Actor Prepares," Stanislavski emphasizes emotional truth and a respect for the actor's inner life to which an authentic performance is dedicated. Lee Strasberg transformed the Latin ideas into Method Acting: using emotional memory so that psychologically the actor becomes one with the character. Susan Batson (2004) took this even further and posited that acting at its height depends on the synthesis of persona, need, and tragic imperfection .

Modern theory accepts a far wider array of techniques outside of the major systems. Chubbuck's technique, Hollywood - style, uses trauma and purposeful activity to inform active performances that embody agency. In contrast to reliance on emotional memory, Chubbuck stresses substitution and conflict to assist actors in converting personal trauma into doing the art.

Other approaches, such as Grotowski's "Poor Theatre," seek more of physical discipline and actor - audience intimacy in place of emotional realism. In contrast, Sanford Meisner's technique is based on repetition exercises and divests the actor of any reliance upon his introspection by training him to respond truthfully in time with the present moment .

Equally important are the self - taught actors, who have forged their method in experience and not by formal training. For example, Sylvester Stallone was able to provide Rocky with a certain raw spirit of genuinity, not from the classical theories but from his own personal identification with the character's struggle, rooted deeply in Stallone's own life of hardship and rejection. His technically unorthodox performance touched the audience because whatever he conveyed, he conveyed sincerely with emotion. These intuitive methods indicate that heavy acting sometimes becomes too big for methods.

Together, the very varied perspectives, ranging from codified systems to an instinctive self - expression, underline

the many pathways acting may take in affecting narrative and audience response in cinema .

### 3. Methods / Approach

A qualitative research method is used here, weighing case studies of landmark cinema performances to investigate how a particular acting choice determines narrative impact and emotional resonance. Rather than collect empirical evidence, it examines how intimate scene perception and comparative performance evaluation communicate through variation in voice, use of body, timing of emotional affect, and psychological absorption in drama .

The case studies have been selected to display actors from different backgrounds methodologies: Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Great Gatsby* (2013), Jim Carrey in *The Truman Show* (1998), Sylvester Stallone in *Rocky* (1976), and Heath Ledger in *The Dark Knight* (2008). These particular instances are chosen with intent: culturally relevant, contrasting techniques, and the performances cutting across.

There is room for considering those actors and performances that disrupted audience expectations, such as Carrey bringing completely unprecedented emotional weight to a dramatic role, in contrast to the most psychologically intense performances of Ledger's haunting Joker .

Theories of acting used as tools for analysis include both classical and modern ones. Among these were Stanislavski's system, Ivana Chubbuck's goal - oriented substitution for emotion technique, and Susan Batson's theory of persona - need - tragic flaw. Theories such as these are not meant to serve as set templates but instead as a mode of interpretation about how performances can alter meaning, heighten empathy, and deepen cinematic engagement .

### 4. Results/ Discussion

The selected performances demonstrated a variety of ways acting can build or diminish a film's emotional strength, thematic clarity, and audience attraction. They stem from various traditions or instincts, showing that actors do not simply represent characters but enhance narrative essence.

Jim Carrey's casting in *The Truman Show* (1998) was a significant departure from his previous reputation. While Carrey is known for his wild physicality and frenetic energy, audiences first saw him tonally, immediately, and excitingly shift to a more restrained, nuanced performance as a man who slowly comes to understand that he lives in a manufactured reality. Carrey's dramatic performance gave not only depth to his range as an actor, but it humanized the thematic notions of control, reality, and freedom. He showed audiences that performers can create characters who are unusually vulnerable and anchor their performances in genuine emotional truth, challenging their public persona as an actor .

Heath Ledger's portrayal of the Joker in *The Dark Knight* (2008) serves as a contemporary example of total psychological immersion. Ledger reversed all traces of the

traditional notions of villainy, crafting a character that was ultimately easy to understand in how terrifying and tragically believable he could become. Ledger's methods of immersive preparation included isolating himself in a hotel room, writing journals in character, and engaging in deep psychological preparation, systematically borrowing from as many of his fears as were available. The performance was deeply troubling and intense and led to further public exploration of the emotional risks actors undertake when they commit fully to character work. Ledger's Joker is now seen not only as a masterclass in acting, but also as a cautionary tale about the psychological risks of total embodiment.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Leonardo DiCaprio (2013) executes a different type of performance rooted in accuracy and emotional density. DiCaprio's performance of Jay Gatsby intermingles charm, desperation, vulnerability, and nuance into a layered character study. The internal rim or emotional distortion, where DiCaprio is smiling, whilst internally he is hiding immense emotional pain, added depth to Fitzgerald's symbolic vision. DiCaprio channels the potential of micro - expressiveness, correct body - language use, and tone - pitch modulation to create a character that is both operatic and mournfully human, where his acting does not call attention to itself, but rather, it performs the emotional center of the script's narrative precisely .

On the contrary, Sylvester Stallone uses a foundation of instinct - driven acting, pushed by experienced lived experience rather than formalism. In *Rocky* (1976), Stallone unpacked the burden of his own personal struggles, poverty and rejection, perseverance into a performance that at any level transcends social and cultural differences. Though Stallone lacked training in the classical sense, his honesty and physical conviction made the character universal. Rocky's story mirrored Stallone's, and when actor and role fused, Stallone's performance secured a wild emotional honesty that could not be subdued by intellectualized technical critique. Despite the historical primacy placed on formal training, Stallone's success challenges the assumption that formal training is necessary for compelling performance.

In sharp contrast, Tommy Wiseau's performance in *The Room* (2003) serves as the antithesis of weak acting, which can derail every single aspect of a production. Even if the film has a full - length script, dramatic motivation, and investment, the film became notorious as an unintentionally funny spectacle because it is emotionally incoherent. Wiseau's unnatural delivery, the tonal swings, and most importantly, his emotional disconnection, serve as a glaring example of how performances that do not hit the beats of genuine human action can distance and alienate the viewing public, while also undermining the narrative. *The Room* has since become a cult classic, but largely as a textbook example of how performance can fail to convince, despite the work that was done to perform convincingly .

Collectively, these case studies reveal an important insight: stellar acting is not bound to a singular methodology or school of thought. Whether it arises from a psychological immersion, some level of physical discipline, or from gut

instinct acting, acting becomes transformative or transcendent, when it homes in on emotional truth. Through all of these methods, and by comparison to disastrous failures, actors can at least toy with the idea of creating moments that do not just impact the characters they portray but give an impression within the spectators or audience member's emotional space.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has examined the transformative power of acting in cinema, highlighting how a performance may enhance, define, or even destroy the impact of a film. Its catalogue range of diverse case studies teaches that acting contains nothing secondary to filmmaking - it is the very centre of its emotion and narrative - from the heart - wrenchingly subtle Jim Carrey, to the complete immersion of Heath Ledger, to the controlled and mathematically precise of Leonardo DiCaprio, through the raw and outright instinctive of Sylvester Stallone, culminating to the amateur amateurism that is *The Room*.

These performances demonstrate how there is no single formula for acting well. The ingredients vary, from classical training and life experience, but what really makes great acting is a solid and believable expression of emotion, creating further empathy to the audience, thereby tying down the common threads of the story itself. Returning to the epitome of bad filmmaking, *The Room* and its lack of any conjunctive acting dreadfully revealed the disconnected narrative potential thirsting for closure.

Ultimately, in this paper, we are establishing that acting, whatever it may be, is not merely the performance of a role but is an engine of cinematic meaning. An actor is the creation through which a story breathes, touches, and transforms an audience. In film, where image, sound, and editing intermingle, performance constitutes that last human ingredient that instills soul into this art.

## 6. Future Scope

Although it is not the intention in this article, the selected case studies entered should ideally pertain to how acting affects cinematic storytelling, also where acting, whether acknowledged or otherwise, has affected critical and reader responses to a film in question rather than detailed, or at least along with, audience responses more generally, conduct empirical psychological research on actor involvement in film - watching or compare acting models and reception in different cultures. Quantitative measures, like biometric responses or viewership engagement statistics, could provide more insight into how performances affect emotion.

And as AI - generated performances and virtual actors gain prominence, new questions about the authenticity and emotional impact of non - human acting will have to be addressed. The convergence of tech, psychology and performance might be a new frontier for acting, as well as kinesiology, in American cinema.

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## Author Profile

**Nathan Mouret** is an Israeli - French actor, screenwriter, and voice artist with a background in cinematic education and independent filmmaking. A graduate of a four - year degree in film and education, he has directed three short films, two of which have won international awards, including recognition at the Europe Film Festival UK and the Philip K. Dick Science Fiction Festival. As an actor, Nathan has appeared in major Israeli television series (*Tehran*, *Blackspace*, *Shabas*), and he is active in Hebrew and French voice dubbing, with credits on Netflix and Amazon Prime. His creative work explores the intersection of performance, storytelling, and emotional impact, both on screen and through digital mini - series that have reached over 100, 000 viewers per episode. He is currently represented by agent Hagai Rakovitch and continues to develop feature - length scripts in science fiction and drama.