THE ART OF BECOMING:
PERFORMANCE, TEMPORALITY, AND THE COMPOSITION OF THE FILMIC BODY IN
CONTEMPORARY CINEMA

by

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Abstract

Film performances have long served as a point of contention in Film Studies. The elusive nature of the art form is often overlooked, and consequently approached via history, star studies, or in reducing a performance to the mise-en-scène. The aim of this thesis is to theoretically root film performances by deviating from classical performance analysis, and focusing on the abstract qualities that demarcate the practice of becoming other. To do this, I turn to the works of Gilles Deleuze (and Félix Guattari) when confronting the unique relationship between the actor's frame and process to suggest that film performances are necessarily informed by the body and time. The film body is a doubled body, belonging to both actor and character. It serves as an aesthetic platform for the medium, and a technical substructure that maintains artistic cohesion. In investigating this interaction across cinema’s fractured temporality, we can address not only the implications of the film actor’s art, but art more generally.

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari argue that “composition is the sole definition of art,” and “what is not composed is not a work of art” (1994 191). Not only are film performances composed for the sake of the medium, they are bound by their own compositional structure. This calls for a negotiation between the materiality of a physical body and the potentiality of a screen body that embodies otherness. In this project, I emphasize the film body’s ability to house and negotiate Deleuze and Guattari’s technical and aesthetic planes of composition. In doing this, the film body navigates the before and the after, the self and the other, and the interior and surface throughout the duration of a performance. With the increasingly popular wave of body-centered cinema emerging post-
twentieth century, we can draw explicit parallels between the performative process and the physical conditioning endured prior to shooting – particularly in portrayals of pain, suffering, and emaciation. In navigating this compositional interplay, I seek to illustrate how the art of the actor is not so much dictated by the character she becomes, but rather, by the process of becoming.
Preface

This thesis is an original, unpublished, independent work written by the author, Andrea Katherine Brooks
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Wendy.
**Introduction**

Film performances traditionally strive to efface the presence of the actor in favour of the character and narrative at hand. It is through the process of undoing the self that a character and performance can emerge via the actor’s own body or performative frame. In this respect, a successful performance aims to be as seamless as possible, ostensibly leaving behind little to no trace of the actor. That said, in contemporary Hollywood cinema, the film bodies that we regularly encounter are often informed by external factors that fall beyond the scope of the performance. Oftentimes, this allows for the *actor* to become the central pillar of discussion during the evaluation of a performance. While this tendency may ultimately distract from the performative aims of the actor, this trend indicates that the *process* and *assembly* of a performance can shift on account of the actor’s own pre-conditioned body.

In an attempt to tackle the nature of the film performance, I have chosen to examine the body’s wavering status within film by viewing it as a connective force between technical composition, and the aesthetic surface that we encounter as film viewers. This negotiation takes place both within and upon the physical frame of the actor, and can serve to elucidate the ways that performances are contingent upon their own unique compositional structure. Little has been written about the actor’s means of attaining an *authentic* screen body without venturing into a discussion of societal influence and reception. In this case, I am pointing more specifically to extreme performances that call for the actor to embody acts of suffering or pain in order for an ‘authentic’ performance to be realized. Generally, these performances are accompanied by cultural commentary
concerning dieting, eating disorders, and self harm. What is more seldom discussed is the impact that these sorts of bodily transformations have on the art form of performance and the critical receptions that follow.

By focusing on the composition of both actor and art form, I argue for a reevaluation of the ways we conceive of performance by refocusing on the structural/technical aspects of becoming a character. To do this, I call attention to the theoretical implications of performing within a medium that is at all times restrictive, and heavily dictated by its own process. In this thesis, I am offering a new framework for analyzing and understanding the nature of contemporary film performances, which are becoming increasingly embodied, and subsequently reliant upon the actor’s physical frame. Drawing from the methodologies of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and working within the emerging performance philosophy trend, I suggest that the process of erecting a performance for the screen is predicated upon acts of negation, limitation, and undoing. In order to better understand the technical aspects of film performances, we must question our understanding of time, authenticity, and the pre-conditioned status of the actor’s body.

The first chapter of this thesis contains a review of the major literature on the topic of the body, affect, and duration in order to lay the groundwork for my Deleuzeo-Guattarian assessment of performance as artistic composition. I also use this chapter to distinguish between stage and screen performances while pointing toward my broader

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1 Performance philosophy is an emerging field of interdisciplinary research that combines the study of performance and critical theory. The performance philosophy association, founded in 2012, has grown to include a website, conference, book series, and a journal. It currently has over one thousand online members. [http://performancephilosophy.ning.com/](http://performancephilosophy.ning.com/)
assessment of the film performance’s uneven relationship to time. This chapter serves as the pretext to my second and third chapters, and begins to unravel the ways in which film performances are dictated by their own process of becoming.

My second chapter centres on the idea that a film performance cannot escape its own process, and can therefore be contextualized through an engagement with Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of composition – which recognizes that artistic compositions are both technical and aesthetic in nature. In this chapter, I discuss composition prior to outlining the ways in which film bodies are used to illustrate the technical-aesthetic divide in contemporary Hollywood cinema, which seemingly favours a film’s technical achievements over the aesthetic aggregate. I argue that the conditioned body draws attention away from the aesthetic plane (which houses the character), and back to the technical plane (which houses the actor), therefore inverting the actor’s own art form as a means of overinflating the role of performative technicality. I then move into the crux of my thesis, carving out the film actor’s unique interplay between time and the body in order to suggest that the screen actor’s performance is contingent upon temporal fracturing and reassembly much like the performative frame itself. Time, much like the body, is extended beyond its own initial position, further illustrating the liminality of the art form.

My third chapter investigates the physical conditioning of the film body, and the subsequent implications this bears on the performative moment.\(^2\) I return to the actor’s subservient position within cinema to highlight the actor’s masochistic treatment of the body and time. To exemplify this, I draw upon a number of films (including Steve

\(^2\) The ‘performative moment’ is, essentially, the moment captured on camera between action and cut.
McQueen’s *Hunger* [2008], Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Birdman* [2014], and Jonathan Glazer’s *Under the Skin* [2013]) that rely heavily upon the actor’s physical frame as a means of conveying narrative. I point to the ways in which certain contemporary performances offset their own need to convey emotion (specifically emotions of pain and suffering) through displays of pre-conditioned bodies that have been prepared accordingly prior to shooting. These performances rely upon the actor’s ability to decompose the self into the art form. This in turn, calls attention to the *process* of becoming a character and the actor’s relationship to time. This body-driven performance trend results in a dwindling need to emote, and an exaggerated reliance upon the actor’s physical frame.

Art is both technical and aesthetic, meaning that it is both the work of material and the work of sensation. If we consider that which we perceive on a screen (characters, sets, and scenarios) to be an aesthetic surface, then the actor’s preparation, while not directly attainable or traceable via the screen, is responsible for lending a performance its shape. In reaching beyond and acquiring extra textual information pertaining to the experience of the actor, one is failing to acknowledge that performances fall between their execution and their destination. In this thesis, I rely upon Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of art to address the jarring relationship between the technical and aesthetic aspects of performance. In understanding the film performance with Deleuze and Guattari’s compositional planes in mind, we can apply a logical framework to this widely misunderstood process. It is in acknowledging and analyzing the procedural aspects of a film performance that we can pinpoint the manipulative tendencies at play in contemporary Hollywood, and perhaps
more importantly, restore artistic agency to the actor by liberating her from her current model (social construct anchored to a director).
Chapter 1: Compositional Context

“But the picture is also traversed by a deframing power that opens it onto a plane of composition or an infinite field of forces.”

-Deleuze & Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*

1.1 The Body

Contemporary film scholarship concerning the onscreen body has been profoundly influenced by the body's affective capabilities. As such, the film body is commonly approached via its ability to engage spectators on a physical or visceral level. This has resulted in array of studies devoted to embodiment, sensation, and tactility. While contemporary phenomenologists rely upon the film body to interpret sensation, reception studies scholars use it to formulate connections between audiences, and star studies scholars use it as a rubric to unpack meaning behind a star's public identity. My analysis seeks to approach the film body as something that is progressively conditioned and bound to its own process by examining the film body as an artistic composition positioned within the medium. The film body continually informs the performance process. It allows for the performance to exist, while simultaneously hindering it from reaching that which it sets out to be. It is the film body that renders the performance *destinational* – meaning that the performance strives toward an end point (character) that can be suggested but not fully actualized. As such, the performing body is forever bound by its relationship to time and the performance process. In approaching the film body via temporality, I hope to expand upon preexisting discourses within a field that has long overlooked the relationship.
between performative technicality and aestheticism in film. While Deleuze’s work on time has maintained its influential position within film studies, his analyses on the status of art and the body, while less overt, are foundational for an understanding of the film body as a compositional force within a composed medium.

From the works of Plato and Aristotle, to early Christianity, to contemporary feminist scholarship, the body has acted and continues to act as a central pillar of theoretical inquiry. Contemporary investigations into the status of the human form reach back to René Descartes’ mind-body problem, in which the thinking thing (the mind) is entirely separate from the non-thinking/space-occupying thing (the body). In separating mentality from materiality in an attempt to prove his own autonomous existence with absolute certainty (*cogito ergo sum*), Descartes has effectively laid the groundwork for contemporary theorists to expand upon. Spinoza, for example, rejected Cartesian dualism in favour of substance monism;\(^3\) while John Locke’s favouring of perception-based empirical knowledge (*tabula rasa*) led him to develop a methodology in which the body possesses primary, secondary and tertiary qualities; and while Berkeley devoted himself to subjective idealism,\(^4\) maintaining that the body and matter are but mere illusions. Such foundational investigations into the mind, and body continue to actively inform a body-conscious era of scholarship that not only interrogates the very status of the body, but questions its position within the public, mediated, and artistic realms.

\(^3\) Everything is derived from a primary source. For example, to Spinoza the mind and body are both expressions of the same product.
\(^4\) A championing of ideas, maintaining that only ideas exist.
Unlike the fragmented Lacanian body, or the Freudian *sack* body, which emphasizes depth over range, the Deleuzeo-Guattarian concept of a body is, like immanence, a flat, map-like surface, informed by its surroundings. Deleuze’s concept of a body, while not at the forefront of his discourses as in the works of his psychoanalytic contemporaries, has paved the way for scholars such as Elizabeth Grosz and Moira Gatens, and has served as the topic for Joe Hughes’ 2011 Deleuze Connections installment titled *Deleuze and the Body*. Gatens’ reading of Deleuze is mostly approached through his engagement with Spinoza and Spinozan temporality. In her feminist study *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality*, Gatens writes on Spinoza’s account of the body, claiming that it “is not identical with itself across time,” and thus, the body is a process that forever lacks a ‘truth’ or a ‘true nature’ (1996 57). Approaching the body across time as opposed to within it serves as a starting point for Deleuze’s engagement with ever-expanding surfaces. In *Imaginary Bodies*, Gatens relies upon this Spinozan-Deleuzian approach to the body and truth prior to unpacking the body and body image via *alienation* and *otherness*. She explains:

> We can be objects, for ourselves and to ourselves: recipients of our own sadism/masochism; esteem/disdain; punishment/reward; love/hate. Our body image is a body double that can be as ‘other’ to us as any genuine ‘other’ can be... We may think of our own bodies as the most private of all ‘possessions’, but in fact the body – and the way we each ‘live’ the body – has about it an eerie anonymity and otherness that is especially strongly

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5 Immanence, as derived from Spinoza’s *God or Nature* formulation, is the absolute in-process. That is, the plane that holds within it life and death; beginnings and ends.
felt at times of illness (both mental and physical), times at which we feel alienated from our social surroundings and times at which we are vulnerable to objectification by others. (1996 35)

Gatens’ understanding of alienation and otherness is not entirely dissimilar from the filmic body and the process of performing in cinema. As I will explain in depth later on in the thesis, the very nature of the actor’s filmic process requires for the actor to alienate herself from the image that she creates. In instances involving the extreme conditioning of the body, for example, the actor is required to disengage from the self, and in many instances, use the body as a performance object to help convey sentiments and experiences. This pushes the body beyond its mere status as a mediation device in cinema, allowing for it to become the frame and grounding device for a performance. Gatens uses her assessment of otherness to formulate a grander claim involving doubling and gender relations, but she does so prior to mentioning the integral role of alienation and doubling in film. It is the doubling of the actor’s frame that problematizes the body’s relationship to self and time, while ultimately defining the function of performance in film.

Grosz is in agreement that Deleuze fails to commit to a stable theoretical approach to the body. She does, however, provide a “provisional reconstruction” of Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of corporeality in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994 161). Grosz deems Deleuzian corporeality to be of use in feminist scholarship, stating that the pair “provide an altogether different way of understanding the body in its connection with other bodies” (1994 164-5). For Grosz, Deleuze and Guattari find their foundation in Spinoza when they privilege the body’s *potential* over its favoured status as a locus of truth.
Grosz considers this emphasis on potentiality and becoming to be of use when confronting the Freudian-Marxist readings of the body that were dominating feminist scholarship in the nineties. Grosz uses Deleuze and Guattari to uphold her discussion of the merging of interiority and exteriority that serves to destabilize binary oppositions. In this same work, Grosz provides one of the most comprehensive contextualizations of Deleuze and Guattari’s Body without Organs (BwO)⁶ – a term that is readily appropriated but rarely put into proper practice. While she acknowledges the need to be selective when confronted with the BwO, she summarizes what the concept does as opposed to focusing on what it is. She writes that the “notion of the BwO is Deleuze and Guattari’s attempt to denaturalize human bodies and to place them in direct relations to the flows or particles of other bodies or things” (1994 168). She then attributes this embracing of potentiality back to Spinoza and the act of becoming.

Potentiality is a defining aspect to performance given that the actor’s task is to actively reach away from herself as she performs.⁷ Performing for the screen is an embodiment of becoming, in that the actor can never obtain what she reaches for (character). As a result, performance is caught in the entre-temps or in-between. The BwO, which is not a body per se, nor is it an image of a body, a place, or a scene is, rather abstractly, “what remains when you take everything away” (1980 151). In A Thousand

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⁶ Deleuze and Guattari borrow this term from French playwright and poet, Antonin Artaud. Artaud declares war on organs, stating "for you can tie me up if you wish, but there is nothing more useless than an organ" (as qtd. in Deleuze, Guattari 1980 150).
⁷ It is important to keep in mind the difference between acting for the stage and acting for the screen – something that will be addressed later on in this thesis. In sum, I consider screen acting to be distinguishable from theatre on account of the compositional nature of the cinematic medium, which hinges upon the fracturing and reassembly of time.
Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari see the BwO as a plateau belonging to the plane of immanence, which fuses interiority and exteriority onto an uninterrupted and non-hierarchical field. Like many of Deleuze’s theories and concepts, the BwO cannot be addressed properly without taking into account his theories of immanence. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the BwO is introduced in relation to potentiality:

> You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit. People ask, So what is this BwO? – But you're already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic; desert traveler and nomad of the steppes. (1980 150)

This idea of the BwO being informed by its own position – as something that can never be fully attained – parallels the performing body’s inability to achieve that which it presents itself to be. This rather abstract train of thought is indicative of the actor’s process, and the nature of performance.

In *Francis Bacon*, the BwO is described not as lacking organs, but lacking “the organism, that is, this particular organization of organs” (1981 34). *Organization* is the key term in this statement and it suggests that the BwO acts as a spirit body, an intensities body, or a non-hierarchical body that allows for affects and percepts to flow. In other words, the BwO serves as a platform for art to present itself. This is where Deleuze’s project veers toward sensation. This is also where a large portion of Deleuzian scholarship falls into place. Deleuze’s critics have a difficult time grappling with many of these slippery

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8 This term is derived by Deleuze and Guattari from anthropologist, Gregory Bateson, who argues that *plateaus* are uninterruptable by nature, and are thereby not subject to “external termination” (1980 158).
definitions especially given that a concept such as the BwO is presented in numerous works and in numerous ways. It should be noted that Deleuze deals with art in a similar fashion, claiming that all of art’s inner workings rise to a surface that holds the potential to be engaged with. While this is something I address in my analysis of time, performance, and the body, I am very much in favour of dealing with the composition of a plateau in order to suggest that all of the technical components of an art form can be readily accessed via the surface of the medium. When it comes to film performance, the body, which has long been regarded as a site of sensation for the viewer, is doubled. It simultaneously acts as a site of externalization and sensation, as well as a technical frame serving as a boundary for the actor’s own self. As a result, the performative medium is actively showing us its roots and its surface via the actor’s body:

D. N. Rodowick claims that, “the cinema is best suited to the task of presenting... the [BwO]” given the cinema’s ability to “give expression to forces of becoming that are immanent in bodies” (1997 154). Rodowick does not consider the cinema of the body (as he calls it) to be associated with the literal body as much as it encapsulates the expression of one. While we do not encounter a physical body before us in film (as we do in the theatre), we engage with an image that has been technically crafted in order to uphold the transmission of forces, sensations, etc. In other words, the physical body serves as the technical substructure to the performance at hand. While my project calls for an understanding of the BwO, it is primarily aimed at unraveling the physical body’s position within the process of becoming other. The BwO, however, points to this idea of directionality versus destination that of course parallels my understanding of performance.
It works in strict relation to the process of becoming, or to be more specific, the Deleuzeo-Guattarian line of becoming.

The line of becoming⁹ – that which is caught or lodged in the *entre-temp* – simultaneously springs away from its starting point (in this case, the actor's body) and its un-attainable endpoint (the character's body). Such points are infinitely extending and reaching. As described in Deleuze and Guattari's essay “Becoming-intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible…”:

[A] line of becoming is not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes between points, it comes up through the middle, it runs perpendicular to the points first perceived, transversally to the localizable relation to distant or contiguous points.”

(1987 293)

In performance, the act of becoming is set in motion by the actor, who uses her physical body to compose a character that reaches outward, and toward the realm of sensation. The actor performs potentiality in such a way that renders her art a suggestion. To look at the composition of a character in this light, we must consider, much like the BwO, a performance is a process of becoming. Performance is the ultimate *milieu*. It causes intensities to be passed, but more importantly, it is housed by a body that is bound to its technical roots. The actor can never withdraw herself from her own body, nor can her body host an alternate personality. She can, however, suggest that these acts are taking place. Deleuze and Guattari assert that no one can ever “break with the arborescent schema”

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⁹ Deleuze's concept of an infinite middle with no beginning or end.
when between “two contiguous points” (1987 293), meaning that once upon the line of becoming, one is caught within her own process as described by Maratine Beugnet in *Cinema and Sensation* (2007, 18). Beugnet goes on to suggest that the human form is a “figure caught again in the material reality of the film as event. In turn, ‘becomings’ also appear embedded in the film form itself” (2007 149). It is this space where the physical figure is lodged. And it is in this space where character and actor are negotiated along with the *then* and the *now*. It is in striving toward, while remaining unable to become, that a performance is rendered illusionary. This thesis aims to deal with the idea that this illusion is forever affixed to, and informed by the actor’s physical presence. The actor hovers between the unanchored endpoints of technicality and aestheticism;\(^2\) past and future; self and other, while her body is simultaneously materialized and literalized.\(^3\)

Deleuze has his critics when it comes to the body and what the body represents. In his book *Organs without Bodies*, Slavoj Žižek provides a Hegelian-infused criticism of Deleuze’s major works. Žižek suggests that contrary to popular opinion, Deleuze is far more of a Hegelian thinker than otherwise believed. He also criticizes Deleuze’s decision to stop at the BwO, failing to acknowledge (what he has labeled) the Organ without Body (OwB). Žižek asks:

[W]hy BwO, why not (also) OwB? Why not Body as the space in which autonomous organs freely float? Is it because ‘organs’ evoke a function within a wider whole, subordination to a goal? But does this very fact not make their autonomization, OwB, all the more subversive? (xii 2004).

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\(^{10}\) To be addressed later on in this chapter

\(^{11}\) This brings us back to the notion of doubling as mentioned previously in this chapter.
Žižek points to the Cheshire cat’s looming smile in *Alice in Wonderland* as an example of symbolic castration set against Deleuze’s BwO. He also makes mention of the idea of a body that works against itself from within by ‘beating itself up’ and altering a character’s external surface as displayed in *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999) and *Liar Liar*¹² (1997). Here, Žižek is criticizing Deleuze’s engagement with, what he considers to be, drive-less/desire-less surfaces. At its most basic level, this debate concerns directionality – while Deleuze works outward, Žižek (via Hegel) works inward. In many ways, my project aims to crack open the idea of a Deleuzian surface by focusing on the technical aspects of performance. However, I choose to combat this with the Deleuze and Guattari of *What is Philosophy?*, who suggest that all art is composition, and that composition is in fact comprised of technicality and aestheticism.¹³ We could go as far as to suggest that Deleuze does in fact acknowledge that art is beholden to a technical structure or inner organization. While the technical and aesthetic planes are readily distinguishable from each other, favouring the technical (or inner) side of art sans its aesthetic surface is a rather empty venture. The technical aspects of a performance are only as important as their function – to uphold the performance. A technical substructure continuously informs art in the same way that an actor’s body informs the character within a film. Approaching the actor (who is by all means the embodiment of the technical aspects to a performance) as a nucleus of meaning creates a distance between the artist and her art form. For Deleuze, inner organization and technicality is a function, and no art is created for the sake of function. If it were, it would no longer be art.

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¹² Žižek confuses *Liar Liar* with *Me, Myself, and Irene* (Farrelly 2000) in this book.
1.2 Affect and Duration

Recent scholarship on the topic of performance and the body has focused primarily on the body’s affective capabilities in relation to the cinematic experience, meaning that the bodies in question often involve an interaction between screen bodies and the bodies of spectators. This is of particular interest to Deleuzian and Deleuzeo-Guattarian scholars given Deleuze’s assertion that sensation (which can be painted, written, sculpted, etc.) is the body’s way of entering and becoming one with the affects and percepts produced by art. Elena del Río discusses the body of the actor in *Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection*. She uniquely suggests that the BwO sets intensities into motion in ways that mimic the exchange between the performative body (the actor) and the affective body (the spectator). In working from a Deleuzeo-Spinozian methodology concerning expression and the body, del Río’s project explores spectacle and performativity, noting that bodies are in a perpetual state of motion resulting in an “affective-performative force” that binds the performer to audience and vice versa (16). For del Río, the body extends beyond the realm of visuality by way of force, while actualizing bodily potential (del Río considers this to be the performative act). While del Río draws from many of the same sources that have inspired this thesis, our aims are very separate. While del Río concerns herself with potentiality and affect, my engagement with potentiality is rooted in the technical aspects of performance. These technicalities demonstrate how the actor’s ability to become (character) results in a unique display of temporality and process.
Laura U. Marks lays the groundwork for scholars such as del Río in her seminal work *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, where she favours tactility and the embodiment of experience over visuality in order to advance the theory of “haptic visuality.” Marks’ work has effectively contributed to today’s onset of Deleuzian scholarship. Calling upon experience and memory, her phenomenological approach works against optical visuality, which is predicated upon the distance between subject and object. For Marks, “the eyes themselves function as organs of touch” (2000 162). Marks’ work on hapticity serves as the precursor to a number of studies on sensation. For instance, Jennifer M. Barker explores the visceral connections between subject and object in *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*. Barker describes the tactile relationship between subject and object as “a full-bodied opening into and suffusion of one with the other that goes beyond surface, middle, and depth,” in which we all experience living through subjectivity (146). Steven Shaviro, in following a Deleuzeo-Guattarian (and later, Foucauldian) methodology in *The Cinematic Body*, argues that screen images are events calling for affective film responses. Shaviro writes on the body’s stupidity in relation to cinematic fascination, suggesting that it is the stupidity of the body that is most seductive. While such contributions are invaluable to the study of cinema, they tend to favour viewership over art. This thesis is not so much a return to formalism, as it is a turn to that which lies behind the forms that appear to us on screen. In this project, I wish to use Deleuze to move away from studies of affect, focusing instead on the temporal,

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14 Barker calls this relationship “inspiration,” after Merleau-Ponty’s claim that there exists an “inspiration and the expiration of being,” in which it becomes impossible to differentiate between the subject and object (lvi).
compositional, and performative implications that arise upon encountering a performing body on screen.

The Deleuze collection edited by Guillaume and Hughes (Deleuze and the Body) contains a wide range of body interpretations spanning from the political bodies, to bodies of learning, to the dancing body, to the virtualization of bodies, and sensation. In his article on the ethics of form, which trace Deleuze’s notion of a body via secular faith, Joe Hughes emphasizes Deleuze's use of the Bergsonian body in Cinema 1 and Cinema 2. These returns to Bergson are expected when engaging with Deleuze, who has often been credited for regenerating Bergsonian scholarship in the twentieth century. From duration, to multiplicity, to becoming, Deleuze’s work is riddled with Bergson’s ideas, many of which make their way into his cinema project. In fact, Deleuze’s engagement with temporality is derived almost entirely from Bergson. The body’s relationship to time and space is easily approached via Bergson’s theory of becoming. For Bergson, the body is at the centre of the “stream of becoming,” given that the body acts as the fluctuating boundary that processes its own relationship to time (1988 77). As a result, surroundings act upon the body, and in turn, the body acts upon its surroundings. The same can be said for a film performance, in which the actor’s body is both responsible for internalizing surroundings and subsequently externalizing the body’s engagement to its surroundings for the process of becoming a character to ensue. When becoming is equated to a continuous flow that is rooted in its past while waiting in anticipation of its future moment, we are able to acknowledge the body's liminal status. In its liminality, the body must negotiate its space within a moment as opposed to simply living within it. The fact that time is experienced indirectly in cinema (as
per *Cinema I*) suggests that the film body is forced to consult its own unique, temporal position.\(^{15}\)

In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson declares that the body is an “ever advancing boundary between future and past,” to which “our past is continually driving forward into our future” (1991 78). For Bergson, the body is a center of action and perceptions, as well as an instrument of action and choice. As opposed to giving rise to *representation*, Bergson’s body is regarded “an object destined to move other objects” (1991 20). This can account for Deleuze’s focus on sensation and potentiality. The Bergsonian body also strives toward a single connected consciousness, while maintaining the distinction between body and spirit. One of Bergson’s major claims in *Matter and Memory* suggests that the mind-body relation is articulated temporally as opposed to spatially, and that it is the convergence of matter and mind that results in production of memory. This division between space and duration (in mimicking the division between matter and memory) serves as one of the major jumping off points for Deleuze’s cinema project. Bergson writes:

> The function of the body is not to store up recollections, but simply to choose, in order to bring back to distinct consciousness, by the real efficacy thus conferred on it, the useful memory, that which may complete and illuminate the present situation with a view to ultimate action.\(^{97}\)

Bergson not only considers the body and the image-body to be interchangeable,\(^ {16}\) he interprets the body in relation to action. For Bergson, perceptions lead to affections, which

\(^{15}\) This will serve as the major focal point in my second chapter.
result in action. This is similar for Deleuze, who claims that percepts lead to affects, which ultimately result in sensation.

In following a brief engagement with Christian Metz in Gilles Deleuze's *Time Machine*, Rodowick claims, “unlike the performing arts, the cinema cannot give us the presence of a body” (1997 168). In other words, as an audience, we are to engage with images of present moments that have long since passed. Film lacks immediacy, which results in an illusion of time. The film actor's relationship to time is often overlooked in this field, which is surprising considering that the film actor's process is entirely informed by both the actor's and character's relationship to it. The actor relies upon time to condition her body prior to filming, when shooting scenes out of order, when imagining and projecting a character's story, and when taking into account the gaze of an eventual audience that dictates the actor's framing, eye line, and lighting. A film performance is assembled out of this sort of temporal fragmentation. In my second chapter, I will discuss the ways in which the actor's experience of time differs from a direct engagement with time, or even from an audience's experience of indirect of time. In many ways, the actor illustrates the function of time in her attempt to defy it. The actor's ability to perform a version of time within time is signaled via the actor's body, as can be asserted through Rodowick's claim that the body "is a spatial sign of time that passes" (1997 168).

\[\text{16 This is something to be considered when discussing the doubleness of the actor and character body on screen.}\]
1.3 Stages and Screens

While few film actors fully subscribe to the method-acting model, and while the term itself continues to be debated, the trend has undeniably shaped the way contemporary cinematic performances have been crafted and received. Championed by the likes of Marlon Brando and James Dean, and derived almost entirely from Constantin Stanislavski’s system,\(^{17}\) the Actors Studio was founded in 1947 by Elia Kazan, Anna Sokolow, Robert Lewis, and Cheryl Crawford. Lee Strasberg, who later joined the school in 1951, was instrumental in his efforts to provide actors with a cohesive set of tools for constructing authentic performances.\(^ {18}\) With this ‘new’ acting method on the rise, not only were actors reconsidering their approach to performance, the method also called upon film and theatregoers to reevaluate their expectations. No longer were actors encouraged to focus on their diction, projection, breath, and presentation – they were actively turning inward to establish emotional connections that could then be physicalized for all to see.

As described in Strasberg’s *A Dream of Passion,* “the actor knows that the elements on stage are false, but he tells himself, ‘If they were true, I would do this and this, I would behave in this manner and in this way toward this and this event...’” (52). While the actor’s ability to remain committed to the Stanislavskian ‘creative if’ varies from actor to actor, what is perhaps most pertinent to this thesis is Stanislavski’s recognition of the actor’s dual experience and dual processing. Anthony Uhlmann describes Stanislavski’s process of turning inward to uncover a ‘truth’ as the actor’s “unapologetically subjective

\(^{17}\) Stanislavski’s system was first put into practice at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1911.

\(^{18}\) Stanislavski, unlike Strasberg, went on to reject many of his own theories and techniques later on in his career ultimately calling for the abolition of his own system should an actor find a more suitable or useful approach.
understanding” (55). While scholars such as Marianne Conroy approach the method historically, considering it a shift in cultural attitudes provoked by a Cold War America, where actors were suddenly encouraged to “intervene actively in the construction of... a national culture” (256), other scholars such as Kevin Esch refer to the method as a “mainstream mythology” that lacks a cohesive set of principles or instructions (127). The popularity of the method un-coincidentally parallels the technological advancements that took place throughout the twentieth century. The increasing investment in film as the favoured storytelling medium has called for actors to rethink their own framing – performing in close-up as opposed to performing upon a stage and from afar. Method or not, working introspectively and channeling emotions has – whether unguided or via Stanislavski, Strasberg, Meisner, Adler, or more contemporarily, Larry Moss – contributed to the shaping of a standard protocol for those working within or in proximity to Hollywood cinema. Should an actor choose to work from nothing but her own instincts, she is nevertheless performing within a medium that predominantly champions introspection and internalization over theatrics and spectacle.

In Cinema I, Deleuze points out that the Actors Studio offers realist actors – actors actively seeking inner connection with the self to compose a performance – a method or structure to what may otherwise seem natural:

The Actors Studio does not invite the actor to identify himself with his role any more than any other method; what characterizes it is the reverse operation, by which the realist actor is supposed to identify the role with certain inner elements that he possesses and selects in himself. (1983 158)
While particular performance techniques are difficult to trace on a formal level given that no two actors will utilize a particular method or style in the same way, if at all, the frame of the actor’s action – the body – acts as the physicalized boundary that bridges technicality and aestheticism. All actors have technical roots, and while tracking these roots has proven to be difficult as evidenced in the struggles to tackle the subject critically in academia, we have reached a point where an examination of the processes and restrictions that define the nature of the art form could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of both performance and film, more generally.

As rightfully pointed out by del Río, one must distinguish between the concept of performance as a social construct, and performance as new narrative. Judith Butler has long argued that performing through the same body throughout time, results in an identity, along with a potential crisis of identity. Other scholars such as Grosz approach performance reluctantly, putting more of an emphasis on the embodiment of the image. It should be noted that I have made a concerted effort to distinguish between performance and acting in this thesis. I consider performance to be an all-encompassing term, embodying both the actor’s work (between action and cut) along with the process that feeds into and trails behind this precise moment of action. Acting is but a small piece of the actor’s process. It takes place within a specific moment, and does not necessarily account for factors such as wardrobe fittings, makeup, and strategic bodily conditioning, which all factor into a performance’s composition.

Deleuze makes explicit mention of the actor in The Logic of Sense, and throughout his Cinema project. He engages with performance via his own theoretical models, including
the chaos of being, the role of the artist, the sensory-motor link, and affect. Deleuze approaches the role of actor both historically and theoretically, specifically in his discussion of behaviour, and the action-image. In Cinema I, Deleuze takes note of the shift in acting styles between the method teachings inspired by The Actors Studio, and Hitchcock’s cinema. For Deleuze, method training ignites a particular set of behaviours (permeations and explosions), which work beyond the actor's own sense of self. He claims that such behaviours exert their influence over the “conception and unfolding of the film, its framings, its cutting, its montage,” maintaining that, “this structural and genetic representation of the action-image gives rise to a formula whose applications are truly infinite” (1986 155). In taking this a step further, performances are continuous flows that extend well into the before and after, resulting in the reshaping of temporal linearity.

Many of the scholarly examinations of film performance fail to conceive of it as a form of art, or compositional force, and therefore engage with performance as an afterthought to the medium. This is often done by way of star studies, reception studies, history, or as director and scholar Rick Kemp has done in his study of acting as embodiment, by way of contemporary neuroscience. This is not to say that such undertakings are unworthy, but rather to point to the gap that has been left behind. Mary Ellen O'Brien’s Film Acting: The Techniques and History of Acting for the Camera, and James Naremore’s Acting in the Cinema are perhaps two of the most detailed historical accounts of

19 According to Deleuze, the action-image “inspires a cinema of behaviour” given that action can be passed along, much like sensation, resulting in an influence over those engaging with the image (1986 155).
20 Kemp focuses on the physco-physical aspects to performance, claiming that acting is not so much driven from the outside in, or from the inside out, but rather, acting is a process that oscillates someplace in the in-between.
the trends and styles of performance that have influenced North American cinema to date.21 While Naremore's study has been divided into what he calls: performances in the ‘age of mechanical reproduction’ and ‘star performances,’ O'Brien devises performance types into four separate categories: 1. *The character actor*, 2. *the personality actor*, 3. *the physical actor*, and 4. *the natural actor*. One cannot ignore the ways in which the personalities and/or public personae of actors can shape the reception of a performance by calling attention away from the aesthetic surface of the medium. Such receptions challenge the compositional nature of the art form and detract from that which the actor strives toward.

In any art form, the aesthetic plane of composition relies upon its technical foundations (outlines, sketches, memorization, etc.). Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the technical plane is “necessarily covered up or absorbed” by the aesthetic surface of the medium (1994 195). For the actor, technicality involves all aspects of preparation for the role – both internal and external. Stanislavski argues that inner preparation is the key to building a successful character as an actor (*An Actor Prepares*). Stanislavski puts forth a set of strict guidelines for the actor to follow when preparing internally for a performance. She must arrive to the theatre at least two hours in advance, relax the muscles, select her objectives, and stabilize her mood (1936 231-2). Stanislavski points out that:

An actor lives, weeps and laughs on the stage, and all the while he is watching his own tears and smiles. It is this double function, the balance between life and acting that makes his art (1936 232).

21 It should be noted that Naremore’s *Acting in the Cinema*, is one of the most comprehensive historical overviews of film acting to date.
This reemphasizes Gatens’ point about cinematic doubling, which she claims generates feelings of alienation and otherness via the screen. It also suggests that performance is a sort of continuum in which the actor is forced to negotiate her own position at all times.

Considerable attention has been paid to the spectator’s ability to enter and become one with the art, and yet very little has been said about the process of the actor who must enter and become one with a character. Stanislavski asserts, that, “we cannot reduce the study of the inner life of other human beings to a scientific technique” (1936:81). To this, Deleuze and Guattari would agree, suggesting that art is never created for the sake of technicality, but rather, for the sake of the aesthetic (What is Philosophy?). That said, the specific techniques and methods used by actors are of less importance than understanding how technicality feeds into the broader compositional structure of the art form as a whole.

In rethinking the film performance as a divvied up entity (both technical and aesthetic), we are giving ourselves a platform to discuss implications of the film body, performance, and time without resorting to discussions of specific acting schools, or actors’ accounts of their technical processes. The act of becoming character involves an interplay between the self and other, and the before and after. It is a very particular interplay that is specific to the filmic medium and can be illustrated using Deleuze’s theories of duration, composition, and the body. To do this, we must take into consideration the ways in which the process of the actor can be addressed and accessed directly via the cinematic image and the actor’s own

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22 This is largely explored in Francis Bacon, where the spectator reaches “the unity of the sensing and the sensed” (25).
frame. One does not have to scientifically unpack technique to understand its supportive function within the realm of art. 23

23 Deleuze and Guattari link the technical plane to science in *What is Philosophy?*
Chapter 2: The Performative Process

“[T]here is an actor’s paradox; the actor maintains himself in the instant in order to act out something perpetually anticipated and delayed, hoped for and recalled. The role has the same relation to the actor as the future and past have to the instantaneous present which corresponds to them on the line of the Aion.”

-Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*

2.1 Deleuze, Guattari, and the Composition of the Body

In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari claim that “composition is the sole definition of art,” and that “what is not composed is not a work of art” (1994 191). This statement serves as the groundwork for this project. Rather than focusing on the associations between performer and spectator, this thesis explores the screen body’s relationship to what Deleuze and Guattari have labeled the *technical* and *aesthetic* planes of composition. Filmic performances hinge upon the interaction between a technical structure (the work of material), and an aesthetic arrangement (the work of sensation). As such, the film actor is required to compose and condition the self for the sake of her chosen medium. Deleuze and Guattari claim that “[a]rt begins not with flesh but with the house,” meaning that before we engage with any of art’s affective capabilities, we must first tackle the pillars and frames that lend art its shape (1994 186).

Deleuze and Guattari categorize art, philosophy, and science separately, maintaining that they all work toward producing creative understandings of our own reality. Art relies
on sensation and feeling, philosophy trades in the creation of concepts, and science deals with function. For Deleuze and Guattari, art must navigate chaos prior to the production of sensation and feeling. This is done via composition: “art is not chaos but a composition of chaos that yields the vision or sensation” (1994 204). For Deleuze and Guattari, the plane of art is compositional, and composition is comprised of materiality. They consider art’s materiality to be the catalyst for sensation, believing that no art is created for the sake of technique. Instead, they believe that art is composed for the sake of an aesthetic surface that so happens to use materiality to derive expressions from within matter. When it comes to the actor’s performance, the body serves as the frame from which expressions can be withdrawn, while simultaneously housing the composition of chaos. The film body is the integral element when it comes to the compositional process of film performance, as it can never be ripped away from its own paradigmatic model.

The technical plane of composition is a frame, and the aesthetic plane is the surface that both contains and allows for sensation to pass through to the perceiver. When it comes to performance, the actor’s body acts as the skeletal frame to an image body. For Deleuze and Guattari, art exists on an aesthetic surface, ultimately casting a shadow over the technical frame. This is articulated in What is Philosophy?, where the pair state that sensation “is projected onto the well-prepared technical plane of composition, in such a way that the aesthetic plane of composition covers it up” (1994 193). As a result, while Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge technicality’s integral role when it comes to art, they strip the technical plane of its agency in continuously prioritizing art’s (amalgamated) aesthetic surface. How are we to approach the film body if both the frame and surface share
the same interface? In order to understand the function of a performance, one must consider the ways in which doubleness factors into performance, while taking into account the film body’s own position within time.

Film performances are composed and constructed. This is even suggested in the titles of Constantin Stanislavski’s works: *An Actor Prepares, Building a Character,* and *Creating a Role.* Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of the artist’s task is heavily influenced by the art of the painter. This is apparent when they state that, “action never stays within the frame; it leaves the frame and does not begin with it” (1994 188). The art of the actor differs slightly. Firstly, the actor’s actions are not only encased within the frame of the filmic medium, but are drawn out of a primary frame (the body of the actor) that acts as both a boundary and platform for the performance at hand. In a sense, the actor’s performance is once removed by its own medium. When it comes to action, the actor must negotiate the ways in which temporality factors into the compositional process. This results in a doubling that is effectively nonexistent in other forms of art. Without action, the actor cannot set her art in motion, which would leave spectators with nothing to sense or grasp. A film actor’s entire process is informed by action, in that it informs her relationship to time while implicating her body in such a way that permeates both the technical and aesthetic planes of composition. The actor’s body not only acts as the connective tissue linking together art’s compositional planes, it also links actor to character, actor to spectator, and action to action. Consequently, we cannot tackle any aspect of the actor’s performance without confronting or bypassing the formal aspects of the actor’s performance – the actor’s body.
An actor’s transition into character is a process that is both localized and actualized within the actor’s own frame. The screen body is unique in that when performing, it acts as both substructure and surface within a medium that too is comprised of substructures (the technical) and surfaces (the aesthetic). We are, in a sense, dealing with a body within a cinematic body. We see at all times, a. the body of the character, and b. the body of the actor becoming character, meaning that both art’s flesh (surface) and house (structure) are apparent to us at any given moment. Unlike a painting, in which the markings and outlines are layered beneath colours and brushstrokes, the actor’s body remains exposed in such a way that disallows the aesthetic surface to cover the plane completely. As such, the actor’s body is effectively bound by the act of becoming. The actor must negotiate a balance between the technical and the aesthetic planes. To assist a performance, the body physicalizes the performance, rendering it destinational. Unlike other art forms, in which the technical plane upholds Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that technicality is absorbed by the aesthetic realm before becoming one with sensation (take for example our painting’s outline), performance is an art form that not only exposes its own transition, but hinges upon it. The body is at all times doubled, meaning that the technical plane exerts an extra level of influence upon its art form at all time. The screen actor as artist must compose herself technically before she can be accessed aesthetically. Yet, in becoming aesthetically traceable, she remains technically exposed. She is at all times herself and character.

24 While this study is focused primarily on the actor’s ability to embody a fictional character in contemporary narrative cinema, it is worth mentioning that the same interpretation of performance structure can be applied to the documentary or reality subject who performs an enhanced version of themselves before a camera.
25 With an end goal in sight.
Olivier Assayas’ *Clouds of Sils Maria* (2014) explicitly presents this transition between art’s *flesh* and *house* when it comes to filmic performance. In this film, we are presented with scenes-within-scenes when maturing actress, Maria Enders (Juliette Binoche) works on her dialogue with her personal assistant (Kristen Stewart) to prepare for a revival of the production that launched her career decades prior. In these scenes, we see an actor (Binoche) playing a character (Maria) who is preparing to play a theatrical character (Helena). As such, we are forced to consult the performance on three separate levels. The film melodramatically works to expose the links between actor and character through a romanticized depiction of the ways an actor’s personal life feeds into a character. While the film is preoccupied with the relationship between Maria and Helena, we are at all times reminded of the ways Binoche negotiates her character, Maria. Something similar takes place in *Birdman*, another narrative focusing on the career of an aging actor – Riggan Thompson (Michael Keaton). While the allusions to Keaton’s personal career are blatant to say the least, here too we have an example of actors working through scenes that directly concern the technical process. When we see Riggan and Mike (Edward Norton) stumbling through their lines and discussing blocking the night before their first theatrical preview, we are once again faced with two notable Hollywood faces acting as if they are acting (a performance within a performance).

While these particular films romanticize the mental strain associated with the process of becoming character, we must recognize that even in an instance where there is no emotional connection to the character or scenes at hand, an actor’s physical presence (the fact that the actor’s body is as much a boundary or limit to the actor’s own self as it is the canvas for the character) is enough to set a performance in motion. The dramatized *strain* that the actors in
these films present, while commonly played out in contemporary depictions of the ‘tortured artist,’ is ultimately insignificant when it comes to the process of performance. In following Deleuze and Guattari’s methodology, art is not conceived for the sake of the technical. Technicability is intended to stabilize the aesthetic plane so as to enable sensation to pass. What is of greater significance in Clouds and Birdman is the way in which the actor’s form, while aesthetically consistent, is technically multifaceted. The mere presence of an acting body ignites a division that further separates the compositional process onto its technical and aesthetic planes. At its most basic level, all art relies upon its own frame. In performance, this frame is doubled. While the actor has to negotiate between her thinking self and her performed character, so too does the audience. One can choose to watch a character maneuver within the narrative, or, one can watch an actor actively negotiate the ways a character maneuvers within the narrative. It is through the sheer presence of a screen body that we are at all times exposed to a story, and an active interpretation of a story – to art’s technical structure and aesthetic surface. This is the art of the actor, and the function of performance.

In analyzing the role of the artist, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the painter and the architect, whose technical compositions (backdrops, blueprints, and outlines) provide a substructure for the aesthetic plane (colours and accents). In this respect, the actor’s self, along with the actor’s technical preparation, serve as the foundation to the character she embodies. The screen body is problematized on account of its own doubleness, in that it is simultaneously composed and undone, belonging at all times to character and actor. Not only are we bearing witness to an emotional separation between character and actor, we can also account for the physical conditioning that separates actor and character. For
instance, in Darren Aronofsky’s *Black Swan* (2010), we see an emaciated Natalie Portman, who has starved herself and trained extensively in the art of dance to come as close to authentically embodying a struggling New York city company ballerina as possible. We are also privy to the storyline of Nina (the swan queen), who eventually falls victim to her own hallucinations whilst performing the lead in the production of Swan Lake. The art of the actor does not so much lie in Nina’s storyline, but rather, in Portman’s ability to externalize her own bodily conditioning for the screen. The actor’s own technical form is a malleable aspect to performance. In her portrayal of Nina, Portman moves beyond herself on an emotional (or sensational) level, as well as a physical (or technical) level. In a sense, her own body becomes external to itself given her willingness to perform her conditioned body as a part of her process of becoming other.

Figure 1: Still of Natalie Portman from Darren Aronofsky’s *Black Swan* (2010)
Screen bodies operate within a medium that is often championed for its technical achievements, and subsequently analyzed for the sake of what lies beneath the aesthetic the surface (simply consider any awards ceremony, festival Q&A, or industry interview). In stating that, “a work of art is never produced by or for the sake of technique,” Deleuze and Guattari diminish the status of the technical plane, and yet they do not deny its crucial necessity (1994 192). If technicality were meaningless, art would cease to be compositional and would therefore cease to be considered art. As such, technicality becomes the differentiating factor that separates art from otherness. In misunderstanding the assembly of a performance, the nature of the compositional art form has been debated and misrepresented both academically and otherwise. The actor operates on a technical level, while relying upon a body that performs a character rendered accessible to audiences on a surface level. Yet, the technical substructure working to uphold this surface is continuously informing how a performance is to be engaged with aesthetically. For example, we are well aware of the fact that Natalie Portman suffered in her portrayal of the swan queen (we can see her protruding bones), and we are aware of the fact she trained (we see her on relevé). The same can be said for Christian Bale’s skeletal frame in The Machinist (Anderson 2004), Rooney Mara’s pierced new-wave image in Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (Fincher 2011), or Emma Stone’s heroin-chic body in Birdman. These types of body-centered performances render the technical-aesthetic division visible and palatable, and in many ways they illustrate the actor’s own compositional (and technical) assembly for us.

Walter Benjamin claims that “[f]ilm is much less interested in having the actor portray another person to the audience than in having the actor portray himself to the camera” (1936, 18). This is true for the celebrity or star actor. While technical aspects of a film performance can
be rendered aesthetically visible, especially when it comes to the actor’s frame (e.g. Portman’s protruding bones in *Black Swan*) there comes a point where the technical plane can speak over art. Performances can readily fall victim to the star personas that portray them. In some cases, a star actor’s own personality is overinflated to the point where the roles they play on screen work to uphold their own public construct (as opposed to the actor’s identity working to uphold their art). This upsets Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of composition given that it reverses art’s compositional process. In turn, it can be suggested that a star performance, if conceived as such, is not art given that the character winds up informing the technical image / the actor. In analyzing the role of the artist, Deleuze and Guattari consider the architect, whose technical work (blueprints, frames, and outlines) provides a substructure for the aesthetic plane (paint, colours, and accents) to work upon. This parallels the idea of an actor who constructs her own physicality in order to produce an aesthetic illusion that goes above and beyond typical performance protocol. That said, when the illusion is undermined by the actor’s technical plane, the performance becomes a stepping-stone for a very separate project. Perhaps this can account for the tendency in academia and culture alike, to strictly evaluate the technical achievements of a performance (e.g. physical transformations) to determine a performance’s success and relevance, without necessarily taking into consideration the interplay between the technical and aesthetic planes. In other words, form can speak louder than content.

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26 Much has been written about the ways in which Marilyn Monroe’s star persona influences, and speaks over the reception to her body of work.
2.2 The Transformative Body in Practice

Bernadette Wegenstein writes on the *cosmetic gaze* – the tendency to approach mediated bodies with the notion of rearrangement in mind. Wegenstein considers mediated bodies (female bodies in particular) to have surfaced onto a plane of potentiality that requires adjustment, reassembly, and even cutting (cosmetic surgery). The cosmetic gaze can readily be applied to the film actor’s body, in which performances win awards for the physical undertakings required of the role. Many of the most notable Hollywood performances throughout the past decade subscribe to the *body-acting* trend. In addition to the films and performances mentioned in this chapter, contemporary films such as *Requiem for a Dream* (Aronofsky 2000), *Night Crawler* (Gilroy 2014), *Les Misérables* (Hooper 2012), *Hunger* (2008), *Into the Wild* (Penn 2007), *The Fighter* (Russell 2009), *Dallas Buyers Club* (Vallée 2013) and *Wild* (Glazer 2014) require for the actor’s body to assist with the narrative. Not only are the bodies heavily conditioned in this set of films, they are commercialized via the Hollywood machine in order to draw attention back to the technicalities associated with the performance.

Hollywood’s body-acting trend can be mapped from popular trade-magazine headlines alone: “Is Oscar just a weighing game?: Actors who have gone to physical extremes for their roles have wowed their peers – and endangered their health,” “Paunching above his weight: Christian Bale shows off another body transformation... as he reveals beer belly in new American Hustle trailer,” “50 Cent weight GAIN: not so skinny anymore,” and “Natalie Portman, Mila Kunis talk starving, bonding for Black Swan.” Contemporary depictions of the emaciated screen body serves to illustrate the function of composition
and the performance process. Not only does the emaciated frame provide a visual for an actor's technical undertakings when preparing for a role, it also serves as a point of entry for broader discussions of stardom and celebrity. More importantly, in undoing the body for a film role, the actor's relationship to time and process is rendered more distinguishable. It should be noted that the compositional process that I aim to illustrate through examples of emaciated bodies is reflective of a process that pertains to all film actors (body-focused performances and otherwise). Performances calling for extreme bodily conditioning highlight the division between the technical and aesthetic planes that I aim to illustrate in this thesis, and in doing this, the body becomes the palate to the performance.

Emaciated screen bodies can also be described as fetishistically decomposed surfaces, shaped by the technical process, and shared by both actor and character. When emaciating the body for the sake of a role, the actor's technical frame protrudes through the flesh of both the actor and the medium. Not only does an emaciated body call attention away from the character and back to the actor, the actor's technical means of attaining such a body exposes us to the framework art aims to cover. These performances maximize the effectiveness of their materiality through a commitment to decomposing the self for the sake of artistic composition. Generally speaking, actors are consistently aiming to undo the self in order to become other (undoing particular modes of speech, undoing habits, undoing muscle memory, etc). Performance is not so much predicated upon the act of building, as much as it is committed to the act of decomposing a preexisting structure and way of being. Bodily decomposition serves as a symbol of this process of undoing to do. By blatantly
exposing audiences to the destructive nature of performance via an emaciated body, an understanding of the actor's relationship to otherness is forged. In implicating the body, suddenly performances become traceable entities (perhaps this can account for the awards that accompany the body-acting trend). A successful performance can be achieved without physical implication, but given that the actor's body is so closely intertwined with the technical aspects of performance, it seemingly, and often problematically stands for the literalization of process.

In Elaine Scarry's study on the body and pain, she claims that torture "bestows visibility on the structure" of pain, which is otherwise "contained within the boundaries of the sufferer's body" (27). The same can be said for the actor who endures any sort of physical suffering for the sake of art. The actor serves as both torturer and prisoner when faced with her own frame. She enters into a contact with her art by route of her body while chasing the visibility of suffering (not necessarily the suffering itself). The trouble in overemphasizing the role of the actor's body results in a *visibility* of pain or excess that is easily confused with an artist's personal suffering (mental or physical). In viewing and evaluating a performance via suffering, one risks accepting that performances are achievements with end points ('she starved herself, therefore she truly experienced that which her character experiences'). It would also suggest that the closer an actor comes to facing her own demise, the more likely these performances are to be authentically accepted, when in fact there is nothing authentic about an actor's process.\(^27\) In order to avoid these pitfalls, the body should be approached on two levels, in the same way that

\(^{27}\) The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences is seemingly committed to this train of thinking.
Deleuze and Guattari approach art (both technical and aesthetic). The technical film body is both a springboard of visibility, *and* a container for the undone personality. It belongs both to the actor and the character.

Not only does the body act as the liaison between self and other, we must also acknowledge (as per general star studies scholarship) that it serves as the link between actor and society. In this sense, a recognizable actor’s body will be compared and contrasted to all previous works, while the relatively unknown actor has the opportunity to undo herself and her body without the same crossover risks. The art of the recognizable (or ‘star’) actor is renegotiated to include the undoing of all previous characters and all public appearances. Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke, who are critical of the current star studies stronghold over performance in film studies, describe “[a]udience interpretations of star performances” as being “influenced by publicity and an actor’s work in a series of films” (65). Studies focusing on Christian Bale’s body-driven performance in *The Machinist*, for example, do not fail to recognize his emaciated frame in relation to his professional resume. From a deadly playboy in *American Psycho* (Harron 2000), to a withered steel worker in *The Machinist*, to an iconic superhero in *Batman Begins* (Nolan 2005) and *The Dark Knight* (Nolan 2008), to a wasted junkie in *The Fighter* (2010), back to Batman in *The Dark Knight Rises* (Nolan 2012), to a bloated swindler in *American Hustle* (Russell 2013), Bale’s reputation parallels his willingness to seismographically alter his physical appearance in the name of art. In consequence, Bale’s technical undertakings are rarely considered from a compositional standpoint. Instead, his art is approached almost entirely from a technical standpoint, which render his films and characters byproducts to the ever-
fluctuating scale. While Bale’s commitment to his art may be earnest, his career speaks over the compositional structure of each individual performance, ultimately detracting from the nature of the art form.

When it comes to a known actor, the aesthetic plane no longer exists as an aggregated surface. Instead, it serves as a support system for the actor’s own career and personality. The star actor enters into the frame as her own public and pre-packaged composition, resulting in a barrage of technical excess that calls upon the memory and extratextual knowledge of the spectator. When the technical tools of the actor have been so heavily vetted within popular culture, in many ways the performances become dictated by the shadows they cast, and by the preconceived notions of those that give rise to them. As such, aggregated aesthetic surfaces no longer seem necessary or appealing. In discussing the major differences between film and theatrical performances, Benjamin claims:

Film’s response to the shriveling of aura is an artificial inflation of ‘personality’ outside the studio. The cult of stardom promoted by film capital preserves the magic of personality that for years has lain solely in the rancid magic of its commodity character. (1936 21)

When watching a Meryl Streep on screen, for instance, we encounter a known person portraying a character (the technical supported by the aesthetic). When we encounter the

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28 I have often wondered if one were to conduct a study of onscreen weight loss, how many respondents would be able to name any of the characters that the actors in question portrayed. My point being that films are moving away from their own aesthetic, and are being celebrated for their technical (bodily) achievements. I strongly feel that in western cinema, we have reached a point where the technicalities that factor into a film are seemingly of more importance than the films themselves. The same can be said for body-acting performances.
work of a lesser-known actor on screen, we are more likely to encounter the character as performed by the actor (the aesthetic supported by the technical). According to Deleuze and Guattari, the latter is more conducive to the composition of art. It would take a very specific film spectator to engage with a Streep performance without automatically referencing and negotiating the actor’s grander body of work via her own stardom and public appeal. In order for a rounded understanding, a film performance should be considered from both an aesthetic and technical standpoint.

For the actor, both the technical and aesthetic planes manifest themselves by route of the body and present themselves ‘in the moment,’ or as the Deleuze of The Logic of Sense might suggest, in the form of a ‘pure event.’ Deleuze recognizes the paradox of the actor in that “the actor maintains himself in the instant in order to act out something perpetually anticipated and delayed, hoped for and recalled” (1990 171). The status of the screen actor’s body wavers between a site of construction, a mediator of sensation, and a reflection of the artist’s interface for daily life. This sharing between actor and character results in a body that must surrender and devour itself in order to become something that can never be fully realized. Once again, we must return to this idea of performance as liminality. Characters are aesthetic suggestions, not destinations. They are to be interpreted and suggested by the actor, but never attained.

2.3 Dead Time

The distinguishing factor between a stage performance and performance for the screen lies in the actor’s relationship to time. In The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,
Benjamin addresses this disparity, calling attention to *presence* when discerning between theatre and film. For Benjamin, screen performances differ in that *a.* they are mediated through the camera that captures and records, and *b.* they lack the personal contact of an immediate audience, thereby disallowing screen actors to make adequate adjustments to their art form (1936 17-18). According to Benjamin, the screen actor’s performance is broken into a “series of episodes,” that require assembly (1936 20). Christian Metz takes a similar stance, arguing that the film actor (the signifier) acts as an embodiment of *absence* given that “everything is recorded” (43). He states:

> [I]n the cinema, the actor was present when the spectator was not (= shooting), and the spectator is present when the actor is no longer (= projection): a failure to meet of the voyeur and the exhibitionist whose approaches no longer coincide (they have ‘missed’ one another). (63)

This notion of disconnection is alluded to by Robert Nunn in his article “Flickering Lights and Declaiming Bodies: Semiosis in Film and Theatre.” Guided by Metz, Nunn argues that, “[f]ilm is absence pretending to be presence” and “[t]heater is presence pretending to be absence” (157). In his reading of performative symmetry between the mediums, Nunn gives both a filmic and a theatrical reading of two specific scenarios. In the first scenario, a film actor empties a pail of water on screen. Nunn writes that “[y]ou duck. Nothing is coming at you,” given that the water is both spatially and temporally absent, having been both performed and captured in the past (157). In the second scenario, a stage actor empties a pail of ‘water’ onto the audience from his position upon a stage. The audience ducks only to be met with the representation of water (confetti). Once again, the water was
absent, but “it was signified by something that was unmistakably there,” something present in space (157). In its absence, film gives the illusion of being ever-present, while the theatre aims for an illusion of absence through its presence. Not only does temporality illustrate the difference between the two performative mediums, for the film actor, it acts as the binding force that connects the actor to her art form. For the film actor, everything is measured against time.

The Metzian formula measuring absence and presence in performance directly implicates the performance body (a body that is continuously being measured against its past/actor self). When performing for film, the actor performs her conditioned body to best suit her character. This is done for the sake of a future illusion, and for the sake of a potential aesthetic, sensory exchange between her art and future audience. Bergson states that the “body, being extended, is capable of acting upon itself as well as upon other bodies” (1991 232). The key to this statement lies in the body’s ability to extend itself, not in space, but through time. When watching a film, we actively witness an actor attempting to abandon the self while forging a present moment for the sake of the character and narrative. The actor’s relationship to time is uniquely outlined by this task of adjoining the past and future within a fictitious present.

The actor pre-prepares the body prior to shooting. She commits to the process of becoming other through mental preparation and physical conditioning. The bodily conditioning is achieved through weight loss or gain, altering workout regimes, makeup, and/or costuming, etc. Unlike film, the stage actor has the luxury of utilizing the active body within a present moment. The stage body moves, and engages with audiences through
gestures and signals, while the film body is forever subservient to the act of capturing and recording (as per Benjamin). The process of becoming character in film requires for the actor to undo the self in the past in the name of an eventual present (a present that will ultimately exist upon being pieced together in editing). The stage body, on the other hand, works within the present to convince the audience that she has transformed herself into her character. In film, performance is a sacrificial piece of the technical process, while on stage, the performance serves as an aggregate, or pinnacle. While the screen actor pre-conditions the body in an attempt to eliminate traces of herself from her character, the stage actor works to become other by actively merging self and character in the present moment. It is for this reason that theatrical performances can be regarded as fusions of time and being, while film performances serve as fractures of these very qualities. In simplified (and perhaps more traditional) terms, the stage actor projects her character, while the film actor internalizes hers.

It is argued in Deleuze’s cinema projects (Cinema I/II) that the essential difference between stage and screen acting concerns the very process, passing, splitting, and advancing of time. Deleuze is immensely influenced by Bergson’s conceptualization of duration, which is linked to movement and action. For Deleuze, theatre is immediate; actors are performing in and for the moment where the before and after meet. In theatre, spectators are able to become one with the art form at the precise moment when the actor actualizes her character, allowing for the performance to lock itself onto the aesthetic plane. As explained in What is Philosophy?, “[t]here is only a single plane in the sense that art includes no other plane than that of aesthetic composition” (195 1994). Film acting, as
argued previously in this chapter, is forever negotiating the relationship between the technical and aesthetic planes. For the actor, the performative moment (the moment in which the actor performs before the camera) is entirely detached from the performance itself. They are detached in location, arrangement, and time. A film performance is not complete until it is composed and edited together. As such, film actors act for the future – a future that will call for the fragmented pieces of the performance to be editorially assembled into a collective whole. Actors often shoot entire films out of order, which, in turn, forces them to weave a seemingly linear emotional journey out of chaos and fragmentation.

Film performances are collages of moments that forever lack their epicenter. The film actor’s present is reached for in the performative moment, but it cannot be fully realized until it has attained its own future. The film actor suggests a present moment as she performs her character before a camera, and this suggestion is responded to in editing, once the moment has long since passed. Time is perhaps one of the most uneven aspects of performative composition. The moment in which action takes place for the actor serves as the character’s fictive past, and the actor’s past serves as a steppingstone into the character’s future. For this reason it can be argued that film performances do not exist in time, but rather, emerge out of a collection of fractured moments. In doing this, the actor deterministically embodies her character, much like Bousquet’s wound, in which, “my wound existed before me; I was born to embody it” (as qtd in 1994 159). This moment only begins to emerge when an actor is stationed before the camera. This is the unfinished moment – the suggestion. This is the moment that does not exist within time, but rather, is
drawn out of it. This moment is a *dead time*, where both nothing and "an infinite awaiting that is already infinitely past" take place (1994 158). This is where art's paradigmatic model ruptures and rips itself out of time while simultaneously surfacing onto the aesthetic plane. This is where film performances reside.

According to Deleuze, the actor’s present, unlike God’s eternal present, “is the most narrow, the most contracted, the most instantaneous, and the most punctual” (1990 170-71). It is for this reason that Deleuze has labeled the actor the contre-dieu.29 The actor makes suggestions as to the ways a character should be perceived, but even after a complete bodily transformation for the sake of a role, the actor can never truly embody her own character. Ultimately, embodiment takes place beyond the actor’s self, and upon the aesthetic plane. Not only does the actor lack a sense of control over her performance, she is forever bound by her temporal position. The regulation of chaos takes place on a stage for the theater actor, and yet it takes place within the editing bay for the film actor. Not only does this draw out the performative process, it keeps the film performance from ever being able to move beyond its own composition and process. The actor’s process is reflected in Benjamin’s understanding of the film actor’s aura, in which he states:

> The aura surrounding the player must thus be lost – and with it, at the same time, the aura around the character played,” the actor’s relationship to time is simultaneously lost while being played out (1936 18).

This brings us to Deleuze’s *agitation of the actor*, in which the clashing between the breaking down of self, and the composition of character results in a production – a

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29 The anti-God
performance. A film actor’s ability to become is predicated upon the actor’s technique (which is physicalized via the body). In vigorously performing before the camera, the film actor’s art remains unfinished upon completion, which confirms her position within the entre-temps. The actor labours in order to lend her chaos to the camera, and in turn, the filmic process blends it for her.

For Deleuze, time is one of the greatest paradoxes. He argues in Cinema II that time is “not the interior in us, but just the opposite, the interiority in which we are, in which we move, live, and change” (1985 82). Deleuze describes the body as a means of encapsulating the beforeness and the afterness of time. He suggests that, “[t]he body is never in the present, it contains the before and the after, tiredness and waiting” (1985 189). Deleuzian time informs this reading of the film actor, who is responsible for one body and two separate ideas of self. In essence, the film actor deals with splintered presents; that of the acting self (which relies upon conditioning and preparation within a performative moment), and that of the performed character (which cannot exist until it has been actualized in the future). The actor not only acts within a moment that is divided in time, she is also split in that her body is accommodating acts of suppression (the actor) and projection (the character). Only one of these selves is intended to reach the screen and become one with sensation, despite the fact that within the aesthetic surface of the medium, there remains traces of the technical process which can never be fully effaced. The body is one of these technical elements that protrudes through the medium, and distracts from artistic composition.
There is often a misconception that film actors have the same ability as theatre actors, to fluidly lose themselves in the roles they play. This is evidenced in the work of Andrew Klevan who suggests that ‘good’ performances move and flow to establish a “presence and precision of meaning seemingly at the same time as they are adjusting and transforming them” (2011 45). Klevan fails to distinguish between flow as a fluid display of emotion, and flow as a reconstruction of performative moments spanning over an arrangement of separate times. He acknowledges that actors move within time and space, and yet his critical approach suggests that performances are cohesive offerings, not taking into account the fact that performances are constructed out of continuous interruptions to the flow of time (set ups, lighting alterations, turn arounds). Performances are not simply displays of inner emotion, they are active negotiations of the past and future. The film actor lacks the freedom to unhinge herself from her own process and to experience her performance as a pure event. In a sense, the film actor must work harder to overcome the technical interruptions she faces, unlike the theatre actor, who can commit to scenes in their entirety. Constantin Stanislavski’s theories are often considered the foundation for contemporary method actors. Stanislavski speaks of the actor’s job of bringing past experiences to the present to convey a not only realistic, but real emotion that connects the emotion of the character to the actor’s self:

> When a real artist is speaking the soliloquy ‘to be or not to be,’ is he merely putting before us the thoughts of the author and executing the business indicated by his director? No, he puts into the lines much of his own

30 We take into account that Stanislavski’s teachings were developed for the stage
conception of life... Such an artist is not speaking in the person of an imaginary Hamlet. He speaks in his own right as one placed in the circumstances created by the play. The thoughts, feelings, conceptions, reasoning of the author are transformed into his own. (1936 215)

While Stainslavski's teachings maintain their relevance within the film community today, they are perhaps more representative of a performative idealism that like a character, can be strived for, but never attained.

Stanislavski’s championing of the present moment is reflected in much of the performance scholarship that exists today. It is here where most believe the film performance to exist when failing to consider the complexity that arises when performing through an uneven time, and not just within a linear time. As opposed to living and breathing a performative moment, the film actor is continuously making sacrifices to adhere to the technical limitations that face her – not only in regards to body and time, but in the context of the filmic process which is clunky and repetitive. The film actor’s circuit between character and actor remains open ended once the performative moment has passed. It is for this reason that the present moment is a dead time to the film actor. As such, the time in which a film actor speaks a soliloquy (as per Stanislavski) is a time where the actor must channel her preparation and conditioning directly into a camera that will later produce a sense of flow for her. In a sense, the film actor is denied the luxury of living out her own emotion. Instead, she sacrifices it. Time works against the film actor. It forces
the actor to match the master take,\(^{31}\) to consider her position within the film’s narrative, to negotiate her physical positioning before a camera, and to repeat her performance from take to take. These technical aspects to performance are all subservient to the aesthetic plane, and they are all integral to film’s compositional process.

The actor and character use the body for separate purposes in film. Once again, the performing body contains two separate aims. The character relies upon the actor’s body to express a story. The actor also uses her body as a means of upholding everything that feeds into the aesthetic surface of the medium, and she does this by relying upon her own technique. In *Cinema I*, Deleuze briefly explores the assembly of a film performance while connecting it to the sensory-motor link, and to the action-image at large. He states that, “what must appear on the outside is what happens inside the character, at the intersection of the situation which permeates and the action which is to detonate” (1983 158). In effect, Deleuze suggests that it is the internal link that bridges the “fictitious situation” and the “sham action” experienced by the actor, thus allowing for the actor to internalize the act of killing without hurting anyone, or the act of drunkenness without sipping alcohol (1983 158). In acting as both projecter and container of emotion, the actor is faced with a dilemma (Deleuze’s *agitation* of the actor), in which the actor actively consults the technical aspects of her performance in order to commit to a *sham* experience for the sake of the aesthetic plane. In other words, while the actor is chasing a visibility of her character’s experience, the character is being puppeteered by her own master (self). The negotiation between the technical and aesthetic planes during a performance further

\(^{31}\) The establishing wide shot to which all closer shots should match. The master is generally shot first.
disrupts the conceivability of a present moment for the film actor and forces her to mediate her own temporal position.
Chapter 3: Illustrations of a Filmic Body

“The masochist needs to believe that he is dreaming even when he is not.”

-Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*

3.1 Masochism and Post-Performance

The actor is a masochist. She enters into a contract with her own art by route of her own body. The contract makes explicit the actor's willingness to sustain a certain level of pain and abuse for the sake of a role – particularly in performances of emaciation. For the actor, pleasure is postponed and continuously sought after. In turn, the actor enters into a prolonged state of waiting (waiting to set a character in motion, waiting for the close-up, waiting for the performance to be assembled and actualized, waiting for a reaction, waiting for the next role). It is this state of perpetual anticipation and suspense that drives the Deleuze of *Coldness and Cruelty* to describe waiting as the “essential characteristics of the masochistic experience” (1989 70). The actor is masochistic in that she lingers in anticipation as the totality of her preparation and sacrifice feeds into the compositional structure of both her performance and the filmic medium at large. It is this postponement of pleasure combined with the foreseeing of pain for the sake of visuality that results in masochistic gratification (1989 71). In *Coldness and Cruelty*, Deleuze investigates the relationship between sadism and masochism through an analysis of the works of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. In doing this, Deleuze suggests that the masochist’s experience is

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32 I would like to thank Dr. Christine Evans for the suggestions that inspired this section of the thesis.
33 Pain, in this case is generated from the undoing one's sense of self, body, morality, etc.
entirely distinct from that of the sadist. While the masochist's sense of gratification is preceded by pain, punishment, and humiliation, the fantasy is ultimately rendered pleasurable through the acts of suspense and repetition. In other words, the masochist operates in direct relation to time.

The actor is ritualistic. In film, the actor sustains self-inflicted abuse in the name of, and for the sake of authenticity, while committing to specific patterns in preparation for her scenes. There is an inherent violence associated with the act of performing. As mentioned in the previous chapter, film actors are sacrificial. Not only do the actor's characters violate the private sphere, the actor is forced to negotiate between her sense of self and other at all times. As such, a performance is set in motion through the undoing of self - a process that is strictly reliant upon the body. The more extreme, dangerous, or painful the character's situation, the more obvious the actor's masochistic contract with the self becomes (hence, our tendency to mistake physical commitment for a successful performance). It is in mitigating the law (in this case the filmic process) that the masochist emphasizes “its extreme severity” (1989 91). In physically demanding performances, this extreme severity is illustrated through the body, given its ability to act as the visual realization of pain (Scarry). The actor's body serves as a map to a performance given the body's ability to be tangibly read and received. In conditioning the body in certain ways, the actor can effectively alter the shape of a performance. In this chapter I will discuss a handful of film performances that require for the actor to starve or abuse the body prior to a shoot. In these films the actors participate in an organized and constructed (one could
also say contracted) attempt to regulate the chaos and disorder of the filmmaking process through their willingness to sacrificially undo the self.

While the body of the actor is visually transmissible via the filmic medium, the actor’s psychological relationship to a character is difficult, if not impossible to trace. An actor’s mental commitment to her character leaves behind an *impression* – something that can be sensed but not grasped, felt but not traced, pointed to but not located. It is this intangibility of the impression that attracts the spectator’s eye to the concrete aspects of the medium – in this case, the body. In portrayals of physical abuse or pain, the film body relays emotional and situational aspects of a character visually, and at times without the actor’s emotional commitment. While the tendency to read performances visually is often associated with audiences, it too has an influence over the ways actors choose to perform. For the actor, pleasure is derived in conditioning the body and mind to best suit the character. The actor, like the audience, enhances her understanding of a character through these concrete aspects of becoming. In a sense, physicalizing a performance provides all parties with a definitive, albeit superfluous goal. Stanislavski acknowledges the importance of performative physicality in *Creating a Role*, where it is stated that:

[The actor] can develop habits in his role which are not native to him, and methods of physical portrayal as well, and he can change his mannerisms, his exterior. All this will make the actor seem different to the audience. But he will always remain himself too. He acts on the stage in his own right, even though spiritually and physically he may transfer himself to be more akin to the role he is playing. (1981 71-2)
A masochistic reading of this would suggest that the actor is willingly binding herself to her own fantasy in the name of performative authenticity. As she does this, and as acknowledged by Stanislavski, she maintains composure by containing and keeping her sense of self at the center of the bodily action.

One of the most integral aspects to Deleuze’s reading of masochism emerges from his understanding of the masochistic contract. Deleuze states that the “masochist appears to be held by real chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone” (1989 75). Not only is the actor/masochist’s contract reflective of the institutional politics of the medium (contracts, casting, agents), it serves to underscore the actor’s reflexive relationship to her art. What Deleuze’s assessment of the contract elucidates, is the idea of a heightened, logical awareness from which all performativity springs. In this sense, the actor undoes herself physically by maintaining herself strategically. It is in the maintaining of a logical epicenter that allows the actor to observe her own tears while smiling during a performance (as per Stanislavski). It is also what sets her apart from a linear relationship to her desire. The actor’s gratification is rendered through a sense that she has performed her pain authentically. As such, the actor must at all times maintain a heightened technical awareness of her self, her performative strategy, and her motivations in order to render her art visually appealing. This entire conception parallels Deleuze and Guattari’s technical and aesthetic planes, which goes to suggest that art, while seemingly all aesthetic,

34 It this idea of a contract with the self that serves to debunk many of the romanticized notions concerning method acting. Contrary to popular myth, the actor does not ‘lose herself’ when performing. It is, in fact, quite the opposite. She maintains herself at all time.
is continuously informed by its own strategic, technical substructure. It is in contracting oneself to one’s art that one distinguishes between the self and the surface.

As mentioned previously, the art of the actor is composed, and immediately sacrificed for the sake of the filmic process. This highlights another important point from Coldness and Cruelty: “waiting and delay” (1989 71). The actor’s willingness to sustain abuse for the sake of her art is perhaps more significant than any physical harm that may result from the compositional process. Once again, it is time that helps to define the art of the actor. As established in the previous chapter, time is fractured and suspended for the film actor. The film actor acts within a performative moment, and for a future that is not only beyond grasp, but subject to external manipulation and arrangement (from the director’s direction to the editing bay). As such, a film performance exists beyond its own execution. This effectively draws out the lifespan of a performance, to the point where the film actor experiences her own performative execution as a dead time. It is in surrendering the self and the body to the filmmaking process that the actor maintains command over her own art in the same way that the masochist “postpones pleasure in expectation of the pain which will make gratification possible” (1989 71). This “indefinite awaiting of pleasure and an intense expectation of pain,” calls for the actor to make temporary sacrifices with the understanding that any pain endured will result in an eventual (artistic) gratification (1989 71). For Deleuze, “[d]isorder is another form of order, and the decomposition of death is equally the composition of life” (1989 27). The masochistic contract, which pertains to the actor’s physicality and emotionality, calls for this kind of decomposition and disorder. As
such, through a masochistic contract, the actor’s performance comes closer to being authentically realized than it would through a simple visualization of pain and suffering.

For the actor, the technical aspects of a performance are both extrinsic, and internal. This idea is of course troubled when the body of the actor becomes the object of frenzied fascination (both to the actor and spectator). To consider masochism as the act of enjoying violence is to misunderstand the role of the contract and the masochist’s relationship to time and process. In addition to this, when it comes to the actor, mental engagement does not necessarily align with physical engagement (and vice versa). The film actor’s ability to psychically disengage from the process of filmmaking is to be expected on account of the tiredness, waiting, delay and repetition. Generally, the actor has pre-conditioned the body prior to shooting, meaning that the body carries a great deal of the performative baggage. In repeating a performance ten times over while making considerations for the sake of the camera/angle/lighting setup/direction, an actor will be pressed to disengage from her surroundings, instead opting to operate on a visual level. Given that the aesthetic aspects of the art form do not truly begin to emerge until the performance has been assembled in later stages of the process, technicality dictates daily operations during the filmmaking process. As a result, the actor at times performs her own act of performing (forging her own engagement with her character). It is the actor’s subservience to the process that often disrupts the actor-character connection, resulting in a display of emptied carcass-bodies that, while mostly inactive during shooting, are put into action as the film comes together.
In her assessment of the structure of torture, Scarry describes how a prisoner ultimately gains his voice and agency, through translating “pain into power,” and ultimately “body into voice” (45). Not only does this fittingly describe the intentions behind the true Bobby Sands’ political motivations for hunger striking as recreated in McQueen's *Hunger*, it aptly describes how contemporary actors, such as Fassbender, are achieving notoriety in an ever-evolving industry. By rendering the acting process physical, and hence, visual, the actor moves away from subjective scrutiny given that physicality can be read more concretely. While an audience can maintain differing opinions as to what a good or bad performance consists of, starvation and pain are easily read. As a result, film actors are frequently using their bodies to voice their stories with the intention of allowing their bodies to perform in their place.

Figure 2: Still Michael Fassbender from Steve McQueen’s *Hunger* (2008)
Fassbender is standing in a prison cell. He is examining his own boney frame as the camera pans across his emaciated body. Fassbender is conveying to the audience his level of sickness and suffering. He is also performing a specific level of sickness and suffering as experienced by his character in the midst of the 1981 hunger strike in Northern Ireland’s Maze prison. The immediacy generated by an actor’s willingness to embody a dangerous physicality frame for the sake of a performance is a point of entry for McQueen. In other words, the film’s ability to build an accessible bridge between the technical and aesthetic planes results in a physical intimacy between self and character. In doing this, a film such as *Hunger* illustrates how unnecessary it is for Fassbender to *perform* his pain. For example, in this scene, a simple hand motion points to all of the pre-conditioning that took place off screen and prior to shooting. It also alludes to the pain experienced by Sands. An actor who has immensely altered the body for the sake of a performance need not (necessarily) portray the *act* of feeling pain as much as she must point to the story being told by her own physical frame. While makeup and lighting tend to enhance the severity of these types of performative images, a film such as *Hunger’s* strongest asset nevertheless lies in the body of the lead actor. In this film, Fassbender is embodying his own suffering in an effort to carve out a more shocking illusion of his character. The same can be said for actors who embody their pre-existing disabilities for the sake of the screen (*Under the Skin, Freaks* [Browning 1932]). With such emphasis being placed on the body in these sorts of body-acting films, it can be argued that the contemporary film actor’s performative moment has shifted out of the frame altogether, leaving us with a simple imprint of a
performance. Perhaps the true performance lies in the act of conditioning and undoing the body prior to shooting, thereby enhancing the actor’s own dead time.

Performing bodily emaciation (or any extreme form of bodily manipulation) provides the actor with the ability to, at least superficially, experience the pain and suffering of the character. No longer do actors have to convince an audience through their ability to emote, as their bodies can do that for them. This is contrary to the acting styles that dominated prior to the twentieth century, where performances were theatricalized and externalized for the sake of emoting from a stage. As evidenced in one of the images of a performing actor from Edmund Shaftesbury’s Lessons in the Art of Acting (below), actors were encouraged to communicate via grand gestures. In this particular image, a man expressively lifts his arms and face in effort to portray agony – standing in stark contrast to Fassbender’s performance of Bobby Sands.
As technology has continued to advance, emoting in modern cinema has grown into an increasingly internalized activity. In contemporary cinema, actors swallow their own performances in adherence to the 'less is more' rule-of-thumb. In many body-driven performances, the act of emoting is no longer a necessary requirement, but an added touch to a conditioned body. This does not, however, mean that the actor suffers to the same degree as her character. The actor's pain and suffering has more to do with the act of
undoing the self than it does to physical conditioning. The film actor suffers for the sake of a process. For example, Brad Pitt’s decision to have his teeth chipped by a dentist in order to perform his role as Fight Club (1999) headmaster Tyler Durden does not mean he suffered from being repeatedly brutalized in an underground fighting ring, in the same way that Tom Hanks did not contract AIDS prior to his performance that chronicled his demise from AIDS in Philadelphia (Demme 1993). The actor suggests suffering and agony – acts that are later embodied as the performances are assembled in post.

The performance of emaciation, hunger, AIDS, depression, even death bring the actor a sense of gratification and fulfillment, not in the sense that the actor is often rewarded for such efforts (while this is in fact true), but in that the actor who watches her own tears takes the greatest pleasure in observing her own efforts to project chaos. It is the chasing of tears (or heightened moments) that the actor feels as if an experience is truly being felt. Of course performative truth is a goal with no end in sight. Performances should be regarded as artistic suggestions, informed by the restrictive nature of the filmmaking process, and shadowed by the actor’s ability to remain technically engaged. In turn, the actor’s pain is translated into masochistic satisfaction. An actor’s mental (one might also say, internal) relationship to her character varies from actor to actor and from scene to scene. For example, an actor need not be as emotionally present during a master shot as she would when framed in a close-up. She will often ‘save her tears’ for an opportune moment to maximize her performative output. Unlike stage actors, the film actor can attempt a scene more than once, in a variety of ways, and from a number of angles. Not only does she wait to perform during tireless setups and turnarounds on set, she must await the
actualization of her performance, and accept her subservient position within the filmmaking process. Deleuze writes that the act of waiting “represents the unity of the ideal and the real, the form or temporality of the fantasy” (1989 72). It is this act of perpetual waiting that uniquely links the film actor to time, while showcasing her willing compliance with the sadistic and institutional structures that she must maneuver her work around.

Technical awareness touches upon all aspects of a film performance. While the actor’s relationship to the technical plane varies from actor to actor, it always ensures that the actor is positioned in relation to her own potentiality. Striving to embody this potentiality is a part of the process, and it is not finalized upon the completion of a shoot. While performances can be relocated prior to the performative moment (bodily conditioning), they too continue to subsist prior to it as well. In fact, performances remain deconstructed even after the cameras have been put away, meaning that they are maintained as reservoirs of potentiality subject to further manipulation. For the masochist, pleasure is awaited in “qualitative suspense,” with an expectation of eventual pain (1989 134). With this in mind, the film actor must wait as her performance is assembled on her behalf. An eventual encounter with the end product (the edited performance within the film) serves as a totality of the actor’s own masochistic pain. This is by all means an agitating experience to which the body is once again outside itself. Performances are collected and manipulated (editorially) by the same institution that oversees the actor’s contract with the self and subsequent postponement of pleasure. Perhaps it is the knowledge of existing within an image and beyond the self that drives the actor’s
masochistic tendencies. Nevertheless, the actor’s relationship to the unstable self dictates much of the compositional process.

3.2 Undoing the Body

In discussing the role of the actor explicitly in *Cinema I*, Deleuze takes note of the ways in which performances are constructed. He explains that performances are linkages between the “permeating situation and the explosive action,” or, the “fictitious situation and the sham action” (1983 159). These negotiations operate via the actor’s body in cinema. It is the body that houses the narrative situations of the character, ultimately translating them into accessible actions for the sake of the aesthetic plane. For Deleuze, the actor’s technical tracings manifest themselves within the image itself – something that Deleuze argues leads to the “constant agitation of the actor” (1983 158). Deleuze recognizes that the inner elements of the performative art form involve the actor’s training (or to take this one step further, the actor’s preparation, which extends beyond training). These inner elements present themselves directly within the medium, meaning that at all times the technical aspects to a performance shine through. As a marker between realism and performance, Deleuze astutely mentions the role of the physical object in cinema. In *Cinema I*, Deleuze gives the example of the knife or hat, which calls for an autonomous response (the hat is worn, the knife cuts). Such a response draws upon an automatic, and interchangeable behaviour that connects the actor and character. Take for example the act of signing a document or removing a hat on film – these actions are seemingly performed without much thought or consideration on behalf of the actor. These actions can in turn be readily
accepted as non-performative actions given that the actor need but commit to a physical action (not necessarily a psychological one). By enhancing a performance with objects that actively \textit{act upon} the actor, characters appear to be performing within their natural state. Suddenly, a performance becomes reactionary as opposed to being expressive. As a result, when the actor's body parallels the character's body (an actor sprays perfume / a character sprays perfume), the performance gap between actor and character is narrowed.

For Deleuze, the object awakens "an emotion corresponding to the situation," which internally links object and emotion while breathing a life force directly into the image at hand (1983 158). But what happens when the object worthy of such life force is a part of the actor's physical frame? What happens when the bones protruding from within an emaciated body serve as the object connecting the performance to the genuine experience of the actor? In other words, how do we approach the vacillating status of the actor's body when it too is an object being played off of for the sake of the medium?
Figure 4: Still of Michael Fassbender from Steve McQueen’s *Hunger* (2008)

Figure 5: Still of Michael Fassbender from Steve McQueen’s *Hunger* (2008)

An emaciated screen body suggests that the character at hand is experiencing a certain degree or physical and/or emotional turmoil. It is also reflective of the actor’s technical
commitment to her art form. The actor must undo the self in order to become. One of the ways in which an undone body intensifies the connection between actor and character is through the performance of an autonomous response that presumably matches that of the character. At the same time, the actor’s action within the performative moment becomes less expressive, and more dependent upon the body’s ability to speak over a performance. It is in the stripping away of the physical body and in becoming less of oneself in the name of another that the actor can perform her role as artist. It too brings us back to Deleuze’s “double face of the actor,” who is “bracketed with his public role,” to suggest that “the more the virtual image of the role becomes actual and limpid, the more the actual image of the actor moves into the shadows and becomes opaque” (1994 71-2).

The actor is responsible for actualizing the virtual image, something Deleuze acknowledges as being unique to the cinema. At the same time, Deleuze recognizes how some actors engage in the process of actualization by embodying their own “excess[es] or shortcomings” in order to find their roles (1994 71). Deleuze gives the example of the “monsters” from Tod Browning’s *Freaks* (1932), who embody their own disabilities, for the sake of the screen. This differs immensely from the actor who willingly alters the body for the sake of the virtual image. Take, for example, actors such as Emma Stone (*Birdman*), Christian Bale (*The Machinist*), or Anne Hathaway (*Les Mis*), who have all starved their own bodies in striving toward authenticity. While certain performances involve the undoing of the body for the sake of a specific virtual image, other performances hinge upon the embodiment of a preexisting actual image. The former example positions the body within the compositional process of becoming character, while the latter does not.
Scarry’s claim that torture “bestows visibility” on the structuring of pain is reflective of the actor who engages in the compositional process in order to render a character’s feelings visible (27). The commonality when it comes to the handful of contemporary body-driven films discussed in this chapter, is that the actors are not only rendering pain visible through displays of suffering, and/or emaciation, this visibility is being rendered active, meaning that the body has become the physical object intended to advance the action of the plot. As such, the actor’s protruding bones are doing more than simply suggesting character traits or providing us with a general understanding of a character’s position within society. In cases where the actor must make substantial alterations to her physical form prior to shooting, the actor is pre-actualizing the virtual image. While this is generally taken to be a sign of commitment in the name of authenticity, such drastic undertakings bring us back to Deleuze’s “double face of the actor” in that we become hyperaware of bearing witness to both a suffering character, and an actor who suffers for her character (1994 71).

Fassbender’s portrayal of Bobby Sands in *Hunger* is depicted via a withering frame that fuels both the performance and the narrative. In the film, starving bodies serve as the source of action. As previously outlined, Fassbender’s bones are glorified to convey a sense of shock and urgency intended to drive the plot forward. That said, not all heavily conditioned film bodies serve such an active function. At other times, they serve to activate a character’s backstory. Emma Stone’s frail body in *Birdman*, while never the source of direct commentary or action within the film’s percussive plot, serves as an indication to the Samantha’s (Stone’s) former lifestyle. Stone’s hollowed face and figure are suggestive of a junkie-past, something that once communicated visually, no longer requires consideration
within the actor’s performative moment. In other words, the body communicates the harsh realities of a character’s circumstance on behalf of the actor. Undoing the body can be regarded as a source of liberation for the actor, who can pass some of the more difficult aspects of a performance onto her physical frame. In doing this, the actor relies upon more than just an aesthetic surface to convey her art form. She strategically engages the technical plane of composition to assist in telling the story of her character. In other words, the conditioned body becomes a sort of narrative spokesman for the actor and audience alike.

Shia LaBoeuf and Rooney Mara have recently committed forms of bodily-sacrifice for the sake of their recent performances. Mara not only committed to having real piercings prior to her portrayal of Lisbeth Salander in *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, she emaciated her own body to match the character description in the book series from which the film was adapted. In *Fury* (Ayer 2014), LaBoeuf sports torn skin on his right cheek (having opted to slash his own face), along with a missing bottom tooth, which was strategically removed prior to the shoot. Upon the completion of filming, LaBoeuf’s scars, like Mara’s eyebrow piercing, have remained visible. These forms of bodily conditioning once again, point to the compositional process of performance, suggesting that performances extend their capacity to influence well before and beyond the termination of a performative moment. Marks and scars on the actor’s body serve as cultural badges of honour, symbolizing commitment and seriousness to the art form. In an attempt to wear aspects of past performances, the actor’s art does, in a sense, continue to act upon the body.

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35 During an interview on Jimmy Kimmel’s *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* In October 2014, LaBoeuf revealed that he hired a dentist to remove one of his bottom teeth prior to shooting *Fury.*
Of course there are other performances that directly implicate the body without calling for such drastic physical undertakings. This is true of Reese Witherspoon's portrayal of Cheryl Strayed in *Wild*. Cheryl, in attempt to find herself, sets out on a thousand-mile journey along the Pacific Crest Trail, where she faces extreme temperatures, a lack of preparation, and most integrally to the plot: herself. Apart from the flashbacks and a few accessory characters, the film very much centralizes around Witherspoon and her character's relationship to herself – a relationship that candidly implicates the body. Throughout the film, and throughout the journey, it is suggested that Cheryl grows physically weaker, but mentally stronger. As opposed to chronicling an increasingly emaciated body as in *Hunger*, or, as in Vallée's earlier film *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), in which Jared Leto commits to the drawn-out act of dying from AIDS, Cheryl's withered body is mostly informed and performed via the external factors surrounding her. Her body is dirtied, bloodied, bruised, and beaten so as to highlight the physical (and mental) strain accompanying her strenuous journey. Witherspoon's commitment to her role does not include the same level of technical engagement as displayed in a film such as *Hunger* or *Dallas Buyers*. Instead, Witherspoon uses her body to navigate and display her physical surroundings in such a way that results in an expressive performance. In other words, where Witherspoon operates for the sake of an aesthetic surface, others such as Leto and Fassbender work from a place to showcase their own technical commitment. While all performances involve the use of an actor's body, when the body becomes spectacularized to the point where emoting pain is no longer necessary, the performance shifts. No longer

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36 Leto was honoured with an Academy Award for best supporting actor for his portrayal of a transgendered AIDS patient named Rayon in 2013.
are we accessing a body by route of a performance. Instead, we engage with a performance via a body – a body that gains attention not so much on account of its affiliation to its character, but in relation to the actor who has restructured her own frame in order to portray another.

It is important that we differentiate between the performance of a conditioned body, and a body that performs its own condition. With specific reference to the disabled bodies displayed in the works of Browning (particularly *Freaks*), actors embody their characters through an embodiment of their own preexisting conditions. In *Cinema II*, Deleuze writes that:

> The actor is bracketed with his public role: he makes the virtual image of the role actual, so that the role becomes visible and luminous. The actor is a ‘monster’, or rather monsters are born actors – Siamese twin, limbless man – because they find a role in the excess of shortcoming that affects them. But the more the virtual image of the role becomes actual and limpid, the more the actual image of the actor moves into the shadows and becomes opaque. (71-2)

In considering the character of the living torso (Prince Randian) in *Freaks*, or the character of the deformed man (Adam Pearson) in Jonathan Glazer’s *Under the Skin* (2013), such performances are reliant upon the actors’ preexisting ‘wounds’ for the sake of the narrative. This stands in stark contrast to the actors who make bodily sacrifices for the sake of the compositional process. While exhibiting marginalized bodies remains taboo in much
of mainstream cinema, which in turn feeds into the othering of disability on screen.\textsuperscript{37} the disabled body (as opposed to the visualization of a disabled body) bridges the gap that an actor such as Fassbender strives to bridge when bringing himself to a deathly weight to embody starvation.

Marginalized bodies are typically cast to perform their marginalization, thus putting said bodies at the center of their characters’ narratives. In \textit{Under the Skin}, a film that has earned praise for the casting of Pearson, the woman (Scarlett Johansson), remarks on the softness of the deformed man’s hands as he enters into the woman’s predator van, which is used to capture male victims throughout the film.\textsuperscript{38} Ara Osterweil claims that it is upon this “encounter with disability” that a “radical identification with alterity as the key to human empathy,” emerges in the film (48). At this point, the film makes an attempt to work past traditional depictions of disability in bypassing it altogether and pointing out a normative aspect of Pearson’s body (his hands). While there have been attempts at depicting disability under a guise of normality (there is of course quite a ways to go), actors such as Fassbender, Leto, and Portman chase a visualization of marginalization, which in turn calls attention back to the ‘beautiful’ actors’ own abled frames.

\textsuperscript{37} A worthy discussion deserving of critical analysis.
\textsuperscript{38} This is the character’s title as listed in IMDb.
Figure 6: Still of Prince Randian from Tod Browning’s *Freaks* (1932)

Figure 7: Still of Adam Pearson and Scarlett Johansson in Jonathan Glazer’s *Under the Skin* (2013)
With the surge in reality programming that has dominated our screens this past decade, it would seem as if there is an ever-increasing desire to engage with *authentic* characterizations and performances under the pretence of authenticity. In seeking out authentic performances, many contemporary actors subscribe to the body-acting trend, aiming to close the gap between their performing selves, and their performed characters. This is done in the name of visuality, and it implicates the technical aspects of the performance body. In making drastic alterations to their physicality, many (mostly star) actors are using their bodies to carry portions of their performances for them. It is in chasing an authentic performance that an actor becomes utterly removed from it. There is nothing *authentic* about calling a dentist to have teeth chipped prior to a shoot, or going on a crash diet to embody starvation. It does however work to uphold a shock-worthy illusion, meaning that these bodily negotiations are all predicated upon the interplay between the technical and aesthetic planes of composition.

### 3.3 Decomposed Composition

While many scholars and viewers lose themselves amongst the extra-textual information surrounding a film performance, we must ask if it is worth ripping apart a painting to decipher precisely how it was painted. In following Deleuze and Guattari’s methodology in *What is Philosophy?*, all can be accessed through the aesthetic plane, and we too must understand that the aesthetic plane would not exist if not for the technical substructure that works to keep the aesthetic plane intact. In over-emphasizing the role of the technical we are unable to advance our understanding of performance as a form of art. In looking to
the new wave of contemporary body-driven performances that dominate western cinema today, we are presented with a visualization of the compositional process – meaning that the technical plane can be understood in relation to a performance’s physical substructure, while the aesthetic plane serves as that which appears to us via the medium’s surface (the screen). In analyzing the ways in which the body is used to frame a performance, we are better able to understand the process of performing, along with a performance’s unique relationship to time.

The attempt to uncover inner meaning or *truth* regarding the filmmaking process (the process of the actor, specifically) is widely romanticized and misunderstood, as evidenced in the body of discourse surrounding method acting. This thesis suggests that there is no inherent truth to a performance, but rather, that there are a multitude of ways in which the interplay between the technical and aesthetic planes can inform the means by which a performance is composed and accessed. This compositional interplay works within a unique temporal space. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that art’s state of becoming is a direct result of its compositional process. In stating that “[a]rt begins not with the flesh but with the house” (1991 186), the pair recognize that all art is derived from a primordial structure or frame. When it comes to acting and performance, this frame consists of technicalities that can range from the actor’s preparation (memorizing lines of dialogue, the blocking of the scene, dialects, body movements, etc.), to the actor’s physical appearance (hair and makeup, prosthetics, costuming, weight loss or gain, etc.), to the inner workings of the actor (drawing upon personal emotions and memories). These inner workings are discussed in depth in the work of Stanislavski, who champions the use of
memory, past experiences, senses, and emotions when composing a character. That considered, mental engagement is not a requirement as evidenced in the number of performances discussed in this chapter. With the ability to deterministically manipulate the body prior to a performance, a character's position within a narrative can be comprehended without the actor (necessarily) having to emote pain from within.

The aesthetic plane of composition is the realm that effectively absorbs the technical aspects of an art form. To Deleuze and Guattari, this renders artists the “presenters... inventors and creators of affects” (1994 175). It is affect that works to “draw us into the compound” of the art by enabling the artist/actor to connect to their prospective audiences via their own art (1994 175). Once preserved, the cinematic performance is compressed into a bloc of sensations, which is to say that they hold within them the potential to affect their eventual audiences. According to Deleuze, a compilation of affects are put forth by the artist, and are then met by percepts, which enable for the perceiver or spectator to figuratively enter, and become one with the art. The potentiality of the actor is briefly touched upon in Laura U. Marks’ *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, where she asserts,

[I]n performance you find the meaning of the body through physical, not mental acts; the body has to be right there, not a construct. Performers sacrificed their own bodies so that the rest of us could have ours back.

(2002 208)

For Marks, once on screen, we are dealing with an immediate body that maintains the ability to haptically engage an audience. Deleuze's theories of immanence suggest that
there are no hierarchies, but rather, amalgamations of forces, affects, and becomings, which stand in opposition to the idea of organization. As such, Deleuzian scholarship is less concerned with digging beneath surfaces to locate truths and is more in favour of dealing with amalgamated compositions. This accounts for Marks’ readings of the screen body as an immediate/amalgamated body. When dealing with performance from an artistic and temporal standpoint, the clash between technicality and aestheticism hinges upon the idea that the technical and aesthetic are separate forces. When technical aspects of an actor’s performance begin to seep through the frame (eg. Portman’s bones), we are once again reminded of that which lies beneath the aesthetic surface. As such, we are consistently being reminded of the art form’s technical substructure. Even if one is to follow Marks’ methodology directly, there is still a conversation to be had apropos the pre-haptic body and the means by which a body adorns its own haptic potentiality (the constructed body). Marks points out that in performance, the body is not a construct given that it emerges as a block of sensation calling for multisensory readings that seemingly trump form. While bodies may clash, speak, and serve as the grounding for the transmission of sensation, they also act as the linchpin to the (technical) process of becoming character.

The body serves as both frame and surface in cinema, and thus, a performance hinges upon the body’s ability to navigate its own compositional status. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that while art’s materiality ascends onto the aesthetic plane, that the technical plane (while “never valid for itself”) provides art with a “thickness independent of any perspective or depth” (1994 193-4). Perhaps this is how Deleuze and Guattari attempt to bypass a brush with psychoanalysis. In suggesting that art produces a depth-less
thickness, Deleuze and Guattari recognize the need to move beyond a mere surface, and it is here where an analysis of performance via Deleuze and Guattari becomes slightly problematic. While no art is conceived for the sake of technicality, technicality still holds a valid position within a composition, and can stand to distract from the compositional nature of art. To veer away from conversations concerning the technical aspects of a performance would be to misunderstand the function of performance, and art more generally. That said, in over-emphasizing the importance of the technical plane, one will risk losing sight of the art form altogether (as is the problem in discussing a ‘star body’ divorced from the medium). As such, there is a balance to be struck when discussing a performance in the same way that there is a balance to consider when composing one. It is necessary to discuss an art form's surface and its substructure in relation to one another, and this can be done via the medium’s surface.

In *Francis Bacon*, Deleuze, while focusing primarily on the abstraction and sensation of painting and art with specific reference to the work of Bacon, alludes to a theoretical groundwork that informs my own reading of performance. Deleuze suggests that “[s]ensation is what is painted,” and that “[w]hat is painted on canvas is the body” (1981 26). This once again brings us back to the division between the aesthetic and technical planes of sensation. The technical substructure to a performance can never be fully removed from the frame, or else the performance would cease to exist. To deny a performance of its thickness is to deny the fact that it is an artistic composition. The technical plane can protrude through the medium’s surface as discussed in the last section of this chapter, and yet it protrudes through the aesthetic plane in doing so. As a result, the
aesthetic plane becomes the communicative layer to a performance. In returning to the analogy in Bacon, once paint reaches a canvas, the canvas is altered. The canvas becomes a part of the artistic composition. It is the paint that renders this process bodily, for without having been brushed upon the canvas the paint would have no way of remaining intact. While the canvas does not define the art, it is a part of its primordial structure and remains accessible (albeit in a different way) as long as the painting exists. Similarly, in order for an actor to undo her status as a simple canvas, she must undo herself and allow for her character to overtake her body, if only for the sake of the visual. The screen body is a composed body that requires for the actor to undo her own frame in the same way that the status of a canvas is undone upon its meeting with paint and a brush. Of course the concept of undoing the body is rendered literal upon the actor’s decision to emaciate the body for the sake of a role. Deleuze points out that “composition is itself an organization, but one that is in the process of disintegrating,” going on to add that “[b]eings disintegrate while ascending into the light” (1981 129). As such, art’s technical plane is disintegrating into its own aesthetic surface in order to become art. For the actor, it is in decomposing the self (not removing the self entirely), that a character can be erected. In this sense, performances hinge upon the actor’s ability to decompose and undo the self. It is in attempting to efface oneself from the medium that a character emerges, and a performance is granted its liminal status. That said, if the technical aspects of art were to disappear entirely, the composition would ultimately fail to uphold itself.
Stanislavski’s three seminal works concerning the actor’s technical process are titled: *An Actor Prepares*, *Creating a Role*, and *Building a Character*. The act of preparing, creating, and building are not only reflective of the actor’s technical transition from self to character, they help to build a framework from which an aesthetic surface can present itself (1994 179). The body then becomes the site for projecting character, and the frame responsible for containing the disintegrating actor given its status as both a technical limit, and an aesthetic platform. Deleuze and Guattari write that flesh is the site from which sensation can be withdrawn given that it acts as the compound of sensation housing percepts and affects. According to Deleuze, percepts should be differentiated from perceptions as they are to be considered “packets of sensations and relations that live on independently of whoever experiences them,” while affects are the “becomings that spill over beyond whoever lives through them” (as qtd in Frampton 194). In order for art’s flesh to subsist within the realm of art, its architectural structure must keep everything intact. Bernard Cache, in drawing inspiration from the works of Deleuze and Bergson, considers architecture to be the art of manipulating the frame. In the forward to his work on architecture and Deleuze, he claims that architecture refers to “any image involving any element of framing, which is to say paintings as well as cinema” (1995 1). In cinema, the characters are framed by the actor’s technical efforts, which would suggest that

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39 While the works of Constantin Stanislavski often stand for this idea of performative introspection and emotionality, it is important to note that Stanislavski himself advocates for the breaking away from his own methodologies should an actor come across a more useful means of performing their character.

40 Deleuze sees affect as the intensity or transitional exchange from body to body. ‘Affect’ is that which collides with and ultimately impacts the spectator on a visceral or bodily level. ‘Percept,’ on the other hand, stands independently from the spectator and helps for art to be preserved.
performance are quite similar to architectural structures – in that they are accessed
eaesthetically by those that come across them, while being simultaneously upheld and
collated by a frame or skeletal structure. Elizabeth Grosz outlines the importance of
architecture via Deleuze in *Chaos, Territory, Art*, where she suggests that:

> At its most elementary, architecture, the most primordial and animal of all
> of the arts, does little other than design and construct frames; these are its
> basic forms of expression... The frame separates. It cuts into a milieu or
> space. This cutting links it to the construction of the plane of composition,
> to the provisional ordering of chaos through the laying down of a grid or
> order that entraps chaotic shards, chaoid states, to arrest or slow them into
> a space and a time, a structure and a form where they can affect and be
> affected by bodies (2008 13).

The composition of a character is in this sense, an architectural undertaking in that the
actor’s primary responsibility is to mold and shape a frame for the character and narrative
to fill. Regardless of what method the actor subscribes to when engaging in this process of
undoing the self, the technical process or frame acts as the foundation to becoming a
character. If an actor cannot undo herself, a performance cannot be composed. It is the
undoing of self that the actor becomes the architect to her own work. Not only does
undoing the self lend the actor’s art structure, it allows for the performance to be
suspended between self and character.
In Conclusion:

Film and the performances housed within, seemingly expose art’s walls and surfaces devoid of the structure that upholds them. Film performances appear to us on an aesthetic level, meaning that the internal structures working to uphold them are difficult to trace. That said, performances are forever bound to the technical process and could not remain intact without this compositional element. It is in looking at, not beyond the medium that we can gain a more thorough understanding of the ways in which the technical roots of a performance lend shape to the aesthetic surfaces that we so readily engage with. The bodies we encounter on screen are aesthetic products, informed and maintained by their own structure. In cinema, traces of the compositional process aim to be covered, cut around, and/or edited out of the frame so as to maintain the illusion that that which takes place on the screen is effortless and self-sustaining. As argued in this thesis, performances are uniquely informed by their relationships to the technical and aesthetic planes of composition.

As opposed to joining the preexisting discourse on the subject-spectator experience in cinema, this project has aimed to outline the process leading up to such an exchange. In outlining the compositional aspects of performance as per Deleuze and Guattari’s definition of art, we can look beyond the film performance as an expressive aesthetic interface. The body’s relationship to performance is complexly woven into a fractured and destabilized sense of time, which ultimately enhances this idea of performative compositions being predicated upon acts of decomposition (time, the body, the self, etc.). Film performances
are undone art forms, and in looking to the actor’s body, we are exposed to the technical substructure working to uphold the aesthetic surface.

In recent years, we have seen a perpetuation of body-driven narratives coming out of the west. This has forced conversations about physical crossovers between actor and character into the public arena. Actors such as Christian Bale, Michael Fassbinder, Natalie Portman, Jared Leto, and Emma Stone have taken this compositional process of dissolving the technical plane to a new level by subjecting their bodies to abuse or starvation in the name of art. Emaciating a body for the sake of a character seemingly connotes an elevation in commitment to the craft, often resulting in generous accolades under the guise of artistic achievement. We must recognize how this type of strategic reworking of the compositional process factors into our own understanding of the filmic performance. Unlike emotion, the body is a visible, and thus traceable entity that has provided performance with a seemed limitation or physical goal. This is not to say that such performances are not worthy or successful; they have simply taken advantage of their own compositional positioning to the point where the art form is being manipulated to generate specific reactions.

As illustrated in this thesis, the actor’s body can be used as an object to call up natural reactions from the actor. It can also enable the actor to withdraw emotionally, permitting the physical body to speak on the actor’s behalf. No matter the circumstance, the film actor composes and exposes herself technically in order to be rendered aesthetically traceable. It is via this technical plane that the actor crafts herself as a springboard of visibility, as well as a container to hide her own personality. It is also via this plane that the commitment to process is ignited. In comprehending the performance as
a force that expands upon time, as opposed to moving directly within it, we are able to confront how the art form functions as a collage of moments forever lacking its epicenter. Instead of revolving around an epicenter, or truth, the actor strives and aims for her own eventual completion. In committing to the artistic process, the actor relinquishes her self and body via the masochistic contract and patiently awaits the assembly of her otherness.

Film performances exist beyond their execution and beyond their physical frame. They are reckless and sacrificial forces that rely upon disorder and chaos to project a veneer of sense and seamlessness. In separating disorder from the veneer for the sake of analysis, we are able to better comprehend the many facets and complexities of an art form that has long since been buried amongst the filmic scenery.
**Filmography**


*Clouds of Sils Maria.* Dir. Olivier Assayas. CG Cinéma, 2014.


*Hunger.* Dir. Steve McQueen. Film4 Productions, 2008.


Works Cited


Nunn, Robert. “Flickering Lights and Declaiming Bodies: Semiosis in Film and Theatre.” 


