

**Title: Enacted emotionality: A missing concept for directing affective screen acting?**

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## **Introduction**

Directing screen acting within the Anglo-American tradition is not a highly prescriptive process beyond a code of conduct (Board of Directors UK 2018) or softened to a code of preferred practices (Directors Guild of America 2023). While screen directing skills are taught in numerous textbooks including ways to direct actors generally, the way a performance is achieved can be collaboratively idiosyncratic. This often means directors exercise strategies they believe will elicit affectively engaging results on the screen; sometimes regardless of the psychological impact on an actor. The treatment of actor, Shelley Duvall as Wendy Torrance (The Shining 1980) by director, Stanley Kubrick has passed into film folklore. Duvall suggests she underwent:

“Horrible psychological and emotional torture that she endured during the shooting procedure. According to Duvall, the role was emotionally and physically exhausting as she would have to coerce her body to be in a state of constant panic to appease the filmmaker’s expectations regarding the character.” (Sur 2021).

Acting by contrast has a long tradition of theoretical development with the most influential theories for contemporary screen acting stemming predominantly from the Russian practitioners such as: Constantin Stanislavsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Yevgeny Vakhtangov, Mikhail Chekhov and Lev Kuleshov among others. These practitioners sought reliable and quasi-scientific techniques and methods to develop performance strategies that facilitate inspirational, yet repeatable emotional expressivity, embodied in vocal characteristics, facial

expression, physical movement, bodily postures, and gestures etc. These are invoked with various psychophysical strategies including imaginative cues for the creative enactment of fictional characters.

Successful film directing as an individualised process has evolved with a less structured approach and directors are typically judged on their cinematic aesthetics and commercial and critical success, rather than the *means* by which they achieve their aesthetics and performances. Directing screen acting<sup>1</sup> is often embraced as a creatively unique practice. Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman's remarks: "If you want exactly to know how I work together with my actors, I can tell you in one minute, I just use my intuition; and my only instrument in my profession is my intuition" (Bergman 1975). While Bergman suggests a confidence in the supposed referent of his "intuition" other practitioners such as Polish director Andrzej Mellin adopt a more experimental approach, testing feeling responses against their entire sensibility recognising that performance, shot composition, edit rhythms etc. all combine in an interpretation of story meanings for the director as viewer (Mellin 2015). Steven Spielberg has also often discussed his desire to capture an actor's early takes and therefore increasingly prepares to shoot with this in mind and resists substantial actor rehearsals that can dissipate the spontaneity he wants on camera (Spielberg 2023).

However, it is this commonplace perception that meaning emanates from what is perceived during directing acting that confuses the visual and aural screen stimuli with the *cause* and directorial response as the resultant *affect*. This implicates the need for a conceptual framing that appropriately guides a directorial process in both its cognitive and affective responses to

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<sup>1</sup> "directing acting" will be used, rather than "directing actors" to avoid the inherent, albeit perhaps unconscious, implied power dynamics embedded in the latter term. In this way, the focus on two activities "directing" and "acting" allow for consideration of a co-constituted process and interplay, rather than suggesting a dominant process *directing*, controlling a reactive affective object: the actor.

directing acting and invites us to consider the intra-psychic processes at play with a contemporary understanding of mind in the light of substantial developments in the cognitive sciences. The missing concept posited as *enacted emotionality* suggests why a director's "intuition" and perceived authority are vague constructions for an appropriate perception of emotionality and directorial judgement. Emotionality might be considered as a circumscribed range of available emotional experience and expression, available to an actor or director at any given time and circumstance.

The theoretical under-pinning for this research falls across three main fields: directing acting practice and training based on directorial skills textbook literature; social cognition as informed by ecological psychology and the philosophy of mind; and socio-cognitive studies of acting and directing. Inevitably this review is partial, but the analysis should make clear that the notion of an *enacted emotionality*, though perhaps implicitly exercised by many directors, is not taught, or understood as a teachable process, and therefore suggested here as a missing concept.

### ***Research question and hypothesis***

This interdisciplinary research looks at how emotional affects are enacted between directors and actors in their collaborative process towards creating a screen character. This explores how a dynamic cognitive-affective process framed as an *enacted emotionality* can enrich and inform directing skills-based literature and practice.

The core hypothesis is that while there are many different approaches to the elicitation of emotion, directing acting literature tends to focus on the visible expressivity perceived by

Film/TV <sup>2</sup> directors showing limited regard to *how* an actor's, and most significantly how a director's emotional life, is evoked, invoked or even provoked? This aspect is ignored by directorial skills-based literature that fails to discuss an understanding of directorial perceptions in the light of a constructed theory of emotion <sup>3</sup> or principles of enactivism.

More on this in due course, but these insightful theories can combine to capture a specific kind of worldly interaction between actors and directors negotiating co-constituted screen characterisations and co-constituted perceptions of emotionality. In this mutuality lies the potential for more diverse and nuanced performances that a biased directorial-centric perception may overlook. This approach also contributes towards equalising the creative contribution and potential attribution of credit for even the screen performance itself; conceivable as a psycho-social phenomenon co-created by cinematography, costume, hair and make-up design in addition to pixel manipulation available now for face/body tuning <sup>4</sup>. These aspects obviously enhance the screen performance beyond the essential performance qualities of the actor themselves. It is all these attributes, informed by the directorial and production aesthetics, that contribute to the viewer's perception of a screen performance.

Against this plasticity, the challenge to scholars, directors and actors is to embrace a more nuanced conceptual framing for a co-constituted and negotiated process of character creation and understanding and expressivity of emotions more generally. It is recognised that this mutuality can be compromised by the industrial process of film-making where time is often

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<sup>2</sup> Film/TV is to be understood as a conflated medium producing qualitatively significant performance demands regardless of the final distribution space. It also acknowledges that not all production contexts support effective collaborative contexts for actors and directors.

<sup>3</sup> Constructed theory of emotion suggests that the conditions for emotional elicitation and expression are significantly constructed by socio-cultural context as well as biological and neural processing variability. See Barrett (Feldman Barrett 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Face/body tuning is term coined to suggest that natural qualities of the face or body can be digitally enhanced which can mean anything from removing a skin blemish to skin recolouring or reshaping nose, eyes, and musculature etc.

particularly pressured (Hewett 2015), and where directors are often obliged to prescribe performances with pre-planned blocking, gestures and time-efficient frame compositions and lighting etc.

However, media educators are encouraged to embrace the complexity of this dynamic when teaching filmed drama, and practitioners are invited to engage in the theoretical insights offered by the significant developments in the cognitive sciences to enhance our perceptual understanding of the processes inherent in directing screen acting.

### **Directing screen acting textbooks**

The seminal text on directing screen acting is Judith Weston's *Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performance for Film and Television*<sup>5</sup> which has celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> updated anniversary edition (Weston 2021). It is an excellent text with much to commend it, but it lacks an engagement, like much of the literature in the field, with contemporary theories of psychology generally, and theories of cognition and affect more specifically. Weston stresses the importance for scripted emotional events which necessitate an appropriately articulated performance. However, in her deliberations regarding emotional events (Weston 2021, 128-139) she struggles to identify the notion of an emotional event and to what extent it emerges from a script and to what extent it may be considered a performative event created by the actors. While nobody expects this to be formulaic, it does tend to suggest that for Weston emotions are uncontested experiences to the extent that a script can be mined for the appropriate textual and sub-textual information, and the performance motivation can be appropriately discerned and delivered, to create the desired narrative effect. While these

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processes are important, it does tend to suggest emotion can be discovered and emulated rather than experienced as a dynamic inter-subjective cognitive-affective process.

Stanislavsky particularly developed acting as a cued / inside-out process, rather than the outside-in <sup>6</sup> approach advocated by behaviourists. However, acting a behaviour can also bring about internal affective processes – such is the nature and complexity of the actor’s craft.

Kevin Page in his summary of psychological theories in *Psychology for Actors* suggests:

“What this means is we can use [psychological theory] models built purely out of observable behaviours and externals, as behaviourism did, but also models that represent internal states of consciousness. In either case, regardless of its internal/external orientation, different maps and models can reveal different aspects of mental territories or functions of our psyche that may be quite useful in creating a character or expressing a role” (Page 2019, 4).

So, while Weston does not reference psychological theories explicitly her common-sense approach and sensitivity is often exemplary. Weston clearly advocates for an empathetic relationship and negotiated understanding between actors and directors which involves detailed script analysis, well considered casting briefs and effective character rehearsal plans. These strategies are a common feature in the directing skills literature generally, but the theoretical imperative is rooted in a traditional cognitive understanding of the director as an authoritative perceiver, rather than cultivating a valued affectivity with feelings as accessible cognitions for reflection. Weston offers a well-informed empirical approach to working with actors, but it would be ideal for this to evolve into a more developed model integrating the idea of an enacted emotionality which implicates re-situating affectivity as the primordial relational frame from which, cognition in the form of dialogic exchanges, emerge between directors and actors, and can be discussed as individualised feelings.

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<sup>6</sup> Inside-out approaches to character suggest an actor invokes a real or imaginative psychological state to create a character’s physicality, emotional life and behaviours etc; whereas an outside-in approach works in a reverse manner and suggests that the adoption of a behaviour or use of a prop will develop a character’s inner life.

During my own experience as a professional director working in filmed drama, I recognised the struggle rationalising a response to each performed take. There is the inevitable time-pressured decision-making required to accept the take or “go again”<sup>7</sup> without extensive cognitive reflection or affective and interoceptive investigations. My directorial responses were often framed as “that felt good” or “great that worked” meaning my cognitive-affective experience approved of the take, or if less certain I might say “let’s go again on for safety” usually meaning I was not sure whether the take and performance were good enough, so better have another version to hopefully resolve it in the edit! Also, it was important to hear an actor’s concern if they felt their performance was not as they had intended, especially if our perceptual experiences differed. This is the shared inter-subjective space for an enacted emotionality, where a directorial sensibility does not become a dictatorial one.

Weston clarifies the importance of director-actor exchanges and how to evoke a collaborative process with the actor, an aspect often over-looked in many directing skills-based texts.

However, this does emerge as a tendency towards the “othering” of actors. Weston suggests in her friendly coaching manner to directors that: “Actors are so exposed. It’s so easy for them to feel judged and rejected - insecure ... If an actor does behave badly, the cause of their bad behavior is nearly always insecurity. Don’t take it personally.” (Weston 2021, 65).

This “othering” of actors as insecure might provoke a sensitivity towards directing individual actor’s as embodied psyches, although the literature too often deems actors a homogeneous collective with commonly projected psychological characteristics such as insecurity or personality types reduced as merely performative. Researchers have identified concerns about

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<sup>7</sup> The “go again” phrase is used to denote a request for another filmed take due to a less than satisfactory performance, technical execution of a shot or any associated production issue.

the psychological wellbeing of professional actors whose profiles show evidence of: narcissistic, schizotypal, avoidant, antisocial and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders on the Coolidge Axis-II inventory (Davison and Furnham 2018). It is possible that Weston's lay explanation of actor's feelings of insecurity may be underpinned by clinical psychological conditions in some actors. Although, what has been identified is that cognitive abilities such as empathy is often much higher with actors, than non-actors (Panero 2019).

Directing acting theories might therefore embrace considerations for an actor's unique psychology as much as any generalisable approach, but it may be useful to consider that Film/TV directors may also have underlying psychological traits - perhaps a predilection for excessive control with specific psychological features such as a conviction in their own judgement? This appeal to a deeper understanding of actor's and director's individual psychologies leads us to briefly discuss how people seem to perceive each other's thoughts, emotions, behaviours and intentions etc. at all.

### ***Character understanding as folk psychology***

A term used to philosophically conceptualise perceptions of another's internal mental state is "folk psychology". A term established in Philosophy of Mind that differentiates a philosophical mode of thinking from that of ordinary "folk" who tend to understand others by what is deemed "mind reading", and through an implicit theory of mind (ToM); see (McDonald, Goldstein, and Kanske 2020; Happé, Cook, and Bird 2017; Kanske 2018). It is suggested that ToM is a "socio-cognitive phenomenon involving abstract propositional knowledge about another's mental state" (McDonald, Goldstein, and Kanske 2020). "Mind reading allows us to predict, explain, mould, and manipulate each other's behaviour in ways that go well beyond the capabilities of other animals; therefore mind reading is crucial to

understanding what it means to be human” (Heyes and Frith 2014) and therefore relevant to understand how directors might tend to “mind read” actors and perceive appropriate psychologically realistic character motives and reactions as well as offering actors suggestions on how to adjust the emotional affects perceived.

The renowned acting coach Stella Adler suggested all “acting is reacting” (Kissel 2001). This proposition is expounded in directing acting texts as encouraging actors to listen, concentrate, and affectively respond to each other’s delivered lines, actions, gestures, behaviours etc. The quality of the reaction for Adler maintains the psychological coherence of, and engagement with, the character/s and follows folk psychological principles as a requisite strategy for psychologically realistic characters and filmed narratives.

### ***Directing screen acting: the cognitivist predilection***

*Changing Direction: A practical approach to Directing Actors in Film and Theatre* by

Lenore DeKoven states in her discussion of an actor’s sense memory that:

It is my belief, that the brain acts like a computer, storing all the experiences in its bank. If, in the process of recall, you punch up certain buttons in your brain’s computer memory associated with sensory details of the event, the brain will reproduce the physical state. (DeKoven 2018, 15).

DeKoven’s reductive conception privileges a cognitive containment, marginalising the less tangible, but no less real, affective bodily feelings involved in the directing and acting processes. This is significant as directors, and directing acting textbook writers like DeKoven who consider actors as mechanistic entities might think the more explicit the instructions input as data (to the actor), the more exact results are output (as character performance). This belief can easily result in directors being verbose in their intellectual explanations of a character’s psychological motivations, predilections, and biases as well as the accompanying

behavioural physicality and emotional expression anticipated by a director. It is what Weston rightly criticises as result-oriented direction suggesting:

Directors, who tend to feel that their result-oriented ideas are very exact, may be unaware that actors – who want to please the director, but need to make playable choices - can experience result direction as vague, general, and confusing instead of specific and clear. (Weston 2021, 31).

Often misunderstood by Film/TV directors, actors need to be offered active and affective verbal and/or gestural cues from a director to stimulate an imaginative psychophysical<sup>8</sup> process, not an intellectualised prescription of desired visible behaviour- see Zarrilli's *Psychophysical Acting* (Zarrilli 2008), *Sanford Meisner On Acting*, (Meisner and Longwell 1987), Chekhov's *To the Actor* (Chekhov 1953). Also as Carnicke reminds us of Stanislavsky's inspiration from Ribot, who suggests that a "disembodied emotion is a non-existent one" and as Stanislavsky insists: "In every physical action there is something psychological, and in the psychological, something physical" (Carnicke 2006). However, this represents a clear theoretical disjuncture in the directing acting literature which too often theorises acting as primarily a cognitively-led process, often through detailed script analysis (that results in psychologically projected characteristics and motivations) and a factual questioning (that correlates scripted action with fictional actuality), rather than opportunities for affectively-led and imaginative characterological responses.

Interestingly Meisner challenges this as a cultural phenomenon "Acting in my terms, in all our terms, except for the English, the Americans, the Russians, the Germans – is an emotional creation. It has inner content. Unlike the English, who know intellectually what the character should be feeling and indicate this through the way they verbally handle text, we work from living truthfully under imaginary circumstances" (Meisner and Longwell 1987,

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<sup>8</sup> Psychophysical was used by Stanislavsky to denote the desired unity between an actor's psychology and their embodied physical actions.

136). This alludes to the artistic truth that might be said to allude to an enacted emotionality, yet the conventional texts often reduce acting to cognitivist and deterministic approaches.

In *Directors Tell the Story: Master the craft of Television and Film Directing*, Rooney and Belli pose the question: “So where do we start when talking about directing actors? Let’s begin with the 5 Ws; who, what, where, when and why” (Rooney and Belli 2016, 129). These are clearly useful questions to pose to an actor about a character and were similarly advocated in the seminal text on acting: Constantin Stanislavsky’s: *An Actor Prepares* who suggests: “If you speak any lines, or do anything, mechanically, without fully realising who you are, where you came from, why, what you want, where you are going, and what you will do when you get there, you will be acting without imagination” (Stanislavsky 1937, 71). Though Stanislavsky clearly invites an imaginative questioning, rather than rationalised interrogation as has largely been adopted by Film/TV directors, scholars and many actors. Therefore, psychological interpretations have tended to be privileged, where a pantheon of great actors including Marlon Brando, Meryl Streep, Dustin Hoffman, Hilary Swank and Christian Bale serve as advertisements for Leo Strasberg’s so-called Method acting (Strasberg 1988) which relies heavily on a notion of a truthful psychological realism – often resulting in the Method’s prized conflation of character and actor into a supposed unified entity. The “as if” psychological questioning/questing is considered a psychological pathway towards the realistic depiction of a character, and often merging personal experience with the scripted fiction seeking authentic emotional responses. This invites an ontological blurring between the actor’s emotions, and that of the character’s. Undoubtedly, Strasberg’s Method can be evidenced to show powerful performances, though the Method arguably reveals more about an actor’s personal psychology and desired mode of working, than the artistic creation of the scripted character.

Uta Hagen refined her questions in *A challenge for the actor* (Hagen 1991) to: Who am I? What are the circumstances? What are my relationships? What do I want? What is my obstacle? and what do I do to get what I want? This is clearly an effective process for screen acting constructed as it usually is, shot by shot, and often filmed out of narrative sequence. Therefore, holding a cognitive cue for the enacted context is clearly a useful process to remind actors how their performance might unfold when shooting scene by scene, but this should act as a shorthand note, not a completed process, as enactivism should suggest a lived activity, not a memorised one.

The important point to derive from Hagen, Rooney and Belli, is that the questioning process develops a cognitive understanding of the character with all their conceived, and often desirably concealed, motives, behaviours, objectives, intentions, and feelings which inform the characterisation. While this process done well can clearly create a rich psychological landscape for various performative possibilities it often fails to embrace the actor as a fully embodied being and tends to relate to the actor, if not simply as a brain-led object, then primarily as an insulated memory without much consideration for an actor's affective and bodied contributions, meanings and experiences during the performance itself.

To connect to Stanislavsky's original impulse for an imaginative response to a character's positionality, Michael Chekhov suggested ideas such as an imaginary body, which when visualised effectively, create embodied feelings and sensations with limited regard for conscious psychological motivations or rationalised objectives - see *To The Actor* (Chekhov 1953, 78-80). In this sense, Chekhov offers an affectivity-led process which is embellished with cognitive questioning as a refining dimension, not a starting point. This approach privileges enaction in the form of bodied experience, which prompted by cognitive questioning, can be nuanced to detail psychological characteristics more precisely. Chekhov

valued rationality but recognised that a dry intellect devoid of an infused imaginative emotionality created rational, but predictable character choices and behaviours, rarely inspired performances.

What is relevant for directing screen acting as a form of enacted emotionality is that all the mental “as if” questions require *enactment* to become informed creative and bodied choices. The mental content represented in the mind only becomes relevant to the extent it can be enacted within an industrial filming context. It is therefore incumbent upon directors to have a good understanding of an actor’s creative process and find appropriate ways to relate to these, as well to their own sense and sensibility particularly regarding their own emotional referents as psycho-social constructions. We can embrace this more fully within the 4E cognition framework.

### **Views on cognition as distributed**

The 4E cognition framework<sup>9</sup> suggests cognition as distributed and dependent on different aspects of lived experience/engagement and therefore cognition as embodied, embedded, extended, and enacted with the implied plurality of qualities linked to any individual’s cognitive and affective characteristics. This embraces a whole bodied, situated and embedded presence in a social environment, where mind is afforded enhanced cognitive resources through its given circumstances. Cognition can also be further resourced with the benefits associated with an “extended mind” (Clark 1997) which can range from resourcing the visually impaired with a walking/touch stick to a supercomputer in the palm of a hand available with smartphones as memory and knowledge aides for cognition.

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<sup>9</sup> 4E Cognition suggests mind as: Embodied, Embedded, Enacted and Extended. The term is attributed to Shaun Gallagher who is an American philosopher known for his work on embodied and social cognition.

4E cognition is positioned against the cognitivist representational perspective by suggesting “A living organism *enacts* the world it lives in; its effective, embodied action in the world actually constitutes its perception and thereby grounds cognition” (Stewart, Gapenne, and Di Paolo 2010). This position is obviously under-pinned by a sense of perception as a highly active faculty, rather than a passive processor of incoming stimuli. It sees human cognition as fundamentally situated in a biological system, the body, but a body that can move, adapting its orientation to offer differing perceptions and cognitive structures that optimise our survival within complex and diverse environments.

These ideas have emerged as a “pragmatic turn” (Crippen and Schulkin 2020; Engel, Friston, and Kragic 2016) suggesting a move away from the representational view of cognition which suggests the mind houses a model of the world in the brain towards a perspective that understands cognition as grounded in action – cognition is therefore conceived as an enacted activity emerging from its biological origins and situated and activated by the existential dilemmas of lived experience. Is this not exactly what we share with actors in fictional drama to our delight?

To contextualise these ideas further, we need to enrol J.J. Gibson’s theory of affordances and direct perception (Gibson 2015) alongside the general principles of enactivism which seeks to create an inextricable link between cognition and the environmental context. “What the organism is a perceiver *of*, and a behavior *in*, are environment (or niches) ... where each term has to be understood relative to the other” (Scarantino 2003, 950).

### ***Affordances***

The idea of affordances is a central concept in this research, where fictional characters, initially delineated by scripts, and structured for casting briefs by producers and

commissioners contribute to the potential socio-cultural and physical affordances available within the environment/niche of a Film/TV Production. These casting affordances may constrain the physical characteristics including race, gender, native spoken language, body type, weight, height, hair colour, age, etc. and hence the casting brief circumscribes the potential physical selection of actors, and therefore the psychophysical affordances of that subset.

The casting briefs most usually desired in mainstream Film/TV offer a quasi-morphing of actor and character. This actor/character conflation is particularly desired in naturalistic works<sup>10</sup> as it facilitates a quasi-transparency between actor and character; a viewer may therefore only “see” the character within the narrative context. Carnicke and Baron suggest: “The conventions of naturalism require acting choices that emphasise the illusion of characters. Such performances are meant to disappear by calling attention neither to themselves nor the skill of the actor.” (Carnicke and Baron 2010, 181-185). Modern naturalism is also contemporaneously conflated as psychological realism marking the general narrative shift from plot-driven stories of the nineteenth century to the increasing protagonist-driven narratives of contemporary productions.

However, the actor/character conflation also embeds cultural stereotyping, collapsing the potential complexity of a fictional character by constraining a wider cultural perception of human diversity. This appeal to cultural and societal norms in terms of physical appearance, social behaviours, vocal idioms as well as culturally prescribed modes of emotional expressivity can lead to clichéd performances. It also maintains prototypical casting choices

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<sup>10</sup> Naturalism as a performance style emerged as a reaction against the dominant melodramatic performances of nineteenth century Theatre with such works as Henrik Ibsen’s 1879 play *The Dolls House* (Ibsen 2013).

by directors and producers – save those with specific consideration for diversity and inclusivity <sup>11</sup>.

An actor's training, their physical and psychological presentation, the industrial context of filming as well as the specific emotionality available to the actor and director at a specific time should all be considered relevant affordances that shape the directing acting process and form the core psychophysical character material upon which an *enacted emotionality* is exercised by directors and actors. This dynamically circumscribes the context and process when directing screen acting. Affordances in this context therefore intend to suggest the range of possibilities available from which creative choices and negotiations can be made.

In contemporary filmmaking it is common for an actor to challenge/question a director about their character with comments such as “My character just wouldn't do that!” or “I think she's angry with him because ...” or even “I [meaning the actor/character] am just not feeling it that way”. Directing acting is therefore frequently confronted by actors and directors engaged with their individual emotional referents with their own specific neurophysiological and somatovisceral states mediated as feelings or what might be considered affective-thoughts. Actors and directors often register these feelings, whether explained as perceived, felt or intuited as intrinsically valid.

However, if they can conceive of these experiences within the framing of an enacted emotionality it can create a relational distance providing a unifying conceptual space to discuss directorial perceptions as the informed “I/eye” and the actor's felt senses as an affectively informed interoception. With an enacted emotionality established, directors and actors might use language to explore their mutual perspective with phrases like: “I'm feeling

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<sup>11</sup> See BBC Diversity & Inclusion plan for an illustration of a Film/TV production and commissioning context (Foster 2021).

a sense of sadness when you say that line, what are you feeling at that point?” or an actor might respond with “I don’t know what I’m doing at that moment, but if you’re reading it as sadness then that makes sense too”.

What is significant for our discussion is whether: beliefs, feelings, behaviours, and intentions as evoked by actor’s interactions are simply representing intracranial brain activity as suggested by the cognitivist tradition or bringing forth deeper affective resources as suggested by theories of an embodied mind and ecological psychology, as part of 4E cognition? If it makes more sense to think of reacting as enacting a cognitive-affective emotionality involving an *engaged* and *active* perception within a given social and environmental context, then it makes sense to integrate this thinking into directorial studies as a missing concept.

### ***Enactivism and emotionality***

The idea of cognition with a sense of distributed resources emerged in the 1990s with seminal works: *The embodied mind* (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991); *Being there* (Clark 1997) and later *Mind in life* (Thompson 2007); *Out of our heads* (Noë 2010) and *Enaction* (Stewart, Gapenne, and Di Paolo 2010). Parallel to these expanding conceptions of mind have been substantial developments in the understanding of human emotion and within the philosophic context of enactivism, Giovanna Colombetti, quoting Panksepp, suggests, emotion as:

a collection of meaning-generating and adaptive mechanisms underpinned by specific neural and endocrine processes; emotion allows the organism to adapt to life-challenging circumstances, is constitutive of action and organises diverse behaviours, and modulates the activity of perceptual systems. (Colombetti 2010, 150).

This connection of emotion as a biological imperative has a significant lineage from: Charles Darwin’s 1872: *The Expressions of Emotions in Man and Animals* (Darwin 1998), William James’s 1890: *The Principles of Psychology* (James 1950, 442-485) through to the seminal

work of *Autopoiesis and cognition* (Maturana and Varela 1980) that argued for distinct biological basis to cognition through autopoiesis<sup>12</sup> and has been extended to a primordial cognitive dimension to affectivity in the work of Antonio Damasio (Damasio 1999, 2006, 2011, 2021). Damasio's biological predicate is that we are beings seeking homeostasis, of which feelings reference this in cognitive awareness. Damasio in a mechanistic articulation suggests: "There is no such thing as a mind without emotion ... we are not necessarily thinking machines, we are feeling machines that think" (Damasio 2011). However, this neo-Jamesian strain in the psychology of emotions (Scarantino 2018, 3-48) which privileges the bodied feeling dimension is challenged by some cognitivists who privilege *a priori* cognitive appraisals to inform and regulate our emotional response systems (Broekens, DeGroot, and Kusters 2008).

This convergence between cognition and affectivity provides a further challenge to the computational/representational view of traditional cognitivism in that perception is suggested as *probing* and *active*, and not a passive input receptor of the senses. Ward, Silverman, and Villalobos, suggest: "the environment's sensory effects on us unfold over time, and can be modulated by our own activity (squinting, looking more closely, moving around)". So, by ignoring our mobility, as well as our visual, aural, olfactory, taste and tactile abilities considerably under-estimates the dynamic nature of the resources available to our perceptual systems. It is further suggested that these cognitive affordances are "opportunities to engage with the environment in ways that reflect our needs and plans" which suggests we should conceive of the "perceiver and environment as co-defined and co-dependent. A perceiver's environment is just that set of features which can perpetually guide its ongoing activities"

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<sup>12</sup> Autopoiesis is suggested as the distinguishing feature of life and a biological system that facilitates a self-reproductive imperative. Therefore, at a systems level, biological entities are self-sustaining through complex interactive processes.

(Ward, Silverman, and Villalobos 2017, 366-375). Further supported in *The Embodied Mind*: “Cognition is not the representation of a pre-given world by a pre-given mind, but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the various actions that being in the world performs.” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991, 9).

Enactivism in this sense suggests directing screen acting functions within a cognitive-affective paradigm in which worldly interactions between directors and actors can be framed as cognitively relational and affectively dynamic. Decker and Cadenhead define emotionality as: “a variety of subjective feeling states that predictably influence observable behaviour and physiological responses for functional purposes related to adaptation.” (Decker and Cadenhead 2011, 946-947). Though to what extent emotionality can be said to “predictably influence observable behaviour” in fictional drama is perhaps contentious, but this characteristic can be exploited by actors and directors to explore and challenge this predictability for creative purposes. Emotionality in this sense can be considered a dynamic container of creative emotional possibilities.

## **Conclusion**

Directors and actors are clearly biological entities constantly *affected* by their environmental, inter-personal and intra-personal circumstances which offer feelings as affects that guide action. Emotionality in this context is intrinsically implicated as an aspect of cognition and an amalgam of the actor and director’s assessment of the given range of affordances available. These might include linguistic register as might be evidenced in dialect or accent suggested for the intended characterisation or a desired emotional expressivity alluding directly to scripted guidance. Inter-textual anticipation or contamination are specific given affordances beyond the control of a director on set and can be cued by cultural expectations of genre or a specific actor’s known performativity e.g. Denzel Washington as flawed, maverick, moral

loner (Man on Fire 2004), (The Equalizer 2014); or Zhang Ziyi (Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon 2000), (House of Flying Daggers 2004) as an adept martial artist. However, these affordances can inform casting choices that can also be commercial strategies with implied box office appeal and creates confidence for film financiers.

Though these expansive range of considerations are often undertaken by experienced directors, they are not dealt with coherently within the directing acting skills literature. The missing concept of enacted emotionality with detailed affordances therefore locates characterological performativity, not as an individualised embodied feeling with specific objective references such as the projected psychological causality of an actor's character motivation, but as a way for actors *and* directors to *enact* with a characterisation collaboratively to achieve nuanced performances revealing deeper aspects and qualities associated with the human condition.

Duncan and Feldman Barrett suggest that "*Affect is a form of cognition*" suggesting that "no brain areas can be designated specifically as "cognitive" or "affective" (Duncan and Barrett 2007). In this manner, a character's emotional expressivity adopts a co-constituted character, bodied and *presenced* by the actor, and cognitively-affectively *scaffolded* by the director.

What seems important for directors to embrace is that a constructed theory of emotion posits our evaluation as personal, and potentially idiosyncratic, rather than suggesting anybody can arbitrate emotional validity, as if, they were emanating from the performance itself. As Seth Duncan and Lisa Feldman Barrett remind us quoting Dewey that the psychologist's fallacy is "to confuse the standpoint of the observer and explainer with that of the fact observed".

(Duncan and Barrett 2007). Feldman Barrett further asserts that:

instances of emotion have no objective fingerprints in the face, body, and brain, so "accuracy" has no scientific meaning. It has a social meaning – we certainly can ask whether

two people agree in their perceptions of emotion, or whether a perception is consistent with some norm. But perceptions exist within the perceiver. (Feldman Barrett 2018, 40).

Film/TV directors are obliged therefore to make judgements regarding the emotional efficacy of a performance from their own immediate somatovisceral, sensory, and perceptual feeling experiences. The relevance is that directing screen acting is the evaluation of a director's own sense of emotionality through neural and psychological diversity, socio-cognitive influences and a socially constructed understanding and experience of emotion (Feldman Barrett 2018). This can never intrinsically align with an actor's, *as if*, connecting to a mutually accessible shared perception of emotionality internally felt or intuited, or externally expressed. Any mutuality can only occur at the level of social interaction, rather than ontological identification.

We can link these core ideas to the developmental character of mind as conceived by the theories of representation linked to Jerome Bruner. Bruner suggests that “the rough and perpetually changing draft of our autobiography that we carry in our minds – is understandable to ourselves and to others only by virtue of those cultural systems of interpretation. But culture is also constitutive of mind” (Bruner 1990, 33). In this sense, we can view Film/TV directors as instruments of culture both shaping culture in their contributions through media artefacts, but also as recipients of cultural values that are transmuted as characterological performances, and therefore as narratives on human-ness.

While this paper advocates for an enacted emotionality to be actively integrated into the directing acting process it recognises that film acting is often understood as “a form of *mediated performance* that lies at the intersection of art, technology, and culture.” (Baron, Carson, and Tomasulo 2004). However, a “mediated performance” is not screen acting *per se* as the former represents the final fragments and cultural legacy of a directing acting process. The “mediated performance” is the selected, edited, ideological and aesthetically biased,

material from a complex process subject to interference by producers, commissioners, lawyers and marketing focus groups. Screen performances are further mediated by the viewing screen itself suggesting emotionality needs to be attenuated to certain viewing contexts e.g. wide shots might need an upscaled emotional depiction and the close-up, the converse; see *Secrets of Screen Acting* (Tucker 2023). Also, large-screen, cinematic viewing affords different intensities of affect to a smartphone screen; hence the contemporary complexity of creating affective and effective performances for different media distribution platforms.

Directing screen acting to engage a viewer to the psychologically and emotionally plausible requires skilful and sensitive direction which can be scaffolded in a form of enacted emotionality for a co-constituted characterisation with actors. Therefore, it is necessary to consider directing screen acting and responses to a performance as a complex of cognitive-affective resources presented to consciousness.

One of the foremost texts on Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics further suggests:

Every committed actor wants a director who can lead them into new territory. This means they develop not just in acting but in living. Perform this function only a little, and your cast will place great faith in you and become your most enthusiastic advocate to other actors. (Rabiger, Hurbis-Cherrier, and Mercado 2020, 258).

Rabiger suggests the director as variously: a coach, a guide, and a mentor. Coaching for confidence, guiding with knowledge and experience, and mentoring to discuss scripted themes and character strategies with actors. Rabiger suggests these various positions develop trust and this is why an enacted emotionality is so crucial to the actor and director relationship, as regardless of a director's vision, their intellectual grasp of the script, their production design flair, their understanding of cinematography, visual creativity and crew management, if they are unable to secure the trust of their actors then a shared co-constituted character creation will not be instantiated.

Integrating the missing concept of an enacted emotionality offers a potentially significant contribution to media practice as an enhanced and nuanced understanding of the acting process as well as re-situating the director as a mediating agent of emotional content, rather than arbiter of all emotional sense making while directing screen acting. It offers the opportunity for more nuanced screen performances formed from qualitatively enhanced collaborations between actors and directors, while recognising that an exact alignment of cognitive or emotional understanding is neither realistic nor desirable. The goal is that the performance efficacy builds upon a confidence and affective alignment between both actors and directors in order that the enacted emotionality feels creatively enriching to all parties.

It is this psychophysical entanglement, often enticingly confusing for directors, actors and viewers alike, that we come to know ourselves and others more deeply. As Robert McKee states:

Whereas life separates meaning from emotion, art unites them. Story is an instrument by which you create such epiphanies at will, the phenomenon known as *aesthetic emotion* ... Life on its own, without art to shape it, leaves you in confusion and chaos, but aesthetic emotion harmonizes what you know with what you feel to give you a heightened awareness and a sureness of your place in reality. (McKee 1999, 111).

The art of directing acting with an enacted emotionality might therefore scaffold this higher purpose to support an enhanced model for directing screen acting.

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