

**‘WE’RE ALL COMING THROUGH FINE’: THE OBSERVED SELF OF THE SCREEN
ACTOR IN THE MULTI-ROLE PERFORMANCES OF PETER SELLERS AND
BUSTER KEATON**

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Abstract

In *Stars*, Richard Dyer writes that star actors “seem to be of a different order of being, a different ‘ontological category’” than other people (49). It is here, in the core question of studies on screen acting, that this thesis places itself. Building on Dyer’s claim, this work documents a unique category of existence for film actors: beings that are legitimately understood as one of three separate types of individuals (a character, a persona, or a private self), while also regarded as an accumulation of all those three (many characters, the many roles that create a persona, and the visible and invisible parts of one’s personal life). Another part of the screen actor that facilitates this existence—something not yet encountered in film studies discourse—is referred to here as the observed self, which allows for the many disparate pieces of an actor to be corralled into one body. As part of this analysis, Michel Foucault’s notion of the care of the self is employed, allowing for the identification of an observed self in films such as *The Mouse that Roared* (Jack Arnold, 1959), *Dr. Strangelove* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964), and *The Play House* (Buster Keaton, 1921). After one chapter that surveys trends in screen acting academia, and another on the relevant Foucauldian concepts, this thesis examines performances from Peter Sellers and Buster Keaton to identify the observed self on screen. This piece of identity is found in films that house all three of the different components of an actor’s constitution. Once the components of the observed self are identified within these films, the thesis identifies moments in which audiences must rely on this to place themselves within a familiar viewing experience. I argue that these moments are broadcast at a high frequency in films where actors play multiple roles, and that actors employ Foucault’s notion of transgression, with this inherent quality allowing the viewer to see them as beings that are both unified and disintegrated.

Lay Summary

This thesis examines performances from Peter Sellers and Buster Keaton to identify the observed self. This piece of identity is found in films that house collisions between an actor's characters, persona, and private self. Michel Foucault's notion of the care of the self is employed, allowing for the identification of an observed self in films such as *The Mouse that Roared* (Jack Arnold, 1959), *Dr. Strangelove* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964), and *The Play House* (Keaton, 1921). Once the components of the observed self are identified within these films, I identify moments where audiences must rely on this to enjoy a familiar viewing experience. I argue that these moments are broadcast at a high frequency in films where actors play multiple roles, and that actors are equipped with Foucault's notion of transgression, with this inherent quality allowing the viewer to see them as beings that are both unified and disintegrated.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Matthew Gartner.

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Introduction

A screen actor is a unique concentration of distinct individuals, which are accumulated inside of the borders of one person. Actors play many characters throughout their career, carry a star persona throughout their professional life, and retain a separate private existence that remains mostly hidden from the public's view. All of these methods of understanding an actor coalesce to create one being, a process that a film viewer quite readily executes and accepts when screening a film. But this operation is not without its complications. The constituent "parts" of actors can begin to collide with one another: an actor may be performing as a character, when suddenly he or she recites a line that resonates with a viewer's knowledge of the actor's personal life, or makes reference to the actor's screen persona. To accommodate the otherwise jarring effect that this can have, viewers are equipped with a particular understanding of actors' self construction, allowing the audience member to pass through these kind of moments without being disoriented.

In cases such as these, audiences are presented with the individuated example of an actor (e.g, the character in this hypothetical film), as well as the actor's compound being (the actor as a collective of individuals). In "Story and Show," Paul McDonald writes that the connection between a character and its impersonator "forms the basic contradiction of film star acting" (170). I believe that the state described in my brief example, where actors are regarded as both a collection of three "selves" and singular examples of one of these three pieces, is an extension of this basic contradiction. McDonald's contradiction is an attempt to describe the reality in which actors dwell, and throughout its history, the most significant threads in acting discourse gravitate to this central concern: how do viewers accommodate the curious polymorphic reality that actors represent?

In “Acting Matters,” Brenda Austin-Smith notes that this bizarre concept which governs our absorption of actors must be overcome for acting discourse to fully achieve its potential. She writes that discourse must investigate viewers’ belief that an “actor is physically commensurate with the character played,” implying that an actor’s two “existences [occupy] the same space and [appear] to make use of the same body” (19). In “Implications of Paradoxical Film Characters for Our Models and Conceptualizations,” Johannes Riis reflects that the two sides of McDonald’s contradiction are essential to a viewer’s experience of actors. If these two become “decoupled”, Riis writes that the corresponding effect is “[a] kind of abstraction in the mind of the viewer,” wherein the observer’s inevitable affectual connection with an actor is interrupted (263). Moments of potential decoupling, which threaten to create a divide between an actor “as collection” and an actor “as singular”, must be resolved for viewers to continue their preferred experience of actors. In his seminal text, *Stars*, Richard Dyer points toward such a resolution, writing that star actors “seem to be of a different order of being, a different ‘ontological category’” (Dyer [b], 49).

It is here, in the core question of studies on screen acting, that this thesis places itself. Building on Dyer’s claim that stars are of a unique ontological category, I argue that actors in general are of a unique ontological category: beings that are legitimately understood as one of three separate types of individuals (a character, a persona, or a private self), while also regarded as a database of all those three (many characters, the many roles that create a persona, and the visible and invisible parts of one’s personal life). I believe that there is another part of the screen actor that facilitates this existence—something that we have not yet encountered in discourse, and which helps to clarify what places them in a unique ontological category. I call this the observed self. The observed self emerges from three separate branches of writing on actors. Each

of these approaches assumes that one component of an actor—the private self in performance studies, the character in character studies, and the persona in star studies—is present in film works. This thesis brings these methods together, suggesting that all three of these actor components can appear on screen in the same work.

This argument creates many potential moments of decoupling (in Riis' terms), which threaten a viewer's relationship to actors. In these moments, a viewer makes use of an observed self. This entity, which viewers are readily equipped with and often unknowingly make use of, houses all of the ways in which an actor can be understood—it is the compound entity that corrals the character, persona, and private self into the same container, and exists in partnership with an actor's performance of one of their pieces of identity. This being interrupts moments of potential decoupling, ensuring that McDonald's contradiction and the Riis-ian relation to actors are sustained. For example, if a character references an actor's private life, viewers can quickly transition to considering the actor through the lens of a private self. This will likely only last for a very brief moment before the observer transitions back to an observation of the character, considering the cause and effect scenarios of the film. Later, the same character could be placed in a costume or scenario that references another character in the actor's career. Again, likely for a brief time, this past character shines through the performance at hand, before retreating. In these situations, viewers rely on an observed self. When these moments arise, when the version of an actor that is on display is invaded by another, this newly introduced version violates a viewer's experience. Instead of falling victim to the decoupling effects that this should present, an audience member activates an observed self, which contextualizes the infringement as a condition of the actor's unique ontology. A viewer understands that an actor is bound by the laws of human existence, and their illusive spreading of themselves across many locations is

explained away by an observed self. The function of the observed self is to contextualize the collisions between an actor's various segments, and sustain the pairing that exists between itself and a performance.

This thesis identifies the observed self in films that place all three categories of acting selfhood on display. In identifying the persona within performances, I appeal to two components of Michael Foucault's care of the self. I interpret Foucault's idea of technologies of the self as part of the acting profession, and identify manifestations of this concept within my film analyses. I also make use of Foucault's understanding of spirituality, as it relates to the beatification and transformation of the subject as a reward for extensive personal work. To identify this in the cinema, I rely on reviews that document how a role stands as a notable, reifying, or rewarding performance. To pick out the moments at which an observed self is deployed in films, I invoke Foucault's idea of transgression. I believe that the communication of the observed self, as it quells the uprising of confusion or disorientation that accompanies the interaction of an actor's separate elements, is a reminder that actors are inherently transgressive beings. This transgression, part of the unique ontology that Dyer stresses, allows observers to interpret actors in the way that is required—a fluent mixed being that is paired with a rotating singular depiction, which is all restricted to a single body.

In the first chapter, I consider debates around the legitimacy of studying film acting, and cite the major movements in acting discourse that lead up to my description of the observed self. I identify character studies, star studies, and performance studies as the three major trends of the discipline, before arguing that each of these deploys one component of the screen actor. I describe each of these parts—the character, the persona, and the private self—and document some of the approaches that are used to identify them in cinema. Two important trends are

emphasized in this review. The first of these is that accounts of acting will almost universally rely on the experience of viewers to draw their conclusions. Dyer emphasizes that acting studies must focus on how observers “make sense of the star, the different ways in which he or she [is] read” (Dyer [a], ix). This thesis takes root in Dyer’s idea, basing the execution of the observed self in audience members. The second important trend, covered at the close of the first chapter, is a thirst among those who write on screen acting for more material, and especially works that bring the various segments of an actor’s constitution together. This thesis aims to place itself within that realm.

In the second chapter, I document the connection between screen acting and Michel Foucault that is used for this thesis. I begin this chapter by outlining how some work on acting calls for the use of theories of self that extend beyond the realm of film studies. I then describe how Foucault’s notions of technologies of the self and spirituality will function in the later chapters, clarifying that they assist in extracting the persona self from performances. The link between acting and technologies of the self emphasize the work of the actor as a learned practice, filled with techniques and styles that are repeated over the course of many separate characterizations. As such, performative intertextuality is relied upon as the marker of cinematic technologies of the self. Acting and spirituality intersect in performances which grant the actor’s persona the rewards of spirituality, described by Foucault as beatification and transformation. For the performances cited in this thesis, the rewards of spirituality are channelled through declarations that an actor’s performance is especially brilliant, important, or career-boosting. This provides the reifying effects of spirituality to an actor’s persona, and allows this persona to be found within a film. I conclude this chapter by exploring the overlap between actors and Foucault’s transgression. I see actors as inherently transgressive, with transgression working its

way into a viewer's notions of an actor, and functioning as a map for the inner workings of the actor's observed self.

This is emphasized in the final two chapters, which rely on this transgressive nature to cite moments in which an observed self is incited, and both base their studies on films where single actors play multiple roles. The third chapter focuses on two works from Peter Sellers: *The Mouse that Roared* (Jack Arnold, 1959), and *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964). This chapter describes the private self and persona that are projected onto Sellers, before identifying how both of those are present in the films (exempting the character self from analysis, as its presence is obvious). Sellers' private self is marked by a supposed personal satisfaction in being on screen, his apparent tributes to Alec Guinness, the use of improvisation, and a habit of using acquaintances as influences for his characters. His persona is found in intertextual moments between *The Mouse that Roared*, *Dr. Strangelove*, and other films, as well as the classification of these performances as brilliant. The chapter concludes by identifying moments of potential decoupling in the films, picking out occasions where multiple Sellers characters share cinematic space.

The fourth chapter focuses on Buster Keaton's performance in *The Play House* (Keaton and Edward F. Cline, 1921). Buster's case is addressed second, as *The Play House* finds levels of complexity in its multi-role performance that reach beyond those in the Sellers films. Similar to the preceding chapter, this section uses reviews to identify how Keaton's private self and persona are constructed, and then identifies them in the films. Keaton's private self is built on his stage work, his cinematic ingenuity and technical interest, and his immense amount of courage in the execution of his stunts. Similar to Sellers, Keaton's persona is found through intertextuality—a "Keaton character" that appears in many films, and the presence of other preoccupations and

repeated concerns—as well as the declaration that his work in the film achieves a level of brilliance that contributes to the beatification of his star persona. The chapter concludes by analyzing the opening sequence of the film, in which Keaton plays twenty-six separate characters, which all occupy the same space as each other.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

This thesis is arguing for the existence of the observed self of the film actor. To do this, I must first establish the three selves through which current literature interacts with the actor: the character, the persona, and the private self. These three selves house contents that are not seen by the onlooker: the character self, the individual that exists within a film's reality, is also present in takes that are not seen, in preparation and rehearsal, and in scenes that have been struck from films altogether; the persona self is an actor's "star image," an entity that is crafted from selected roles and appearances, which will omit some of an actor's roles during its creation; and the private self, the individual who performs an actor's roles, remains partially hidden from a viewer's knowledge (or, as we will see in later chapters, an actor's private self can be created by reviewers and fans without any basis in fact). While each of these selves contains unseen elements, the observed self is the combination of their visible or "knowable" sections.

This chapter sets out to accomplish three main goals. First, I will show that screen acting is an area of study independent of the film as a text. Relative to other areas of cinematic discourse, acting has only recently become an aspect of widespread focus. The sporadic history of academic works on acting has caused some to question whether it can really be studied at all: whether there is anything to say about it beyond pure description or subjective interpretation; who is responsible for it; whether it serves any purpose aside from the forging of a human connection that clouds our reading of a film's more interesting components. I argue that screen acting is an aspect of film that can be studied independent of a consideration of the aims of the overall film project. This is a relationship that exists with many aspects of film, and has been established in academic work on the cinema in a variety of domains: editing, cinematography, scoring, etc. As considerations of acting have traditionally been an underdeveloped and highly

questioned area of academic work on acting, this chapter will demonstrate that acting is a component of film that is eligible for intensive study. This chapter will not solely examine literature on multi-role acting, even though this thesis will be analyzing such instances exclusively. This is done because the few existing accounts of multi-role performances do not offer any approaches that step outside of the three trends that are discussed below, and more broad theoretical accounts of the features of multi-role acting do not exist.

The second goal of this chapter is to describe the general shapes that accounts of screen acting take, and to orient this thesis in the broader context of discourse on screen acting and performance. Works on acting fall into three veins of investigation: character studies, star studies, and performance studies. While outlining texts that fall into each of these approaches, I will show that each of these branches analyze one component of the screen actor: the private self (performance studies), the character (character studies), and the persona (star studies). Performance studies understands the actor in terms of the private individual that enters a screen role: documentations of an actor's performative work in a role, reflections on an actor's artistry, the cinematic communication of something personal from the life of an actor (or an Anthropological "digging" on the behalf of the viewer), and the implications of identification with characters. Character studies also touch on some of these sorts of analyses, but base their perception of the actor on a character—hoping to move from observations about characters to other conclusions through the devices of allegory, or relying upon fictional information about the character. Star studies analyze an actor's persona, and seek conclusions about his or her body of work, the fans that align themselves with a star, or the way that a star is presented in the media. Each of these approaches assumes that the actor's corresponding component—the private self in

performance studies, the character in character studies, and the persona in star studies—is present on screen.

The preceding survey of trends in academic accounts of screen acting brings this literature review to its third goal, which is to move towards a discourse on screen acting that adds to these areas. The traditional branches of analysis want to move from an observation or fact about performance, a character, or a star to another external claim. Until recent years, academic work around screen acting has been missing an approach that moves in the opposite direction, and applies external theories to performances, characters, and stars. This thesis takes up this kind of project by examining the features of screen actors through the lens of Michel Foucault's works, and picking out the existence of the observed self.

As a part of this chapter's third function, I will identify some components of acting discourse on which I rest the foundation of this thesis. Some scholarship has begun to consider the actor from a perspective that incorporates more than one of our three avenues of investigation. Some works also call for more theoretical, ontological, and academic accounts of screen acting, creating a place inside of the literature for the overall goals of this thesis. Two important trends within the literature will be extracted throughout this chapter, which will become pillars for the remaining chapters. First, considerations of screen acting tend to involve some consideration of the viewer. The viewer serves many purposes for the actor (variedly filling the role of interpreter, the "other", and evidence for an actor's state of "being"), and this study will also make use of the function of the audience. While the three established selves of the actor can be traced to previous critical texts, the observed self is created by the onlooker: combining the character, persona, and private self into the being we know as "actor". Second, as we will see towards the end of this chapter, some scholars suggest that analyses of acting are

only possible when all three of the discursive selves are taken into account. I believe that this is a valid premise, and that the observed self is the result of an approach that does so.

1.1 Screen Acting as an Area of Study

To start, I will go over some scholarly reflections on the significance and legitimacy of acting analysis. In “Acting Matters: Noting Performance in Three Films,” Brenda Austin-Smith directly responds to calls for further justification of the academic analysis of film acting. She notes that this question over legitimacy is not “just a by product of film studies' emphasis on directing or the ideology of representation, nor a claim that we have stars in our eyes as we look at the screen” (Austin-Smith 19). Austin-Smith also notes that arguments denouncing film acting as a legitimate arena for analysis are rooted in two main problems. Similarly, in “Look at Me!: A Phenomenology of Heath Ledger in *The Dark Knight*,” Jörg Sternagel reflects on two essential requirements that must be met in order to “effectively identify the importance of acting in film” (93). For Austin-Smith, the first thing that could hamper studies of acting as a serious discipline is that “the actor is physically commensurate with the character played, their existences occupying the same space and appearing to make use of the same body” (19). For Sternagel, the first essential requirement for identifying the importance of acting in film is “the realization that film acting is an integral, meaningful and vital element of film” (93). Acting has trailed behind other arenas in its becoming a cinematic element that is eligible for academic concern, and both writers trace this to a difficulty in recognizing acting as separate from other elements and signifiers. This may emerge from the fact that many works on acting simply recite a performer's lines and movements, or perhaps even ignore the acted event altogether (as we will see shortly).

These “shallow” accounts may stain the potential for acting to be “taken seriously”, particularly as it sits in the shadow of cinematic elements that have been fruitfully analyzed for decades.

Austin-Smith notes that the second problem in identifying acting as a branch of cinematic study is “the tendency of film studies to mystify performance, invoking distinctions between stage acting and screen acting that award expertise and craft virtuosity to the former” (19). Similarly, Sternagel suggests that the second condition that must be met before understanding the importance of acting is “the recognition of film acting as actually being *acting*—similar and equal in esteem to stage acting” (93, emphasis in original). Particularly in cinema’s younger years, screen actors were considered to have less talent (or at least less demand on their talent) than their stage counterparts. We need look no further than the technicolor film history lesson that is *Singin’ in the Rain* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952) to see this dynamic at work. Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds), an actor on the stage, deems herself to be a higher class of performer than screen superstar Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly). Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen) is depicted as an untalented and incapable performer, who requires dubbing assistance from Selden to fulfill her screen duties. This gap appears to have narrowed in recent years: or at the very least, the disciplines of stage and screen acting have been separated from their previous connotations of quality and lack of quality. Instead, scholars have begun to compare the two acting disciplines, and investigate how they overlap and depart from one another (Braudy for example, his analysis firmly rooted in Bazin’s “Theatre and Cinema”).

Austin-Smith and Sternagel’s second requirements may refer to past (or at least shrunken) debates in acting discourse, but the first matter—justifying acting as an element all of its own within film—is something that continues to trouble scholars. Austin-Smith responds to these matters very succinctly and convincingly to justify acting as an area open to examination.

By separating the artifice of the performance and its effect, the scholar notes that “although the deliberations that actors make are indeed invisible to us, the results of those decisions are not” (Austin-Smith 20). Because of this, “they are available to analysis in the same way as are other elements of film art” (Austin-Smith 20).

In line with Austin-Smith’s declaration, more scholars try to solve this problem by appealing to the relationships and affects that actors have on film spectators. Sternagel invokes a consideration of the audience member in his justification for the study of film acting. He writes that “all performances should be defined as filmic elements that create meaning, but also sensual as well as physiological effects” for both audiences and performers (Sternagel 94). Actors are capable of producing meaning, which means that they (and their performances) are candidates for study. In the process, while “the spectator watches the film and becomes involved with the *other*, the film actor,” they are moved in response to their relationship with this spectral projection (Sternagel 94, emphasis in original). For the author, this emotional “moving” is a part of the reason that acting is an area of film that requires study. Henri Schoenmakers expands on Sternagel’s use of the actor/audience connection as evidence for the validity of studying performances. In “Bodies of Light: Towards a Theory about Film Acting from a Communicative Perspective,” Schoenmakers notes that “the interpretation and emotions a character may evoke do not have to be based on the work of the actor, but can be the result of the spectator's imagination fed by the filmic contexts” (382). In this formulation, the spectator and performer serves as the co-producers of meaning, with the viewer exercising a creative activity in the process of observing acting. In line with Sternagel, this idea suggests that there is something at stake in acting that is eligible for analysis. If viewers can detach the content of the performance from an actor and use it for their own ends, then there must be some worthy content present.

In “What Becomes of the Camera in the World on Film,” William Rothman looks to provide a reason for the importance of considering acting in cinema. Rothman picks up on the Sternagel/Schoenmakers thread, finding the significance of acting in the power that an actor’s presence has on the viewer’s experience. The author describes instances where characters come close to interacting with the camera directly: moments where the actor looks almost directly into the lens, will nearly acknowledge the camera’s existence in their space, will turn away from the camera and “hide” from it as though it is capable of judgment, etc. Rothman notes that “the camera that is absent from the character's world is no less real within her or his world...than it is within the actor's world, a world in which the camera is present” (229). The above cases, and other points at which an actor is seen “turning away from the camera, almost facing the camera, looking ‘through’ the camera,” and “meeting the camera's gaze,” function as “gestures” that “can color our experience of whole sequences, indeed, entire films” (Rothman 241). When the viewer’s presence is acknowledged (or even nearly acknowledged) by an actor, their experience of other elements within a film can be altered. Rothman, in concert with Sternagel and Schoenmakers, believes that the study of acting is made a worthwhile enterprise by the power of an actor’s presence, and through an actor’s relationship with the viewer.

Ken Miller provides a potential explanation for this trend. Like Sternagel, Miller uses the figure of the other to describe the relationship between actors and their audience. In *More than Fifteen Minutes of Fame: The Changing Face of Screen Performance*, Miller meditates on a variety of different ways to analyze screen performance. Amid this account, he observes that actors can be considered both subjects and objects (in what could be a complimentary formulation of the disintegrated state of the actor than the one that will be presented throughout this thesis). Miller writes that “we think of the actor as a *subject* in a performance—an individual

who considers options and makes creative choices on behalf of a character being portrayed” (53, emphasis in original). The writer later notes that “it is also possible to consider the actor as an *object* to be variously viewed, investigated, manipulated, judged, desired and/or consumed by others—or by ‘the other’ as this is so often put” (Miller 53, emphasis in original). For Miller, “all performances are fundamentally structured by the (implicit or actual) presence of the other” (53). The audience is a vital part of the acting process: the surface upon which a performance is meant to land. The appeal to spectator reaction, made by the previous three writers, emerges out of this fact. It is because this landing coincides with a reaction inside of the audience member that film acting can and should be analyzed.

1.2 Characteristics of Screen Acting Literature

With a justification of the analysis of film acting in hand, I turn to outlining the various shapes of screen acting discourse. I will also describe what exactly these pieces do: what they argue for, and the limits of their claims. I will identify the type of argumentation that likely contributes to the need for a justification of acting studies. After going over many minor trends, I will pick out the three major strands of acting discourse: character studies, star studies, and performance studies.

In *Movie Acting: The Film Reader*, Pamela Robertson Wojcik notes five types of questions that are asked in the process of understanding screen acting, with these five brands of investigation also serving as types or genres for academic works on the subject. The first kind of questions are ontological queries, which investigate questions such as: “What constitutes film acting?”; “How is film acting different from stage acting?”; “To what degree is film acting a function of what an actor does with her/his voice, face and body and to what degree is it technologically determined?”; and “What are the specifically cinematic components of acting?”

(Robertson Wojcik 9). The second sort are stylistic questions, which consider specific techniques and modes of acting in films. These questions will search for differences among acting styles as they relate to place, time, era, genre, and other factors (9). The third line of investigation that relates to screen acting are questions of authorship, which ask the question: “Who is responsible for a film performance?” (10). The fourth type are historical questions, which seek solutions for inquiries about “various historical contexts through which acting is produced and received,” (10). While surveying “histories of technology, institutional histories, labor history, art history, world history, and more,” this approach asks how historical changes have altered film acting (10). Ideological questions, the final variety, ask questions such as: “What does film acting mean?” “What is the value of film acting?” and “How does film acting reflect or alter our ideas about human identity?” (ibid 10-11).

Performance studies uses elements of the stylistic line of questioning, but also asks historical and ontological questions. Character studies will sample each of these categories, with historical questions most scarcely used. Star studies focus intently on historical questions, while also placing heavy emphasis on questions of authorship (these distinctions will become more clear later in this chapter). Work on acting moves between these five varieties, with recent studies asking questions of ontology, authorship, and ideology at high frequency. I believe this stems from an appetite for more theoretical or “serious” accounts of screen acting, which inspired academia to turn away from stylistic questions. As we will see, this is not necessarily a bad thing. The majority of the so-called “bad” analyses of acting will fit into the second category, asking bland stylistic questions of an individual or performance while praising one or many performative elements. This thesis fits into the recent trend that I have described, sticking mostly to questions of ontology and ideology. However, chapters three and four will relate stylistic

investigation to this theoretical work.

These five varieties of questioning are quite useful and exhaustive, while containing a multitude of potential methodologies. To provide a better sense of the range of approaches that these five categories can allow for, I will continue by describing works on acting in cinema as the pieces relate to Robertson Wojcik's categories, with each of these works representing a trend within acting studies. David Mayer's "Acting in Silent Film: Which Legacy of the Theatre?" asks ontological, stylistic, and historical questions. It analyzes how acting in early cinema differs from modern acting, and the extended influence of theatrical modes of acting in the cinema. Cynthia Baron's "Crafting Film Performances: Acting in the Hollywood Studio Era" goes over a variety of preparation practices for actors as they enter their roles. Unique to many accounts of screen acting, these stylistic and historical questions focus on what the actor does before they appear on the screen. Bingham, Bignell, and Foster each pick up on this thread of preparation, but translate it into questions of ontology and authorship by considering whether an actor's performance should be considered "real" or not. Analysis of the "realism" or verisimilitude of a performance is paired with contemplation of the place for film characters in the real (deeper reflections of this come from other scholars, which will be taken up in depth later). Both Jerome Delamater and Thomas Waugh ask stylistic questions to make claims about performance within a genre (with each writer focusing on the musical and the documentary, respectively). For these two scholars, as well as Bart Testa in "Un Certain Regard: Characterization in the First Years of the French New Wave," stylistic and historical questions on acting can be used to make claims about other aspects of cinema.

As I have mentioned previously, stylistic questions can lead to some unmotivated claims. In *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation*, Andrew Klevan writes that "fresh

aspects of even familiar films emerge when we attend to gestures, postures, expressions and voice – and how they are situated” (Page 2 of Preface). The book focuses exclusively on describing scenes, electing to not focus on anything in partnership with this. Klevan goes on to write that “attending to sequences is preferred” in his book “to ranging across a performer’s career, or simply extracting instances of performance from across a whole film,” as “such extractions miss the presentness of the performance and are in danger of ‘assessing in the context of standard technique’” (7). So, Klevan’s claims emerge entirely from stylistic questions. He, like James Naremore, wants the viewer to “attend to the technique of the performance” (Klevan 7). While there is nothing inherently unmotivated (or uninteresting) about his claims, Klevan goes on to write that “the achievement of the performer and the appreciation of the viewer are united, and there is a similarity between the performer’s art and the viewer’s task” (7). While the human connection between the viewer and the actor has been used by other writers as justification for acting analysis, Klevan employs this to equate the work of the actor with the work of the audience member. If equipped with more of Wojcik’s question types, this analysis could even prove quite fruitful. Instead, Klevan simply wants to attend “to the moment-by-moment movement of performers” so that viewers can express their own sensitivities to the work of actors (7). The scholar writes that “[t]his book concentrates on individual scenes or sequences from films so that it may be responsive to their unfolding and savor the delight of their rhythms and rhymes, the flow of their contours” (Klevan 7). Klevan holds on to stylistic questions, and produces a claim that indicates that his work is meant to describe and celebrate rather than investigate. As modest as this claim is, the wording of this last passage succinctly describes a large portion of studies of actors. Klevan’s notion of revelry in pure description of actor’s movements summarizes a not insignificant amount of available writing on acting in cinema.

Of course, there are instances where this “description-as-analysis” is paired with other claims. In “Cary Grant: Acting Style and Genre in Classical Hollywood Cinema,” Kathrina Glitre documents the cross-genre alterations in acting style and technique of actor Cary Grant. The author makes her claims through extensive description of Grant’s actions in several films. Martin Shingler also conducts these popular brands of actor studies in “Bette Davis: Malevolence in Motion” and “Aishwarya Rai Bachchan: From Miss World to World Star”. In the latter, Shingler describes how the actress Aishwarya Rai Bachchan develops transnational performance abilities and stardom. As with Glitre’s piece, outside of this small bit of grounding in other fields of inquiry (transnationalism and Bollywood cinema), the work spends all of its time remarking on how a five-year span in the career of the actor saw her “work in different contexts, with different types of filmmakers and embrace different roles and performance methods” (Shingler [a], 107). Though they are connected to larger conversations in critical works, the claims that these types of accounts produce are still rather trivial.

When stylistic questions are left on their own, they do not manufacture strong conclusions or produce fruitful inquiries. I believe that it is these sorts of claims that necessitate critical texts that justify the study of screen acting. Since stylistic revelry makes up such a consequentially large percentage of the work on screen acting and motivates a whole discussion on the legitimacy of analyzing acting, I will go over some examples. We see this in Mario Falsetto’s “The Mad and the Beautiful: A Look at Two Performances in the Films of Stanley Kubrick”. The article devotes ten pages to diving into scenes from Kubrick’s film *The Shining* (1980), where the author describes the actions that Jack Nicholson performs. Falsetto’s observations are built in support of the claim that “Nicholson uses his body in different ways depending on the kind of scene he is playing” (Falsetto 355). Falsetto goes on to claim that the

performance changes with the tone of the film throughout, writing that “[a]s the film's narrative proceeds, the physical quality of Nicholson's performance becomes more pronounced and insistent, and the dramatic intensity of the film builds” (357). The argument certainly follows from the well-researched evidence, and the piece is an entertaining read, but it is a very modest claim.

James Naremore devotes the majority of his popular book *Acting in the Cinema* to working through case studies of individual performances, and noting how they relate to the performances in the rest of an actor's career. In his analyses of performances, Naremore employs at-length descriptions of an actor's movements and idiosyncrasies, before relating a performance to a film's themes or a character's mental state. In one chapter, Naremore describes James Cagney's performance as Rocky in Michael Curtiz's 1938 film *Angels with Dirty Faces*. The scholar writes that Cagney's uncomfortable character always makes use of “movements of the head and mouth—stretching the neck, jutting the chin forward and pulling it back, scraping the upper lip with the lower teeth, running the tongue around the cheek” (Naremore 166). The author goes on to write that “these movements, accompanied by quick uneasy glances, convey Rocky's efforts to keep his cool in changed surroundings, his determination to fight against odds, his struggle to maintain dignity” (166). In another chapter, Naremore describes Marlene Dietrich's performance in Josef von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930). Dietrich's character sits in a dressing room, and “gazes at herself coolly, like a dandyish male who is also a tough guy, explicitly rejecting feminine accoutrements by picking up a Moroccan lady's fan...and smiling ironically before tossing it aside” (144). Here, Naremore picks up another claim as a part of his analysis, considering the performance through the filter of an ideological question. Naremore also devotes a chapter to Charlie Chaplin's performance in the Chaplin-directed 1925 film, *Gold Rush*. The

author describes a scene where Chaplin hugs another character, “and then does a kind of waltz step out from her arms, holding her extended hand,” while “she leans one arm back on a nearby table, extending the other toward him in a graceful line,” until “he throws his head back, lifts his free hand over his head in a triumphant pose, and rises on his toes to his full height” (124). Finally, Chaplin “rises on his toes again to declare that he will remain true, but he is interrupted by a comic reversal: Big Jim’s arm comes in from off-screen, grabs his pointing hand by the wrist, and yanks him out of the scene like a floppy towel” (124). These observations are made to act as evidence for the claim that Chaplin’s acting style creates comedic effect. At times, Naremore braces his observations with additional lines of questioning to make the claims more significant, while other claims remain quite bare. This modesty stems from these claims’ restriction to the stylistic mode of questioning the screen actor.

Vivian Sobchack executes a similar analysis in “Thinking Through Jim Carrey”. In the chapter, Sobchack describes several film performances of actor Jim Carrey. The article praises Carrey’s work, establishes that he is a “real actor” instead of a clown that simply makes faces and makes audiences laugh, and concludes that “Jim Carrey is always self-reflexively ‘thinking through’ his body” (Sobchack [b], 294). Sobchack’s claim that Carrey “thinks through” his performances is meant to establish that he has a “complex” and “critical corporeal intelligence,” with this argument supported by the fact that Carrey rehearses his performances in front of a mirror (Sobchack [b], 277). The claim here is basically that Carrey rehearses his performances, with much of the article focused on revelling in the written transcription of Carrey’s movements. One passage, describing Carrey’s mimicry of a slow motion football replay in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (Tom Shadyac, 1994), remarks that the actor’s “strenuous stretching and contraction of facial and neck muscles—particularly the jaw and mouth—convey microunits of bodily effort,”

while “arms and legs flail and pump up and down in a rhythm we can inspect, and the hands claw for the air ball in grotesque contortions of strain and desire” (Sobchack [b], 276). As with Naremore and others, Sobchack’s descriptions of the movements of the acting is quite beautiful and poetic, with a strong argumentative significance or complexity to the claim being sacrificed for the chance to describe the performance.

The opportunity to praise is also an important part of these types of analyses. Sobchack makes no effort to hide her praise of Carrey throughout, and the same goes for Alan Lovell in “Susan Sarandon: In Praise of Older Women”. This piece gives a film-by-film breakdown of Susan Sarandon’s career, with the scholar even taking the opportunity to relate why he likes the actor so much: “Sarandon’s work is marked by an expressive energy,” and “crucially this expressiveness is combined with intelligence and this is what marks Susan Sarandon out for me” (Lovell 104). Lovell also writes that he “value[s] Susan Sarandon for the consistency of her performances” (104). Whatever his “final estimate of them might be,” the scholar can not “think of one” performance in which Sarandon does not “show a commitment to making the part work as well as she is able to” (104). Finally, according to Lovell, Sarandon’s “long career testifies that these qualities have been recognized by producers and directors,” and “[s]he more than deserves that recognition,” (104). Lovell is describing and justifying his fandom of Sarandon, rather than pointing his analysis towards a claim. I have described the previous few cases at length in order to flesh out what I believe is the type of discourse that causes those who question the legitimacy of studies of acting to do so. I have also done this to create a point of departure, and establish a type of questioning that my work will not be making use of.

1.3 Three Types of Representation

I pivot now to establishing the sorts of questions that the rest of this thesis will be asking. In

order to do so, I will extract the three main avenues on which screen acting discourse travels—character, star, and performance studies—as well as the three pieces of identity that screen acting literature uses to describe the actor—the character, the persona, and the private self.

In *Theorizing the Moving Image*, Noël Carroll declares that there are three different varieties of representation in cinema. These act as the root for the character, the persona, and the private self. The type of representation that fosters the character self is referred to as nominal portrayal:

A shot that physically portrays Anthony Perkins in *Psycho* depicts a madman while [it also] nominally portrays Norman Bates. A shot is a nominal portrayal of a person, object or event when it represents a *particular* person, place or thing different from the person, place or thing that gave rise to the image...For example, in the fictional world of the story of *Psycho*, the images stand in for Norman Bates rather than for Anthony Perkins, the actor whose presence in front of Hitchcock's camera brought these images of Bates into existence. (Carroll [b], 47, emphasis in original)

The character self emerges when an actor is regarded as the character that they are portraying, or when they are being nominally represented. Carroll refers to the type of representation that houses the persona self as “depiction”:

A film...*depicts* a class or collection of objects, designated by a *general* term. A shot from *Psycho* physically portrays Anthony Perkins while also depicting a man; likewise a shot of the Golden Gate Bridge in *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes* physically portrays *the* Golden Gate but also depicts *a bridge*. Every shot of live action film physically portrays its model—some specific individual—while also depicting a member of a class, describable by a general term—man, bridge, fire, cow, battle, etc. (Carroll [b], 47,

emphasis in original)

The persona self comes about when the actor is thought of as a class or collection of objects that are brought together under a single general term, or when they are being understood through Carroll's idea of depiction. A series of roles from on and off-screen come together to create this public "image". The sort of representation that nurtures the private self is deemed physical portrayal:

The first level of cinematic representation is *physical portrayal*. That is, every shot in a live-action photographic film physically portrays its model, a definite object, person or event that can be designated by a *singular* term. It is in the physical portrayal sense that it can be said that *Psycho* represents Anthony Perkins rather than Norman Bates – it was Anthony Perkins who served as the source of the image. Every live action show will physically portray its model". (Carroll [b], 46, emphasis in original)

The private self is present when the actor is thought of as a person that enters into a role and portrays a character in front of a camera, or when they are being physically represented. I will take up each of these in more detail in turn, beginning with the character.

1.3.1 Character Studies and the Character

In "Look at Me!," writing on Heath Ledger's performance in *The Dark Knight* (Christopher Nolan, 2008), Jörg Sternagel writes that Ledger's face "is always ready for its close-up and persistently penetrates the understanding of the spectator" (104). Ledger's face (inside of the makeup of his character, The Joker), is ever-present in the mind of the viewer throughout the film, even if it is not on screen. This happens for many reasons: a successful viral marketing campaign (involving a prominent image of the face of the Joker) that preceded the film's release; the popularity of the character throughout other adaptations; the intrigue of the

terrorist threat looming over a fictional city; or the gruesomeness of the appearance. The character has become detached from the body that inhabits it, and extends itself throughout the film. Even when The Joker is not active on screen, or being embodied by the actor that is playing him, he continues to exist. This is the way that the character self works in general within the actor. The individual will have moved on from actually impersonating the character, yet the character remains “present” within the actor’s identity. The performance has been captured on film, and can be displayed as widely and frequently as desired. This is one of the three lenses through which film studies views the actor: the individual character that exists within the world of the film, likely detached from the impersonating event, but still capable of being examined and interacted with. As Murray Smith suggests in *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema*, “actors’ performances...give us access to characters’ feelings and thoughts and as such contribute to the ‘revelation of the interior states of characters’” (Smith [a], 151). Character studies will analyze a character, extract some interiority from them, assume that they are equipped with the capacity to contain this interiority, and hold that they are constituents or “selves” inside of the total makeup of the actor.

It is easy to see how the character self exists, and how character studies approach films generally, but establishing its status as a branch of investigation of screen actors may still require work. Richard Dyer contributes to this in his book *Stars*, by describing many criteria that can be assigned to a character that is eligible for analysis: audience foreknowledge, character name and appearance, objective correlatives, speech of the character, speech of others, gestures, actions, structure of performances, and place within the *mise-èn-scene* (Dyer [b], 121). For Dyer, character studies will make use of these categories in order to analyze films.

Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis, and Ralf Schneider also define the techniques of character

studies, doing so in the introduction to *Revisionen: Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*. The authors offer four of their own types, approaches, or “dominant paradigms” for the analysis of characters in film. The first of these are hermeneutic approaches, which “view characters dominantly as representations of human beings” (Eder et. al 5). These investigations will look to interpret a character in relation to their historical background, and will interact with that character without questioning his or her status as a represented or fictional entity. The authors also describe psychoanalytic approaches, which “concentrate on the psyche of both characters and recipients,” while hoping to explain the inner life of characters and the reactions of audience members” (5). These approaches look to understand areas such as character motivation and processes of identification. “Structuralist and semiotic approaches,” the third category that the authors mention, focus “on the construction of characters and the...characters themselves as sets of signifiers and textual structures” (5). These examinations will attempt to trace the ways that a character functions as the agent for a film’s visual, narrative, or cultural meanings. The authors’ final category of character analysis, cognitive theories, “detail the cognitive and affective operations of information processing” (5). These approaches will analyze characters in concert with models of the human psyche, while questioning the limits of the boundaries of the character’s existence. These four approaches, in concert with Dyer’s categories, establish character studies as a section of the analysis of screen actors, as they describe the different avenues that this analysis can take.

1.3.2 Star Studies and the Screen Persona

While the concept of character studies is a centralized and uncomplicated subgrouping, star and performance studies work with more complexity. In star studies, scholars make use of the total “image” that is created over the course of an actor’s career. While actors will leave a

number of roles behind throughout their career, some of these will become “attached” to them, with the associations of these roles following them around. For example, Tom Hanks plays many kind and trustworthy individuals in his film work, and his persona reflects the same values. Obviously, this also emerges from public appearances, interviews, anecdotes, and so on, which are a part of this persona (partially because these appearances may also be performances themselves). Star studies will analyze a composite image from a star’s work, compare it to new works, grant it the power to define the actor, and hold that it is a constituent or “self” inside of the total makeup of the actor.

In “Story and Show: The Basic Contradiction of Film Star Acting,” Paul McDonald reflects on the various approaches that star studies can employ. For McDonald, “star studies have adopted a range of historical, critical and analytic perspectives, ranging from the historical emergence of star discourses or the ideological meaning of stars, to the currency of stardom in the film business and the identificatory relationships that moviegoers form with stars” (181). Similarly, in “Articulating Digital Stardom,” Barry King writes that stars are made of “fame,” which “is largely a function of processes that construct a personalized economy of attention” (271). For an actor to have a persona, or be regarded as the subject of a star study, they must have been in a number of films that have been visible enough to the public for them to “matter”. For King, “being cast in what turns out to be a culturally resonant role is important...but just as important are the investments made in advertising, publicity and subsidiary journalism” (271). Again, the star image is one that is built out of a number of sources, and depends on the construction of viewers and reviewers.

This image is fully capable of making its way onto a screen, and accompanying the actor into a role. Paul McDonald argues that stars create a tension when they are on screen. This

emerges from the fact that “stars contribute to the representation of the story world, yet at the same time they are visible as known onscreen identities” (McDonald 169-70). This tension “between the representation of the character and the presentation of the star...forms the basic contradiction of film star acting” (170). The persona, or presentation of the star, makes its way in to the screen world for McDonald. This is a central tenet of star studies, and studies of acting in general. McDonald provides an example of this, through Doug Liman’s 2005 film, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*. In the film, both Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie use “their voices and bodies to represent the specific character qualities of John and Jane, but at the same time they [are] always visible {as Pitt and Jolie} as they repeat manners evident in previous roles.” (181). “At each and every moment, Pitt [is] John but also Pitt [is] Pitt” (181). For McDonald, “‘Pitt’ or ‘Jolie’ are, of course, in turn performed identities – the product of continuities between previous roles,” and therefore both stars’ performances are informed by their screen personae (181). The persona makes its way into an actor’s performance on screen, altering the way that a performance is received, or the way that an actor appears on screen.

While the persona is generally regarded in this way— an “image,” created from on-screen and off-screen performative encounters that an actor has with an observer—it can also emerge from the performance style that an actor makes use of in their work. James Naremore refers to this aspect of the persona as the “ideolect,” describing this phenomenon as “a set of performing traits that is systematically highlighted in films and sometimes copied by impressionists” (4). The star personality emerges from many sources, and discourse around it also takes a few different approaches to navigate the relationship inside of McDonald’s basic contradiction of star acting.

The most popular approach that star studies employs in addressing this contradiction is to

combine particular elements from the film roles of one actor, and selectively create an overall character that gets associated with his or her work. Charlie Chaplin is one example of an actor who can generate this form of star persona. Chaplin's "Little Tramp" character uniquely exists across a number of films, allowing the viewer to know information about the performance before any exposition is given. In "Helen Shaver: Resistance Through Artistry," Susan Knobloch documents how Helen Shaver's roles allow her to resist ideological constructions, thus documenting the creation of such a trans-textual screen persona. Lucy Fischer describes some other instances of this approach in "The Lives of Performers: The Actress as Signifier in the Cinema." Fischer observes that "critics have discussed the screen character of Mae West, arguing for or against her liberating aspects," that writers have examined the image of Bette Davis, noting her incarnation of a strong woman model," and that "scholars have also investigated the figure of Marlene Dietrich, citing her highly ambiguous sexuality" (143). This line of critique, where an actor's roles and public appearances are used to create a star image that enters subsequent films alongside a character, suggests the active presence of the persona on screen.

Obviously, star studies are not possible without the phenomena of stars emerging at some point in film history, and sections of discourse around stars look to trace the idea of stardom back to its roots. Barry King suggests that "stardom emerges out of the interaction of three distinct economies" (272). The first of these is "the cultural economy of the human body as a sign," the second is "the economy of signification in film," with the third being "the economy of the labor market for actors" (King 272). Stars emerge from King's economies, which suggest that individuals (and specifically actors in film) can function as signs, and that film industries make use of this fact as they assign roles to actors, creating an economy of attention around actors as a part of the organization of the labour market. A studio will look for a specific actor to play a role,

making a decision based on what connotations that actor brings into the film (in addition to their talent and suitability for the role), relying on an actor's persona. Charlie Keil also identifies a historical origin point for star studies, and in line with King, regards it as a product of a system that can create a personality that stems from many acting roles. In "Acting Like a Star: Florence Turner, Picture Personality," Keil analyzes Florence Turner alongside Richard DeCordova's "Picture Personality," suggesting that Turner's overlap with DeCordova's concept makes her an early example of the screen's star system. In a departure from King's ideas, Keil notes that these forms of stardom predate "the enshrinement of motion picture stardom within a complex circuitry of promotional departments and media-based publicity" (201). So as much as stardom involves and is aided by industrial considerations and factors outside of the performances, the most important aspect of stardom has been an actor's work from the outset. As a result, the persona—though it can be found in promotional material—should also be present in an actor's performances.

The most important figure in film star studies is Richard Dyer, having published two seminal books that deal intensively with film stardom. In *Heavenly Bodies*, Dyer acknowledges McDonald's contradiction as something that runs throughout stardom. Dyer writes that "[a] star image consists both of what we normally refer to as his or her 'image', made up of screen roles and obviously stage-managed public appearances, and also of images of the manufacture of that 'image' and of the real person who is the site or occasion of it" (Dyer [a], 7). Dyer also returns to our recurring theme of incorporating considerations of the audience into discourse on acting. The scholar notes that "a major gap in work done on the stars, and indeed in media and cultural studies generally, is the role of the audience," and sorting out how audience members can "make sense of the star, the different ways in which he or she [is] read" (Dyer [a], ix). Dyer notes that

the importance of the audience in his consideration is a result of the fact that “how we appear is no less real than how we have manufactured that appearance, or than the ‘we’ that is doing the manufacturing” (Dyer [a], 2). Reception can work its way into the overall persona, as a star's image is also comprised of “what people say about him or her, as critics or commentators, the way the image is used in other contexts such as advertisements,” and “the way the star can become part of the coinage of everyday speech” (Dyer [a], 3). Other scholars (especially Baron) have placed emphasis on the importance of regarding acting as a crafting of performance, rather than a simple existence in front of a camera. Dyer investigates star personae with a similar perspective, noting that “[s]tars are...both labour and the thing that labour produces...the person is a body, a psychology, a set of skills that have to be mined and worked up into a star image” (Dyer [a], 5).

Focusing on the individual that crafts a star image, as well as the way that this image finds importance within the viewer’s life, are important pieces of star studies that Dyer introduces.

The work that goes into creating the star image, as well as the more general function of the star in society, are also touched upon in Dyer’s book *Stars*. This short monograph is the most important work in defining the discipline of star studies. The book discusses actors in three different ways, devoting sections to stars as a social phenomenon, as images, and as signs. In the first section, as in the work of King and Keil, Dyer questions where stars come from. He notes that they emerge from both production and consumption in society. In describing how stars are created from various modes of production, Dyer argues that “[t]he enormous economic importance of stars, the elaborate machinery of image-building and film’s importance in establishing character-types all suggest the potential power of the forces of cinematic production for creating the star phenomenon” (Dyer [b], 19). Simultaneously, stars are consumed by

audience members through connections made based on emotional affinity, self identification, imitation and projection on the behalf of the audience member (Dyer [b], 19). The “image” or star “personality [is] itself a construction known and expressed...through films, stories, publicity, etc.” (Dyer [b], 23). Dyer again emphasizes the importance of the audience that we have seen in the history of screen actors and their examination, writing that it is only possible to have stars in cinema when film materials become widely available (and when the industry receives the support that it requires to be able to utilize actors as stars).

The second section of *Stars* describes the general features of a star image, which is a unique meta-account of stardom that is rarely otherwise seen, but does not really factor into this thesis. In this section, Dyer writes that “[t]he general image of stardom can be seen as a version of the American dream, organised around the themes of consumption, success and ordinariness,” while there is also “an undertow that, as it were, ‘sours’ the dream” (Dyer [b], 39). Dyer writes that “[s]tars are always the most something-or-other in the world – the most beautiful, the most expensive, the most sexy” (Dyer [b], 49). This is soured by things like pathology, mental stresses that lead to illness, and many other factors that fit into the reality of “Hollywood as a destroyer” (Dyer [b], 51). The final segment of the book is split into two parts: a section that focuses on how stars interact with characters, and a section that focuses on how personae will interact with performance. This final interaction, a conversation between star and performance, is one that generally eludes star studies. While McDonald acknowledges the tension between character and star, Dyer is also thinking through the way that performances can influence star studies. In describing the interaction between characters and stars, Dyer gives an extensive definition of the notion of character—what a character is, how they come to be in film, and how they’re constructed. Dyer’s analysis of this relationship culminates in an observation that stars can either

be a “perfect fit” or a “problematic fit” for a role (an approach that is relatively common—see Gallagher). Dyer bases these categorizations on the way that the actor’s persona interacts with the character: a perfect fit occurs when an actor’s persona matches well with a character, while a problematic fit occurs when the two are not in sync (Dyer [b], 145-9). In the following discussion of the interaction between stars and performance, Dyer describes how audience members read performances, and how acting styles can differ from genre to genre. With this, Dyer is the first to make mention of all three of the components that screen acting discourse makes use of, taking a step that is vital for this thesis. Although Dyer dabbles in these three disciplines, he does not go so far as to make explicit, acknowledge, or collect the individual pieces of the actor that is made use of by each of these strands (as this project will in subsequent chapters).

1.3.3 Performance Studies and the Private Self

In performance studies, scholars will refer to a private individual that exists at the core of an actor’s work and life, suggesting that this individual has a degree of control over what the actor is and does. This private individual is one that “performs” a role, and is credited with the gestures, idiosyncrasies, and expressions that build a screen performance. Performance studies’ method is to analyze this private individual throughout an actor’s career, compare it to the execution of the characters and persona that they are associated with, grant it the power to act as an entry point to analyses of the actor, and hold that it is a constituent or “self” inside of the total makeup of the actor.

Absent in Dyer’s *Stars* is an account of the individual that is associated with performance studies, or the private self. However, Dyer does acknowledge this part of the actor’s identity in *Heavenly Bodies*. The author notes that within the actor, there is “an irreducible core of being,

the entity that is perceived within the roles and actions, the entity upon which social forces act.” (Dyer [a], 7). This irreducible core, which is “variously termed ‘the self’, ‘the soul’, ‘the subject’ and so on,” is “coherent in that it is supposed to consist of certain peculiar, unique qualities that remain constant and give sense to the person’s actions and reactions” (Dyer [a], 8). Dyer is rightfully skeptical of this notion of a singularized authentic individual that is behind all of an actor’s characters and markers of persona. This “subject” is certainly a part of the screen actor, but not something that can fully define what the actor is.

Furthermore, the observer’s understanding of this strand of identity can never really be verified as an accurate account. George Toles remarks on this in “Brando Sings!: The Invincible Star Persona,” arguing that there is always something about the actor that is not knowable. The article outlines how a number of stars—Marlon Brando, Jimmy Stewart, Deanne Durbin, and Robert Mitchum—enter into roles in which they are “playing hide-and-seek with his [or her] established persona” (Toles 76). The audience member, constantly engaged in a relationship with the actors that they see on the screen, are in search of the most “real” area in which to understand an actor (whose profession demands that they constantly adopt new manufactured identities). Toles notes that “it is natural for us to be attuned to kindred manifestations” of personhood, and search for a relationship with an actor that does not “often seem like an intemperate act of temporary bewitchment or possession” (84). The viewer likes to be able to assume that they can know the actor by observing their work: “[t]he most fertile engagements that we have with anyone, off-screen as well as on, arise from a consistent back and forth movement between what we feel we know (which affords comfort and security) and what is disruptively mysterious about stars.” (Toles 89). Obviously, feeling as though one can associate with the private existence of the actor through performance is a fantasy, and the private self of the actor is as crafted and

constructed as the other two.

For Dyer, this is not a problem, as the element of wish-fulfillment that is a part of the private self is something that frames any conception of a singular individual. This understanding of an individual will never exist without major objection, but “even while the notion of the individual is assailed on all sides, it is a necessary fiction for the reproduction of the kind of society we live in” (Dyer [a], 8). As such, performance literature that suggests a private individual that controls an actor’s work is justified. According to Dyer, “whether caught in the unmediated moment of the close-up, uncovered by the biographer’s display of ruthless uncovering, or present in the star’s indubitable sincerity and authenticity, we have a privileged reality to hang on to, the reality of the star’s private self” (Dyer [a], 9). Even though this reality is not technically “real,” the private self is an identifiable component of the screen actor.

Obviously, performance studies will advocate that analysis of performance is the key to making sense of screen acting. Or, as Barry King notes, “an enduring premise in performance studies is that the human actor is central to the process of dramatic signification” (271). In “A Star Performs: Mr. March, Mr. Mason and Mr. Maine,” Roberta E. Pearson declares that “editing, mise-èn-scene, performance, and extratextual factors” influence the viewer’s interpretation of character (72). However, “while performance cannot be analysed in isolation from these other factors, one might conclude that it is the actor's delivery of his [or her] dialogue, together with his facial expressions, gestures, and posture that most vividly endow a cinematic character with life.” (Pearson 72-3). Performance studies works look at the movements and styles with which an actor brings a character to life, and the artifice that goes into the execution of the role, deeming these gesticulations to be purposeful and pregnant with meaning. As Alex Clayton notes in “Play-Acting: A Theory of Comedic Performance,” viewers “encounter

performance, indeed all art, not as something that ‘just is’...but as something that is *meant*, set forward *as such-and-such*” (47, emphasis in original). Performance studies makes this assumption, believing that the observable elements of a performance are the products of deliberate choices on the behalf of the private self of the actor.

Performance studies can take on many forms. In *Reframing Screen Performance*, Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke make use of many of the most common approaches in performance studies. The authors describe trends in gestures and expressions as they shift throughout film history, discuss the phenomenon of crafted-but-natural behaviour that actors must exude, and orient various performances within major acting methods and techniques. This final exercise is a surprisingly common approach, in which writers will discuss one method of acting—Delsarte, Laban, Stanislavsky—and discuss a performance within its dogma (see Larue and Zucker). Alex Clayton seeks to break down comedic performances to identify humour’s roots in performative techniques. Clayton continues his focus on intention in the actor, and pairs this with an analysis of comic delivery to trace incongruity in intention and event. He identifies “the deliberate accident” and “knowing unknowingness” in several performances from Charlie Chaplin, Jerry Lewis, and Michael Palin. Brenda Austin-Smith picks up on Clayton’s concern with intention and choice in “Acting Matters,” as she traces the effects that performances have on creating “believable” constructions of character. For this believability to come across, the performance must effectively communicate the impression of choice within the scripted film world. For Austin-Smith, “our belief in a character's choice in a scripted fictional universe usually depends on the actor's creation and communication of some reservoir reflection—distinct from the actor's own—from which the character's choices can emerge” (21). The scholar vouches for “the part that expressiveness plays in reassuring us of the onscreen presence of a depicted

character who is capable of making meaningful choices, at least in filmic worlds in which choice itself has meaning” (22). Dyer writes that the private self is a fictional construction, and Austin-Smith notes that the fictional expressivity that the private self executes can be a way to make the performance more convincing or “believable” for the viewer.

It is on this note, where believability, authenticity and reality are considered alongside the work of an actor, where performance studies begins to branch out. Precedent for this kind of analysis goes all the way back to Erving Goffman’s notion of individuals acting in the everyday, making reality itself a series of interactions with falsifications, as described in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In “Is Acting a Form of Simulation or Being? Acting and Mirror Neurons,” William Brown suggests that actors go through a corporeal experience while performing, feeling in themselves the sensations that they are meant to mimic in their performances:

if an actor truly wants to convey feelings of sadness...to an audience that will ‘mirror’ the emotions on display, the actor must not just simulate an emotion (since presumably only a simulation of the emotion will be mirrored by the audience), but must in fact feel that emotion for him/herself. In other words, acting involves a state not just of simulation or representation, but a state of *being*. Or better: it is not that the actor simply has to ‘be there’ in front of the camera...but that the actor must actually experience in their performance the emotion that he/she wishes to convey. (Brown 116, emphasis in original)

So, as for Austin-Smith, Brown believes that acting involves a devotion and investment from the actor that extends beyond what we may normally think are the demands of the profession. It is also worth noting that Brown joins the group of scholars that discuss an audience’s reactions and

involvement in the process of creating the state of existence of the actor, as he declares that acting is a state of being due to the actor's ability to communicate experiences to an onlooker.

1.4 What is an Actor?

Most importantly, Brown claims that actors do not simply engage in simulation, where they make their way into a role that remains totally separate from their own isolated self. Instead, for Brown, the actor comes to "be". Using the definition that I have established throughout this chapter, where actors can be variously defined as characters, personae, and private selves that depend on viewer reception, we can reformulate Brown's statement slightly: the nature of these three selves, as beings that are believed to occupy the same body, does not prevent them all from coming to be. Richard Dyer writes that "because stars are 'dissolved' into" a "superlative" life of public praise and adoration, they "are indistinguishable from it," and "they *become* superlative (Dyer [b], 49, emphasis in original). Because of this, stars "seem to be of a different order of being, a different 'ontological category'" (Dyer [b], 49). Altering Dyer's ideas in light of Brown's claims and the aim of this thesis, the three selves of the actor mix together into a solution, making them inseparable from each other (in the sense that all three are necessary parts of the assembled identity of the actor, not in the sense that we cannot tell them apart or isolate them within that mixture).

I want to conclude this chapter by reinforcing this very important point that emerges from Brown, Dyer, and others: any workable notion of the screen actor must make use of these three pieces, and accommodate the fact that they are divisible (if only in discourse), yet are also indistinguishable. As we have seen throughout this chapter, the character, persona, and private self interact with each other, and are each established ways of considering film acting, which get attached to well established disciplines within screen acting discourse. For McDonald, "all film

acting...requires equal regard for acting as narrative and spectacle” (182). McDonald calls for discourse that interacts with more than one of the approaches that have been described in this chapter, writing that “attention to acting may...remedy shortcomings in” individual types of acting literature, “whereas attention to stars may encourage studies of film acting to see how film performance is always situated between story and show,” or generally how the actor is necessarily rooted in all three of these disciplines (182). At the close of his article, McDonald looks for scholarship that weaves together the many ways that we can understand the actor, and addresses the contradiction that he previously identifies, where we can simultaneously view an actor as both a singular being and a grouping of individuals.

When considered together, these three pieces constitute the actor in the most complete terms that acting literature has been able to achieve. But corralling them all within the same individual can be a difficult task, particularly when an actor’s constituent parts begin to encounter one another in our viewership. In “Implications of Paradoxical Film Characters for Our Models and Conceptualizations,” Johannes Riis picks up on Bazin’s claims on the “counterfactual dependence between object and depicted object” (269). Riis, referring to Bazin’s ideas as the transparency thesis, gives an example of the clash between an actor’s constituent parts:

What is more, the transparency thesis explains how an actor’s earlier roles may feed into current portrayals. For instance, Clint Eastwood’s performance in *Dirty Harry* (1971), and specifically in the final scene where he dares a criminal to pick up his gun (“Go ahead! Make my day!”), might function as the portrayal against which more recent portrayals are held...Thus in *Dirty Harry*, we see Clint Eastwood pretending to want to kill a criminal with his Magnum, we see Clint Eastwood pretending that he believes the other person has murdered innocent people in the streets of San Francisco. According to

this hypothesis, these narrative beliefs and desires are held by an actual agent, the actor, rather than a fictional and non-existent one. (Riis 269)

This agent, which we refer to as actor, is not simply crafted from one bit of identity (a character, a private self, or a persona). Instead, from Riis' notion of agent, Dyer's claim of actors as an ontological oddity, and McDonald's basic contradiction of star acting, the word actor itself refers to something else: an entity that pairs one individual (a character, a persona, a private self) with a database that houses the entirety of its identity. Dyer picks up on this as well in *Heavenly Bodies*, writing about a photograph that contains three separate visages of Joan Crawford. Dyer notes that "our mind can constantly shift between the three aspects of Crawford" (Dyer [a], 2).

Accounts of acting that do not consider all three pieces together are those that attempt to identify some essence within the actor, or who in fact they "really" are. But for the scholar, "it is the three of them taken together that make up the phenomenon Joan Crawford," rather than regarding each aspect separately from one another (Dyer [a], 2). This combination of the character, the persona, and the private self, along with the repeated focus on the role of the audience's cognition of the actor within literature, informs the following chapters of this thesis. Adding to Dyer's claim that stars are of a unique ontological category, I argue that actors in general are of a unique ontological category: beings that are legitimately understood as three separate individuals, while also regarded as a combination of all three. I believe that there is another part of the screen actor, which we have not yet encountered, and which facilitates this existence.

Chapter 2: Michel Foucault and the Screen Actor: The Observed Self, Care of the Self, and Transgression

“It is an incontestable fact that in a motion picture no live human being is up there. But a human something is, and something unlike anything else we know”.

-Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 26.

In his book *Parables for the Virtual*, Brian Massumi discusses Ronald Reagan’s desire to use his acting to access a state of being in the world. According to Massumi’s reading of Reagan’s 1965 autobiography, *Where’s the Rest of Me?*, Reagan laments his status as a “semi-automaton” in most of his film performances (55). Massumi notes that Reagan prizes his work as Drake McHugh in *King’s Row* (Sam Wood, 1942), a role which Reagan believes has allowed him “to transcend, to become someone else...to be extraordinary,” and to be “a hero” who “is destined for greater things” (49). Impersonating Drake in *King’s Row*, Reagan “is on the road to completing himself” (in Massumi’s words); but Massumi notes that Reagan can only set himself on this path “by mouthing a pre-scripted line that made him into a foreshortened other” (63). This system presents “an ontological *problem* posing as an open question the very possibility of constructing such a subject” (62, emphasis in original). Phrasing and rephrasing this query three times, Massumi poses the following questions: “how can exalted difference be derived from banal repetition? Repeat: how can a difference born of becoming-other be self-identity? Again: how can higher being arise from abject becoming?” (63). While this claim—relating the screen performances of an actor to a verifiable achievement of “higher being”—is not the sort of claim that this thesis aims for, a slightly altered version of the problem that Massumi notes is relevant here. I want to use this slightly modified inquiry as a way of framing this chapter’s discussion. Indeed, if there is any claim to be made involving selfhood and the screen actor, it must take this

problem into account: how is it that subjective interpretation of a performative activity can lead to claims about the performer's individuality?

In this instance, in trying to flesh out the observed self, I see two ways to deal with this problem. The first of these—admittedly the weaker of the two—originates from the research gathered for the first chapter. A consistent emphasis on the importance of reception in performance, and the individual that does this receiving, allow for academic works on acting to operate in a “safe zone”. As we have seen, claims are made about an actor's work, thoughts, and individuality without the proper access or authority that these claims require. Hoping to avoid this sort of procedure, I want to use the appeal to reception to describe how an actor's selfhood is created, rather than justify a claim about his or her own worldly self-achievement. My discussion of selfhood outlines a being whose existence is a project of both performer and viewer. In other words, an actor creates the moments where the observed self is evident, while its assembly is the responsibility of the viewer.

The second way of getting around our problem comes in noting how a viewer can make this conclusion about an actor's individuality without purely relying on subjective interpretation of performance. For example, if I want to argue that Person X is an example of a poor actor, I could cite instances where I think they are emitting the qualities of a poor actor. But to step around the problem that's guiding us here, I would also need to rely on external reports of the qualities of poor actors: certain tendencies make a poor actor, and Person X exhibits these tendencies; therefore, Person X is a poor actor. This kind of logic also carries over to the project at hand. In the two chapters that follow the current entry, I will show how particular performances function as examples of the creation of an actor's observed self. Before I can show how any cases are meant to exemplify this idea, I need to show how the observed self is created,

and how it can be picked out. Rather than turning to performative theories to do this, I turn to Foucault's transgression and care of the self in this chapter. While not all of my analysis in chapters three and four will take root in Foucault's work, the links created in this chapter are essential in both remaining chapters: in identifying the components of an observed self on screen, and in picking out moments that demand an audience members' use of an observed self. My argument concerning Foucault roughly follows this logic: the deployment of these Foucauldian ideas makes an observed self apparent, and the performances I will cite deploy these ideas, and therefore make an observed self visible. This chapter is concerned with setting the first premise of that argument in motion.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first of these will offer a definition of the observed self of the film actor, expanding on the brief formulation offered in the introduction. The second section will link questions surrounding human particularity with those of screen acting, serving as a "primer" for connecting the communication of the observed self with the thought of Michel Foucault. The third part will describe Foucault's notions of care of the self and transgression, and relate these two ideas to the observed self. This section will show how engagement with these practices makes the observed self visible, and set the terms for the analysis in chapters three and four.

2.1 The Observed Self

Emerging from the literature review in the last chapter, we can see that discourse has established that the screen actor's worldly existence is split. Actors are reciprocally regarded as a character, a persona, and a private self. If we were to stop there, we could visualize an actor's individuality as though he or she is a painter, whose palette contains three different colours: when regarded as a character, actors would deposit one colour; when their screen persona is on

display, we would assume them to be painting with another colour; and a third colour would signal their private self (those on the left side of Fig. 1). Following this, we can extract an important common feature that sits under all three of these ways of understanding cinematic actors: a superficial twist or glossing over, where the acknowledgement or experience of one of these selves comes at the expense of our immediate regard for the others. When viewers address an actor as a character, they are distorting the screen persona and private self, leaving behind consideration for past roles and the person creating the performance. When viewers address an actor through a star persona, they will neglect an analysis of the performative private self, while privileging, forgetting, and trivializing many characters to assemble the persona. When viewers address an actor as the performer who executes a role, they lose some focus on the being of the character in the film world, while also losing track of other roles in the actor's career.

This thought experiment brings out a very useful point in defining the observed self. While actors can be regarded as “single colour painters,” we also know that these colours can become mixed together. Rather than visualizing film actors as painters who move from one colour to another, seamlessly and without mess or bleed, we can envision actors mixing the primary colours together on their palette (on the right of Fig. 1). These strands of identity—characters, personae, private individuals—bleed into each other, with one moment capable of producing a different tone than the next. Something as simple as a spoken line in a film could mix these together: the character's recitation could intertextually call on an actor's previous roles, while the situation in the film could reverberate with what is known of an actor's private self. These two different notions, visualized in Figure 1, represent McDonald's basic contradiction of film star acting. These are the two formulations that remain in contact and tension with one another.

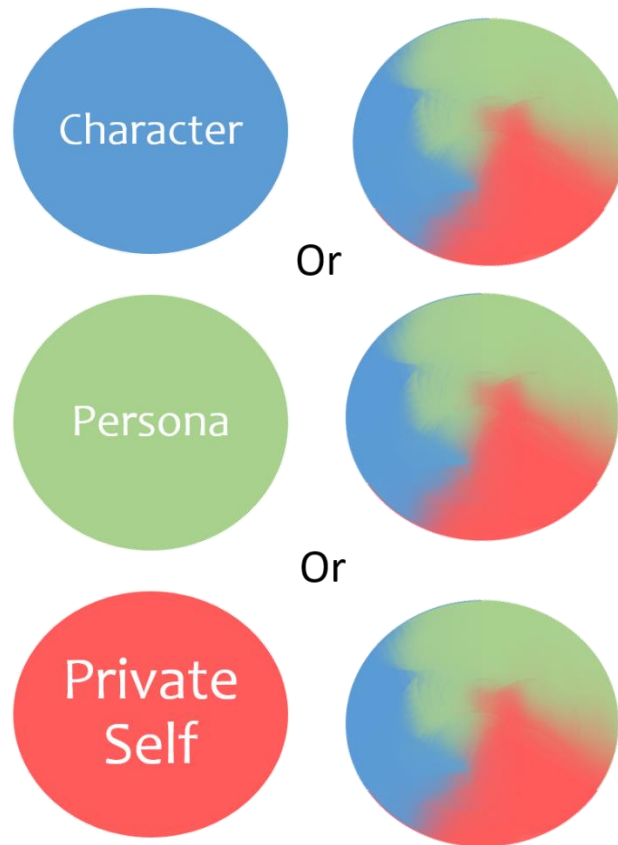


Figure 1: The Actor's Contradiction

Despite the obvious potential for clashes in the viewer's "making sense" of an actor, observers handle this contradiction with ease, and probably without even noticing it. Even at its most basic, viewership of acting meets a radical contradiction to the normal operation of human reality with very little resistance: the viewer is aware that an actor is both on screen in front of them and elsewhere in the world, and generally accepts this fact along with the requisite knowledge of cinematic process. To return to the quote from Stanley Cavell at the outset of this chapter, there is a human "something" on the screen in front of the viewer, suggesting that the screen actor has some degree of existence deposited in at least two (and likely many more) locations. Rather than having to calculate and recalculate the degree to which each of these

selves is present in a film, a moment, or a career, or getting hung up on the oddity of the screen acting profession as it relates to singularity, the viewer is equipped with a mental process that allows for many layers of one actor to flow smoothly through them—to make use of both of these conceptions, and both the human and non human with relative ease.

Facilitating this flow, sitting latent and unnoticed, is the observed self. The observed self is a combination of the constituents of the actor: the tone on the palette when the available colours have bled into each other; the right side of the model in Figure 1. The function of the observed self is found in this facilitation: viewers understand that actors will set forth different combinations of their three selves, mixing all of them together and projecting that visible or “knowable” component of their subjectivity onto their body. This allows the viewer to “know” the many parts of an actor within one body, and to allow the multiple to coexist with the singular.

While it abstractly presides over the viewer’s interaction with an actor, the observed self corrals the disparate pieces of a screen actor into one package. An experience that is created by the viewer, the observed self is activated when the onlooker is given access to a connection, intersection, or collision between the constituent pieces of a screen actor. Like flipping a switch we move from one level of Figure 1 to another, relying on our understanding of the amalgamated nature of actors to ground ourselves in a familiar system. This could happen in a written account of an actor’s career, where these three strands are tied to each other in a retrospective. This may happen between the credits of a single film, where one actor plays a character with separate fleeting moments of reference to their screen persona and private self. This can also happen, as we will see in future chapters, in single performative moments, which may flare up numerous times throughout one actor’s career.

The observed self, the entity that corrals the other three selves of the film actor into one presentable package, is found when the character, persona, and private selves encounter each other. The observed self is an experience that is created by viewers (as long as they are familiar with the performer's persona and private selves); the audience member can have this experience in moments when an actor's performances create intersections and collisions between the three ways of putting actors into discourse. Obviously, for the observed self to be communicated, there must be aspects of performance that broadcast it in the first place: ingredients in acting that disseminate an observed self and make it apparent. In the next two sections, I argue that these features include the deployment of Foucault's ideas of care of the self and transgression.

2.2 The Actor and The Subject: A Primer for the use of Foucault

To begin this section, I want to briefly justify using Michel Foucault as supporting evidence for actors' execution of the observed self. From the first chapter, we have seen that scholars are asking for a rhetorical shift in screen acting theory. In response to a call made by Brown, Dyer, McDonald, Aaron Taylor, and others, recent years have seen significant growth in the number of publications that "take acting seriously". Throughout this burst of "serious" accounts, a central tension frames our discussion: a difficulty in understanding an actor as a "complete" or "whole" individual, while also being able to account for the actor's inherent disintegration. In other words, academics have been hunting for a way to conceptualize the screen actor as both an embodied particularity and a collection of disparate discursive identities. Many of these responses try to resolve the matter by declaring the actor to be "of the world," operating with an existence that is analogous to agents in the real world. The observed self is also a way of accounting for this tension.

This tension is crystallized by Johannes Riis in "Implications of Paradoxical Film

Characters for Our Models and Conceptualizations”. Riis writes on characters that are played by more than one actor, as well as characters that appear in many films. In these instances, there is a “decoupling” of character and actor, which creates “[a] kind of abstraction” in the mind of the viewer (Riis 263). He notes that when characters “lack a specific embodiment of an actor, this means that our person-directed emotions are impeded and the object of emotions are to be found in other aspects of the films” (Riis 266). For Riis, when the viewer cannot couple the character and the actor together, they will invest their emotional attachment in another location. This ties in with Paul McDonald’s basic contradiction of film star acting, noted in chapter 1. Again, for McDonald, this is the tension between the simultaneous screen “representation of the character and...presentation of the star” (170). Via McDonald’s suggestion that an actor has two contradicting and ever-present sides, viewers must be able to connect both sides of Figure 1 to sustain the preferred Riis-ian viewing of an actor: to identify an actor as both a disintegrated being (the left side of the model) as well as a composite being (the right side of the model). For example, a viewer would obtain a Riis-ian viewing position when seeing an actor play a character (satisfying the presence of the left side of the model), while also being aware of their observed self (satisfying the presence of the right side of the model).

For Riis, the viewer is open to being disoriented when the relationship between these two sides breaks down. In these moments, an actor has become decoupled from their performance: or in the terms of my argument, the actor’s performance of one piece from the left side of the model will activate another. The observed self goes to work in these occurrences, rescuing us from a viewing experience absent this cozy coupling. It absorbs the discarded piece, and continues to serve as complement to the individual that is newly in the forefront. The observed self allows for the presence of many discrete identities within one body. Here, viewers can interpret an actor as

someone who vacillates between being comprised of character, persona, and private self, and understand actors as a unique site of interaction for the singular and the multiple. This system allows the viewer to accept that actors will exist in numerous locations simultaneously. The observed self allows the viewer to resolve the contemporary tension surrounding the acting profession, interpreting this as a normal phenomenon.

Murray Smith writes on this viewing position in *Engaging Characters*. Smith notes that film actors can be related to theories of self, since viewers assume “an analogy to everyday experiences with agents when we perceive fictional characters” (Smith [a], 21). For Smith (as for Riis), audiences tend to couple an actor with a character. When the components of this pairing no longer maintain their exclusive connection between one another, the viewer must take an extra cognitive step to allow for a familiar viewing experience. In the case of my argument, this step is the audience’s comprehension of an observed self. This allows us to project all three notions of an actor onto their worldly body simultaneously. Following this, the recognition of the observed self’s emergence is a project of acknowledging how screen performances interact with concepts that account for a similar grouping of individuals within bodies, as well as their collisions with each other.

In a companion piece to his book *Engaging Characters*, entitled “Engaging Characters: Further Reflections,” Murray Smith writes that “characters are representations of personal agents, but have no real agency” (Smith [b], 238). Smith also writes that “to hold that characters are real is not necessarily to hold that characters are wandering around in a multiplicity of possible worlds; the reality of characters might be cashed out in several different ways...we surely need a general ontology which is supple and rich enough to credit characters with a kind of reality” (Smith [b], 237). Before fully exploring how Foucault’s ideas intersect with the

expression of the observed self, I want to briefly reflect on these two Smith quotes. Specifically, I want to focus on Smith's distinction between beings that represent agency, and those that actually have agency. In line with this distinction, my analysis of an actor's deployment of care of the self and transgression is not meant to create a conclusion about the cinematic actor's status as an ideal figure of self-knowledge. I mean to respond to Smith's idea of a supple ontology, one that can credit actors with a kind of selfhood. The function of the observed self, to allow for and sustain a viewing position that has become concerned with a non-Cartesian understanding of selfhood, moves towards "crediting" actors with the dissemination of an ontology that falls in line with contemporary sensibilities. But rather than declaring that actors achieve this purposefully and wilfully, and thereby creating a final declaration of an actor's achievement of ideal selfhood, I mean to show how their relationship to care of the self and transgression allows them to express their observed selves. The connection at hand between acting and Foucault is not one that seeks to pitch an actor's fragmented self as realistic, to declare the observed self a human agent, or to note an actor's achievement of an ideal mode of being. Instead, in the process of arguing for the existence of the observed self, I want to show how the presence of transgression and care of the self make this part of identity manifest. This making visible of the observed self is a necessary step on its way to fulfilling Smith's call of crediting the screen actor with a sort of selfhood.

The fact that actors never engage in this play with the outright purpose of creating the observed self would be a problem if I were assigning the phenomenon totally to their will. I do not mean to step around this problem simply by appealing to the authority of interpretation, instead meaning to rely on the nature of the construction of an acting identity. Since actors are so involved in discourse, viewers, and the act of watching, I see the internal will to knowingly

create the observed self as irrelevant. While actors and their performances are certainly key in showing how these ideas connect (as the final two chapters will investigate), the development of an observed self is also equally reliant on non-actors. In *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation*, Andrew Klevan remarks on how a shift in acting discourse makes this kind of analysis possible. In the past, according to Klevan, acting has been investigated for “the dualistic cosmology of a ‘real truth’ that...was accessible only via specific techniques and specialized forms of mastery” (47). This was paired with a general acceptance of “the idea of an authentic, central self” (47). With the dissipation of belief in this Cartesian ego in the latter decades of the twentieth century, considerations of performance undergo a “movement away from a focus on the interiorized ‘self’ and towards a view of the individual as an exteriorized and abstracted identity” (47). Though Klevan does not explicitly mention Foucault, his ideas allow for a transition into considering the intersection between Foucault and the version of screen acting selfhood being discussed here. For Klevan, film actors marry well with theories of interiority that depart from singular conceptions of selfhood, as the creation of their identity involves external shaping. Also stemming from Klevan’s observation, and likewise linking screen acting with the work of Michel Foucault, is a shift in function for studies of acting. While pursuit of truth or reality was previously the reigning motivation in analysis of screen performance, the impetus for these studies has become accounting for the individual as an abstracted or fragmented identity. The current ruling principle for the screen actor is this multiplicity—not only being multiple, but being in multiple locations and having one’s being assembled through multiple sources.

Again, I return to Cavell’s quote at the outset of this chapter. There is something human about actors, or something about their existence that falls in line with society’s assembly of human identity since the latter decades of the 20th century. This is an association that Andrew

Klevan makes for us. But despite the appeals to the human and the real in Klevan, Smith, and Riis, there is also something not human about actors—their broadcasting of an observed self: their version of being disintegrated while discrete; their easing of our potential decoupling. The observed self—part of the Cavell-ian human something—is a way of allowing for Macdonald’s basic contradiction of film acting to continue within a Riis-ian viewer, who wants able to connect multiplicity to the singular. In part, actors do this through their relationship with care of the self and transgression.

2.3 Foucault: Care of the Self and Transgression

My examination of both care of the self and transgression will involve two stages: I will offer a definition of each concept, and then describe how an actor’s association with them deploys an observed self. Foucault’s reflections on the care of the self come at a time where, according to Carolyn Dinshaw in her book *Getting Medieval*, Foucault’s emphasis is “on *becoming* rather than on *being*, performance rather than ontology” (10). In line with this observation, care of the self refers to curatorial work that one performs on one’s own self. Though progress is made with this work, in this project of becoming of something other than oneself, the individual will never find satisfaction. There is no central or true self to discover for Foucault, making care of the self a constant and unending earthly task.

In *The Care of the Self*, the third part of his famous *History of Sexuality* series, Foucault traces the practice of the care of the self, or “caring for oneself,” to ancient Greek culture. This concept, also referred to as the “art of existence”, is a practice that produced a negative offspring. It warped over time into what Foucault calls here the “cultivation of the self” (elsewhere referring to this altered version as the Californian cult of the self) (Foucault [c], 42-4). While this carries on with the general theme of an art of existence, it sees care of the self “breaking out of

its original setting and working loose from its first philosophical meanings,” and gradually acquiring “the dimensions and forms of a veritable ‘cultivation of the self’” ((Foucault [c], 44). According to Ladelle McWhorter in *Bodies and Pleasures*, the encouragement of self discovery in the Californian cult of the self “attaches significance to the so-called minutiae of personal life—like what kind of coffee you drink or what the brand name of your jeans is” (196). These interests emerge out of a self absorption within the cult members, who believe “that the truth lives within them and expresses itself through these displays” (McWhorter 196). As Foucault writes in “On the Genealogy of Ethics,” individuals that take this approach to selfhood believe that “if they do what they do, if they live as they live, the reason is that they know the truth about desire, life, nature, the body, and so on” (Foucault [b], 262). In the Californian cult of the self, “one is supposed to discover one’s true self, to separate it from that which might obscure or alienate it,” while individuals enacting care of the self are never meant to come to this discovery (Foucault [b], 271). While a watered-down version of caring for oneself posits a “true” self that can be found or known, Foucault emphasizes that care of the self involves no such resolution to one’s work.

For Foucault, this work is performed when the individual engages with technologies of the self. According to Edward McGushin in “Foucault’s Theory and Practice of Subjectivity,” when Foucault “speaks of the ‘technologies’ or ‘arts’ of the self or of life, he is drawing on the Greek term *techne*,” or “the kind of knowledge that allows someone to accomplish a specific task or produce a specified outcome” (135). Techniques of the self are geared towards crafting the self, and establishing the ability to continue to effectively craft oneself, rather than knowledge of the self as such. Technologies of the self are arts “for the *formation* of subjectivity, for the formation of the self,” and “part of an effort to become a certain kind of individual, to give a

distinctive form to one's life, to shape, deepen, intensify and cultivate the relationship of the self to itself." (McGushin 138, emphasis in original). These techniques are described as activities such as writing down one's thoughts and experiences, "teaching, listening, or reading" (Foucault [b], 274). These will facilitate definite objectives, "such as retiring to oneself, reaching oneself, living with oneself, being sufficient to oneself, profiting by and enjoying oneself" (Foucault [b], 274). Care of the self comes about with a personal ethics, or the construction of a "personality". It is also, as Foucault notes in "The Ethics of Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom, "a mode of being for the subject, along with a certain way of acting, a way visible to others" (Foucault [d], 286). It is both a method of thought and a way of being in the world for others to see. In executing these tasks, one must "perform certain very precise and well ordered activities, activities that require a certain amount of know-how" (McGushin 136). Techniques of the self are learned by doing, and visible to outsiders.

In addition to its opposition with the Cult of the self, and its attachment to the arts of living, care of the self is associated with spirituality. In "Freedom and Spirituality," Karen Vintges notes that Foucault's idea of spirituality does not rely on the existence of a central self, nor does he use spirituality as a way for a discrete individual to control the world. Instead, the notion that Foucault suggests here is "a spirituality without a spirit, without an incorporeal supernatural being or immortal soul" (Vintges 103). For Foucault, spirituality is "the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations" on themselves to access the positive effects of the care of the self (Foucault [e], 15). Spirituality has three characteristics in Foucault's thought: first, it "postulates that for the subject to have right of access to the truth [they] must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than [themselves]"; second, rigorous work of the self on the self (or

askesis) is a way for the subject to transform themselves “in order to finally become capable” of self care; and third, access to the care of the self “transfigures [the] very being” of the subject through beatification (Foucault [e], 15-16). The desire, transformation, and reward that the subject experiences in this description of spirituality suggest that care of the self is not accomplished without “a conversion or transformation of the subject” (Foucault [e], 15). This transformation at the heart of caring for oneself is followed by the adoption of techniques of the self. This creates access to some effect, but does not stop the project from constantly recurring.

With this definition of care of the self, as well as some detail on the relevant satellite concepts, I want to show how an actor’s interaction with the care of the self is going to deploy the compound entity of the observed self. More specifically, I argue that actors make use of this Foucauldian concept in expressing their screen persona in films. Certainly, cinematic actors engage with the fundamental characteristics of care of the self. This Foucauldian notion involves impersonation and performance (or acting in Foucault’s own terms), where the subject is out in the world for others to see. This positions an actor’s work as a technique of the self: both a method of thought and a learned performative way of being in the world. The multi-directional approach that is taken by discourse surrounding actors also prevents any declaration of a true self. In these intersections between actors and the subject that engages in care of the self, the observed self is made visible. Within care of the self’s constant state of work, and in opposition to the Californian cult of the self, the subject never declares that they have achieved self knowledge. When an actor is most completely preventing a true self from being declared, all three of their discursive selves will be active. In other words, even in general terms, Foucault’s care of the self applies to the screen actor when understood through the lens of the observed self: rather than declaring any one individual piece to be at the core of the actor, this system employs

a complex partnership of entities where one half of a pair is comprised of numerous changing individuals.

Technologies of the self allow for moments where actors engage in care of the self, and bring the observed self into view. This happens in two stages. First, these technologies will bring all three selves of the film actor together. Even in general terms, we can see how this works: as we have seen, there is a performative element to the art of existence, suggesting that those who employ these technologies will make characters of themselves; this performance is executed so that the subject that plays this role can enjoy benefits, suggesting that the private self is always at play throughout these events. More specifically, as apparent in Foucault's descriptions of the visibility and repeatability of the technologies of the self, the subject is meant to deposit a collective persona in the minds of their public audiences, creating a reputation. Certainly, when subjects engage in technologies of the self, in practicing repeated techniques and activities that create a public image of themselves, they are making a persona evident. I argue that this extends to actors and the expression of their persona, which brings us to the second stage of this deployment of the observed self: identifying when an actor makes use of these technologies, bringing out their persona on screen. While leaning on the notion of screen acting as its own technology of the self, this activation is apparent in films when one performance will reference another work in an actor's career. These intertextual moments act as evidence for performance's status as a learned and repeatable stylistic practice, making them technologies of the self.

Finally, Foucault's idea of spirituality, apropos of care of the self, also brings about the deployment of screen persona. The transformation and beatification that go into Foucault's spirituality are the key terms here. For an actor, certain performances will involve characterizations that have great effects on an actor's persona, and earn them widespread

adulation: an actor will receive rave reviews for such a role, and their persona will undergo a positive swell as a result. Such roles can bring about transformation and beatification for the persona. In accounts of an actor's work, they often receive praise for particular scenes, lines, or actions. Actors will also receive awards, and be regarded as "brilliant," or "geniuses" of their craft. These moments and adulations, when documented as part of a performance's contribution to an actor's "image," allow the actor to enjoy Foucauldian rewards from their work. As such, these performances (as well as their surrounding discourse) utilize Foucault's vision of spirituality (through caring for oneself) to make the persona visible on screen. These roles—where the energizing of a character transforms and beatifies an actor's persona in discourse—pairs with intertextual references—which position performance as a technology of self—to show how care of the self makes an actor's persona visible in performance.

Having completed this definition of care of the self, as well as the contextualization of its function in my argument, I want to do the same for Foucault's idea of transgression. Foucault sees transgression, or the eclipsing of boundaries, as a practice that fills a space previously occupied by the sacred. Instead of the alluring power of God (who no longer holds the power over society that it once did), it is transgression that allows for an individual to access a personal "beyond", or a territory of excess. To connect with this, subjects interact with the relationship between transgression and limits. For Foucault in "A Preface to Transgression," "[t]he limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows" (Foucault [a], 34). Transgression needs to meet with legitimate resistance, while the limit that imposes this resistance must be theoretically breakable. The limit takes part in the "glorification of the nature that it excludes,"

while transgression is directed towards “that which imprisons it, toward the limit and those elements it contains” (Foucault [a], 34-35). Limits are interested in being broken and opening onto the limitless, while transgression is interested in the resistance it feels from the limit in the act of crossing. The relationship between the limit and its transgression is one “which no simple infraction can exhaust” (Foucault [a], 35). The crossing of the limit does not mean the obliteration of this limit, and instead allows for the limit to embrace the content or plenitude that it had been shutting itself off from. Foucault gives an example of this relationship between transgressing and limiting, which I want to include here in full:

Perhaps it is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity; the flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it has given a name to obscurity (Foucault [a], 35).

In this case, darkness is the limit, and a flash of lightning acts as transgression. In transgressing, the lightning gives the obscure limit a name, contextualizing it in this encounter of carving out a path through it. The limit also provides a location for the transgression to impress itself, as a site of resistance to be made apparent upon.

With this definition of transgression and limits in tow, I again want to relate this Foucauldian idea to screen acting, before noting how this concept factors in the deployment of the observed self. Differing from Foucault’s notion of care of the self, which makes the persona manifest, an actor’s use of transgression creates the conditions for the observed self to take action. While my investigation of the care of the self involves two areas of intersection with

actors, I will focus on only one sphere with transgression. This is the interaction between the cinematic actor and the notion of transgressive limits. Subjects break down the limits that surround them, but escape from limits altogether is not possible, as this break is not a complete one (as we saw with the lightning bolt example). Poor casting decisions, typecasting, genre, appearance, and any number of factors could orient the screen actor within an external limit. Discourse is obviously another one of these, with the three selves that discourse manufactures functioning as isolated subjects, each separated from one another by their own limits. I argue that screen actors are inherently transgressive, and can cross the limits that define their construction (to build on Dyer's observation that actors are equipped with their own unique state of being). Returning to Fig. 1, actors pass through the limits that separate their three discursive selves (on the right side), transgressively create themselves anew by reorienting the way that others see them (the various scenarios on the left side), and do so while maintaining the broad limit of their own personhood.

It is the continued relationship between both aspects of the actor—the singular and the collective—that allows transgression to deploy the observed self. The function of the observed self ensures that the actor's many layers of identities are restricted to a single figure. Because of this, the heart of acting's transgression, and the crux of the manifestation of the observed self, is the screen actor's being in more than one location. These moments occur when viewers must depend on an actor's transgressive nature in order to ground a scene in a Riis-ian approach—when an actor's performance demands that the viewer conceptualizes them as a container for any different particularities. This will be even more prescient in the next two chapters, where the multi-role actor uniquely demands the calming function of the observed self. In these cases, actors readily occupy more than one physical location on screen, with the observed self tying

these multiple entities into a singular acting body. By potentially violating the viewing position that viewers hope to maintain, the actor opens the door for an expression of the observed self. Assigning a transgressive existence to an actor allows us to envision them as observed selves, and corral their habits of transitioning and mixing within the limits of one individual.

Stemming from these connections between two Foucauldian concepts and screen acting, we see how care of the self and transgression figure in the broadcasting of an observed self. The persona is found in an actor's adoption of technologies of the self, as well as their association with the transformation and beatification of spirituality. An actor's observed self is found when the character and private self join this persona on screen, while moments that reinforce an actor's existence in more than one location demand that we put this to use. In these occurrences, we are reminded that actors are inherently transgressive individuals, operating with an ontology that is unlike our normal understanding of human agents. The observed self corrals the character, persona, and private self into the individual that we know as "actor", which is then paired with an individuated experience of that actor: a character in a performance, for example. While the profession of acting can be related to care of the self and transgression in a general sense, we can also identify these relationships within individual performances, which is where I will turn for the next two chapters. Or, returning to the logical argument that I outlined earlier in the chapter: having established that the deployment of these Foucauldian ideas makes the observed self apparent, the next two chapters will show how particular performances deploy these ideas, compile an observed self, and create the conditions in which an observed self springs into action.

Chapter 3: Multi-Role Performance and Peter Sellers

In this chapter, I will consider the work of Peter Sellers in two films: *The Mouse that Roared* and *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. In both films, Sellers plays three separate roles. Sellers takes on the multi-role genre of performance many times in his career. The choice to focus on the performances in these two films is partially inspired by a slight absence of the multi-role performance in academic explorations of cinematic acting. These two films (as well as the practice of performing multiple roles in general) also function as ideal examples of putting the observed self into practice. Both pieces contain characters that have been inspired by experiences in Sellers' own personal life, inspire a notable amount of critical work around Sellers' performances, and contain instances where his characters interact with one another or appear on screen simultaneously.

Stemming from the analysis in chapter two, these forms of characterization and moments of intersection are essential to teasing out a screen actor's observed self. The observed self, a subtle and often unnoticed way of seeing an actor that film viewers constantly make use of, allows for many layers of a screen actor to flow smoothly through the perception of the onlooker. Rather than having to calculate and recalculate the degree to which each of the pieces of an actor are present in a film or career, or getting hung up on the oddity of the screen acting profession (where singular beings are easily duplicated, distributed, and appear to be in more than one place at a time), the viewer relies on the observed self to make sense of film actors and understand them in familiar terms. The observed self allows for the three components of an actor—the character, private self, and persona—to be mixed together within the individual. While a viewer can perceive an actor by relying on only one of these parts, the observed self's mixture also allows a viewer to conceptualize the actor as a combination of different beings contained within

the borders of one physical body. This body, according to Riis' theory of coupling discussed in chapter two, is then paired with a cinematic performance. When this pairing is disrupted in the film, viewers must adjust their viewing experience to sustain their relationship with the individuated version of the actor in display. Multi-role performances are thus an especially rich candidate for making an observed self explicit, as viewers must heavily rely on their certainty that an actor is but one physical body that contains several persons.

As suggested in chapter two, the observed self is found in films where all three of an actor's discursive selves are visible. Part of this chapter will be concerned with showing how these pieces are present in both of the selected films. In this analysis, the screen persona is identified through the lens of two aspects of Michel Foucault's notion of care of the self (technologies of the self and spirituality). While a persona (Sellers', or presumably that of any actor) can be found easily through interviews and reviews, I use Foucault to turn the persona from a piece that exists outside of an actor's screen work (created off-screen and then projected onto her or him) into something that functions as a component of performance. The observed self is set into motion in moments that emphasize an actor's unique ability to "exist" in more than one physical location. While aspects of care of the self allow us to identify two ingredients of a screen persona, Foucauldian transgression allows us to identify moments that necessitate the observed self's subtle deployment. Care of the self helps to establish that all three parts of an actor are present on screen while being rooted in a single figure, while transgression shows how the observed self is put into practice: keeping the viewer's Riis-ian coupling together, facilitating the viewer's movement between understanding the actor as an isolated self (e.g. only a character, only a private self, etc.) to a mixed being.

In crafting an observed self in multi-role performances, I rely on this Foucauldian lens to ground the screen persona in an actor's works, and to describe how an observed self is deployed. Over the three sections of this chapter I identify where all three pieces of an actor can be found in these films—which is to say, I assemble the pieces that create an observed self, bringing them into the collision that is necessary for an observed self's creation on screen. I also pick out moments of transgression that force an observed self into action. I believe that an observed self is uniquely equipped to handle the aesthetic of multiplicity that we find in the work of Peter Sellers, and in multi-role performance in general. It allows for a sustenance of the Riis-ian coupling mentioned in chapter two, as the observed self of a screen actor houses many individuals: multiple characters in singular performances included. I begin with a brief discussion of Peter Sellers' private life and persona, rooted in interviews, film reviews, and details from his life. I conclude this introduction by further contextualizing the incoming analyses: firstly describing how each of the three discursive identities of the screen actor will be identified in Sellers' performances, and secondly describing how Sellers' multi-role work in these two films necessitates and deploys an observed self. The next two sections of this chapter will focus on identifying Sellers' constituent parts in the two films of interest, establishing how both serve as collisions of these three pieces. and how the comedian's performance activates an observed self. The third section will address how an observed self becomes especially necessary in multi-role performance, and how the comedian's performances activate an observed self in response to any potential decoupling of performance and actor.

While the characters that Peter Sellers plays are obviously present in his films, I will have to show that his private self and persona make their way onto the screen in sections one and two of this chapter. Of course, in order to be able to identify them within the films, I will need to lay

out a working understanding of what they are in the first place, beginning with his private self. Sellers is widely regarded as a volatile man, whose private life was marked by outbursts of aggressive and inconsistent behaviour. In a 1982 story from *People Magazine*, Jerene Jones outlines some details of Sellers' home life. A father of three, Sellers is described in the piece as a figure who instilled fear in his family, and "inflicted his manic whims and moods on the children". One of his children recalls a scene where a "terrified nanny leaped from her bedroom window as the enraged Sellers embedded a carving knife in the door". While these parts of Sellers' private life do not directly make their way on screen, and will not be used in the upcoming analyses, the widespread knowledge of this aspect of his life certainly makes them worth noting here.

Additionally, this part of his life likely relates to Sellers being "preoccupied with the search for a happiness that always eluded him" (Jones). This would be consistent with something that becomes obvious when watching Sellers' interviews: he rarely has any interest in himself (outside of talking about how miserable he is), and is much more comfortable cycling through impersonations than he is "being himself". Most of his time in interviews is spent telling long stories, speaking in wacky voices, and talking about his characters, while he is consistently reluctant or uncomfortable in discussing himself (outside of what seems to be a macabre interest in discussing his brush with death in 1964). In a 1963 interview, available on the Criterion version of *Dr. Strangelove*, Sellers speaks on the telephone with a reporter while refusing to admit that his American accent is fake. When the interviewer asks him to do an English accent, Sellers cycles through the accents of many different areas around England and Scotland before bringing the short interview to a close. At the outset of a 1969 television documentary entitled *Will the Real Mr. Sellers Please Stand Up?* (Tony Palmer), Sellers says that despite having his

health (having recovered from his heart attacks in 1964), his family, and his wealth, he is not a happy person. He later states in the same documentary that he does find some joy in playing his film characters. In a 1970 interview on Ireland's *The Late Late Show*, Sellers spins a question about his reasons for living in Ireland into an opportunity for impersonation and humour: he boasts that he can change from one character to another very quickly before impersonating a Dickensian character. In a 1974 *Parkinson* interview, Sellers cycles through characters at warp speed: he begins the interview by impersonating a German soldier, and continues by impersonating about a dozen characters from his former radio programme. When Sir Michael Parkinson asks about Sellers' private life, he either ducks the question with humour (impersonating his father with a purposefully indistinguishable Scottish accent), or becomes obviously uncomfortable (speaking solemnly, avoiding eye contact with Parkinson, and grasping tightly to a glass of water as he discusses his failed relationships). Sellers only emerges from this solemn moment when he tells Parkinson about how he finds fulfillment in playing characters. Here, Sellers gesticulates passionately and speaks with strong emphases, in contrast to his previous morose tone: "the only time that [I am] really happy is...not when the film comes out, when [I am] preparing for the film, but the moment [I am] doing it on the floor...That's the time when the achievement, the full feeling of achievement comes out". From all of this, we can clearly see one aspect of Peter Sellers' private life: the comedian gets more fulfillment and comfort from being in his characters than he does from "being himself".

Sellers' constant cycling through of characters leads into another habit of his private self. The actor extends the reach of his characterizations beyond the film set and beyond his own creation: sourcing his characters' accents or mannerisms from individuals that he encounters, or playing his characters outside of the shooting schedule of the film (including a surreal bit of

audio where he reads the lyrics to “She Loves You” by The Beatles as Doctor Strangelove). In the *Parkinson* interview, Sellers discusses various characters from *The Goon Show*, a popular radio program featuring Sellers, Spike Milligan, and Harry Secombe. While impersonating various Goon characters, Sellers explains where the inspiration for their voices comes from—mostly people that he has known in his life. In the same interview, Sellers further exemplifies this “sponge” ability, reciting extremely detailed stories that were originally told to him by legendary actor Alec Guinness, someone that Sellers works with in two films. In Sellers’ use of character traits from those in the world around him (which, as we will see, brings Guinness back into consideration), along with his contentment to be in character, we find the aspects of his private self that show up in the two films at hand.

Perhaps not surprisingly given this description of his working style, Sellers’ persona is partially based on the idea that there is “no real Peter Sellers,” and embraces his vast array of characters. In 1980, *Time* magazine ran a cover story on Peter Sellers. Speckled with images of Sellers’ diverse characters—Clare Quilty from *Lolita* (Stanley Kubrick, 1962), Duchess Gloriana, Inspector Clouseau from Sellers’ *Pink Panther* films, Chance the Gardener from *Being There* (Hal Ashby, 1979), and Doctor Strangelove—the cover asks, “Who Is This Man?”. According to Gene Shalit in a 1980 *Today Show* interview with Sellers, the story insists that there is no Peter Sellers: the actor is “a mass of characterizations, and inside there is nobody”. If those who buy in to this idea of Sellers were to answer the question that *Time* poses, the answer would likely also be, “nobody”. Sellers’ fans are fascinated with describing the actor as someone who does not have a neutral, natural, or “real” state—as though he is always in one character or another (reviewer and fan Paul Gilbert describes Sellers as “The Man Who Never Was”). Additionally, in another surreal piece of Sellers related media, the actor appears on *The Muppet*

Show in 1977, famously delivering the following line to Kermit the Frog: “There is no me, I do not exist...there used to be a me, but I had it surgically removed”. Musings such as this, which come up repeatedly throughout Sellers’ career, provide fodder for fans to heap appreciation and esteem onto the comedian. It is as if Sellers’ apparent professional devotion or pathology adds to his skill, and as a result, an image is crafted wherein he is even more brilliant than he would be otherwise. In the same *Today Show* interview, the effusive Shalit begins the interview by welcoming an “exceptional number of exceptional guests”. He proceeds to list many of Sellers’ roles, concluding by finally greeting (a very patient) Sellers, saying “Good morning, all of you”. These are the features of the Sellers persona that appear on screen: an individual that does not have a “true” or “core” self, and is instead made up of a series of diverse satellite characters, which adds to his apparent professional brilliance.

3.1 Sellers’ Private Self in *The Mouse that Roared* and *Dr. Strangelove*

With the concepts of Sellers’ private self and persona thus defined, I will now briefly go over how these pieces are to be found in both *The Mouse that Roared* and *Dr. Strangelove* (again, I am assuming that the character component of Sellers is obviously present on screen, and does not need any explicating). I will begin with Sellers’ private self, which will be found in reviews of the two films discussed, and interviews where Sellers addresses the characters that he plays in these films. These accounts focus on Sellers’ performativity, emphasizing that the actions and inflections of the characters are the result of work done by Peter Sellers. While our belief that we can “know” Sellers for certain must be grounded in fiction, the private self always involves this property of wish-fulfillment. Even though Sellers, his fans, *Time*, and Gene Shalit may have us believe otherwise, this private self is present. In these films the private self is found when the

performing Sellers is detected through his make-up and accents, pulling the strings of his characters like a puppet master.

This part of Sellers is found on screen in Jack Arnold's *The Mouse that Roared*. In the film, the small fictional country of Grand Fenwick declares war on the United States. While intending to lose, the small army stumbles into a kidnapping of some high ranking American military officers, and return to their homeland with the highly dangerous Q Bomb, a device that gives them control over the entire world. In the Cold War satire, based on Leonard Wibberley's novel of the same name, Peter Sellers plays three roles: monarch Duchess Gloriana XII; Prime Minister of Grand Fenwick Rupert Mountjoy; and the leader of the army, Tully Bascomb. While these three impersonations obviously put Sellers' character self on display, they also bring his private self to the screen. If Sellers is indeed most comfortable and most fulfilled in the moments that he is performing in character, his multi-role performance reinforces this. Spreading himself across three characters, Sellers is on screen for over 55 minutes of the film's 83-minute run-time: a significant amount of time and work, which Sellers presumably prefers to sitting around "as himself" on set while others are in character. The viewer that is familiar with Sellers will believe that his many characters provide access to a private self that Sellers is comfortable with (and again, is often said to be otherwise non-existent).

Reviewers have linked his performance of multiple roles in this film to his apparent love of the work of Alec Guinness, allowing Sellers' personal tastes and desires to shine through in his work. According to reviewer Graeme Clark, Sellers' adoption of multiple roles is "reputedly in imitation of his hero Alec Guinness in the Ealing comedy *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (Robert Hamer, 1949)" (Clark [b]). In *The New York Times*, Bosley Crowther writes that the film "has clear Guinness comic quality" as a result of Sellers' multi-role performance. Reviewer Glenn

Erickson says that Sellers' performance in the film takes on an "Alec Guinness style," and that "Sellers' vehicles sometimes emulated...classic Alec Guinness comedies" (Erickson [b]).

Likewise, Frank Miller notes that "Sellers was eager to take on three roles in one film," relating this desire to his admiration of Guinness (Miller [b]). An extensive search for corroboration of these claims came up empty, and it is likely that Sellers' roots in playhouses and on *The Goon Show* have as much to do with his ability and desire to play multiple roles as his love of Guinness. Whatever the reason, these reviewers' explanations for Sellers' work take part in the fantasy of knowing Peter Sellers through his film work, thus establishing a private self based on a Sellers' performance.

Sellers' creation of his characters also places his private self in the screen world of *The Mouse that Roared*. By basing his characters on individuals that he has known, and making use of improvisation, Sellers grounds his performance in the reality of his private life. According to Frank Miller, Sellers modeled the character of Rupert Munjoy "on Alec Guinness' interpretation of Disraeli in *The Mudlark* (Jean Negulesco, 1950)" (Miller [a]). Miller also writes that "Sellers modeled the Grand Duchess on his grandmother," as well as a character named Crystal Jollibottom, which came from "shtick he had developed for the radio series *Ned's a Laugh*" (Miller [a]). In his 1974 interview on *Parkinson*, Sellers mentions that he used the same Duchess voice for many characters on *The Goon Show* radio series. These influences from Sellers' personal life crystallize in his performance, making his private self visible.

In line with this sense of direct access through insight into Sellers' process of character creation is his supposed use of improvisation in the film. In a review by Jeremy Arnold, the writer describes Sellers' use of improvisation in the delivery of his lines and gesticulations, quoting director Jack Arnold. Arnold says that Sellers is "a marvelous improvisational actor,

brilliant if you got him on the first take”. Sellers’ improvisations allow a direct access to the private self on screen, as we are equipped with the notion that it is Sellers who executes these tasks or speaks these words, rather than a character that he is operating like a machine. Sellers’ private self is brought to the screen in this film through a sense of an improvisational style, Sellers’ constant presence on screen in the state in which he finds the greatest amount of comfort and accomplishment, his apparent tributes to Alec Guinness, and his habit of basing his characters on influences from other aspects of his life.

Similar to *The Mouse that Roared*, *Dr. Strangelove* is a satirical Cold War narrative that is based on a novel (*Red Alert* by Peter George). In the film, Sellers plays three characters: American President Merkin Muffley, Group Captain Lionel Mandrake of the Royal Air Force, and German Physicist Doctor Strangelove. As rogue American bombers approach Soviet targets, Muffley and Mandrake desperately attempt to interrupt their missions and prevent the detonation of a doomsday device. All the while, Strangelove gets increasingly excited by the prospect of massive destruction and the ensuing process of repopulating the earth. Within these three roles, Sellers’ private self emerges, as the characters from Kubrick’s film are based in Sellers’ database of real-life influences. The impersonation of Mandrake is based on a character from *The Goon Show*, a fact that prompts Glenn Erickson to write that a comical exchange between Mandrake and another character is “*The Goon Show* all over again” (Erickson [a]). Reviewer Scott McGee also writes that Sellers was familiar with the Mandrake voice before using it on screen, writing that the actor had “impersonated a stuffy British officer many times in the Royal Air Force as a young company entertainer”. McGee also writes that Sellers’ Mandrake may have been inspired by Alec Guinness’ Colonel Nicholson in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (David Lean, 1957): “this connection is palpable, since Sellers worshipped Guinness and emulated him whenever possible,

including performing multiple roles in films”. Sellers also leaned on an acquaintance in creating his accent for Doctor Strangelove. According to Rob Nixon and Jeff Stafford, Sellers based Dr. Strangelove's accent on the voice of Weegee, a German-born photographer who visited the set during production. In a 1964 interview on *The Steve Allen Show*, Sellers corroborates this story: “really (the Strangelove voice is) Weegee, I don’t know if he knows it, but it’s Weegee”. Sellers, by crafting his characters based on influence and inspiration taken from experiences in his life, places his private self on the screen.

As in Arnold’s film, Sellers’ use of improvisation in *Dr. Strangelove* contributes to bringing his private self out in his performances. In the 1964 interview on *The Steve Allen Show*, Sellers describes his impersonation of the Doctor Strangelove role as partially unscripted—“that was about 50/50 (between scripted and spontaneous)”, according to Sellers. In a 1965 interview on *Late Night Line-Up*, Sellers discusses how working in scripted films has taken him away from his improvisational style, with some exceptions: “you occasionally get the opportunity to extemporize—for example with Stanley Kubrick (director of *Dr. Strangelove*); he’s a great one for encouraging this sort of thing”. Sellers goes on to say that he tries to avoid working in tightly scripted environments. From these words about improvisation, we get a sense of Sellers’ desires for improvisation and the presence of his personality in his roles. Perhaps it is this apparent lingering presence of his private self on screen that allows for reviewers to refer to his characters by his proper name. Andrew Lewicky describes a scene involving President Muffley, noting that a monologue is delivered by “Muffley/Sellers”. Cole Smithey refers to the inflection in Muffley’s voice as he speaks to the Soviet Premier. After Muffley assures the Premier that he can hear him—“we’re both coming through fine”—Smithey describes “the fey tone Sellers uses to alert the distraught politician of his country’s imminent destruction”. Roger Ebert also invokes

the name of the actor in place of the character when discussing these telephone exchanges: “Sellers...has a series of painfully labored hotline conversations with the Soviet Premier” (Ebert [a]). These reviewers, in referring to Sellers and his characters interchangeably, suggest that Sellers is performing the actions that we see in the film, indicating that his private self is present. The immediate presence of Sellers’ private self is communicated through many portals: his desire to be in character, his apparent adoration for Alec Guinness, his method of constructing character, and his improvisational aesthetic. Perhaps the intimate presence of so many different areas of Sellers’ private life contributes to the cult of personality that allows for his persona to be so complex.

3.2 Sellers’ Screen Persona in *The Mouse that Roared* and *Dr. Strangelove*

Sellers’ persona will be found in moments of intertextuality between the performances in these two films and those in other works in his career, in reviews of both pieces, and in the fact that Sellers plays many roles in each of these films. The intertextual moments (technologies of the self) and the reviews (spirituality) will ground the discussion of Sellers’ persona in Foucault’s care of the self, employed here to ensure that the persona is regarded as a part of Sellers instead of as a purely discursive or external entity. This is not to suggest that Sellers is purposefully activating the persona, but is done so that we can regard the persona as a part of his construction, instead of something that only hovers around him. As suggested in chapter two, intertextuality in performance serves as evidence for screen acting as a technology of the self—practices that Foucault believes lead to caring for oneself. These moments emphasize Sellers’ performative nuances as an overarching learned practice or set of concerns, which create his screen persona. The reviews of Sellers’ work will emphasize how these performances function as exercises of a Foucauldian spirituality, where the subject is transformed and reified. Critical

consensus around these films is that Sellers' performances are brilliant, with these boosts to his reputation serving as his brush with the beatification of the care of the self, and representing his persona in the films.

While *The Mouse that Roared* is involved in an intertextual network that brings Sellers' persona to his performances, I will save my discussion of this film's place in that network for my examination of the persona in *Dr. Strangelove*. The critical reception to *The Mouse that Roared*, the other part of my consideration of Sellers' persona on screen, will come first. Reviewing the 2003 DVD release of the film, Scott Thill declares Sellers an underappreciated "theatrical genius". He picks this genius out in the film, noting the film's subservience to Sellers' performance: "its parody, conspiracy, and madness only form the backdrop for...another tour de force for Sellers' comic gifts". Derek M. Germano also reviews the 2003 DVD release, and comes to a similar conclusion on Sellers' work, twice referring to him as a "comic genius". A London *Time Out* reviewer refers to Sellers' work as *Duchess Gloriana* as "brilliant". Frank Miller lauds the performance, noting that this performance finds its brilliance in Sellers' execution of his versatility (Miller [c]). In declaring Sellers' performance as exemplary of his status as a gifted and versatile genius, these reviews place Sellers' screen persona into his work in the film. The film also upholds the other features of Sellers' persona: his multi-role performance strings along the narrative of Sellers as someone who cycles in and out of characters, and never nests inside of one core being.

Intertextual moments, serving as technologies of the self, make the persona evident in both films. There are themes and character types that Sellers engages with throughout his career, allowing for his performances to bleed into one another, and thus permitting his persona to creep into film texts. He plays German doctors in *Lolita* (an extended impression as Dr. Zempf

executed by the character Clare Quilty), *Dr. Strangelove*, and *What's New Pussycat?* (Clive Donner, 1965). In *The Mouse that Roared*, *Dr. Strangelove*, and *Soft Beds, Hard Battles* (Roy Boulting, 1974), Sellers plays characters in the military, and stars in war films. Sellers also plays heads of state in *The Mouse that Roared*, *Dr. Strangelove*, and *The Prisoner of Zenda*. As Thill's review notes, the two films at hand in this chapter also carry many intertextual crossovers: "a nuclear threat, war, and political manipulation". But more importantly, the three characters of each film sync up with each other to create links between the performances: bumbling heads of state who must negotiate their way out of dangerous action (the Duchess and Muffley); conscientious members of military who grapple with the orders of their superiors (Tully and Mandrake); and insidious and untrustworthy figureheads who are regarded with import by national leaders (Mountjoy and Strangelove). These shards of crossover between the films allow Sellers' adjacent roles to creep into films in which they are not otherwise present, bringing the other roles of the screen persona into view.

Similar to his work in *The Mouse that Roared*, and keeping with Foucault's idea of spirituality as it relates to actors, Sellers' performance in *Dr. Strangelove* is widely regarded as marvelous. Sellers earns an Academy Award nomination, while the reviews of his work in the film are universally complimentary, and thus function especially well as evidence of the presence of his persona in the film. In the moments where reviews touch on performances, the accolades heaped on Sellers are a veritable thesaurus of acting praise: Jennie Kermode describes Sellers' performance as "terrific"; Dave Kaufman of *Variety* writes that "Peter Sellers is excellent" in his multi-role performance; Tom Dirks writes that Sellers gives "masterful performances in three distinct roles"; *Montreal Film Journal* describes the performance as "a tour de force"; and Gary Panton lauds Sellers for his "inch-perfect comic delivery". Jon Danzinger calls the performance

“one of the greatest comic turns in all of movies”, citing the actor as a “genius...a comic legend,” and “unthinkably brilliant”. Graeme Clark says that this performance is Sellers “at his most brilliant” (Clark [a]).

Some reviewers choose to give the topic of performance more space in their pieces, giving details on what exactly is so brilliant about Sellers’ work in the film. Mike D’Angelo identifies “Sellers’ exasperated inflection and timing” in speaking to the Soviet Premier as Muffley as “a thing of riotous beauty”. After describing Sellers as a genius, Paul Gilbert declares that *Dr. Strangelove* is the moment where “Sellers transcends comedic acting and enters the rarified group of men and women who display an abnormal amount of talent unreachable by most people”. Gilbert continues, writing that Sellers “performs all three parts in *Strangelove* to absolute perfection,” and that the performance reaches such a level that “the film ceases to star Peter Sellers, but [instead stars] three completely unique and fully formed individuals that just happen to have similar bone structure”. For Gilbert, as for Eric Henderson in his review for *Slant* magazine, the diversity of the three *Doctor Strangelove* characters crystallizes the brilliance that is a part of the Sellers persona.

Other critics agree with this as the quality that functions as evidence for Sellers’ brilliance, making it something that places the persona in the performance. Dan Heaton describes Sellers’ performance as “unbelievable” because of the “significant differences” between each character. Another reviewer describes how Sellers “moves between three vastly different roles with grace and ease,” making the audience forget that he is impersonating the characters. Francis Rizzo writes that “Sellers crafts utterly unique people and breathes life into them in a way few actors ever have”. Sellers’ talents fit in with the persona that we have already established: someone whose flexibility is often used to extrapolate an idea of the man as a mysterious

shapeshifting genius with no resting state. A review of the film in *Box Office Magazine* describes Sellers as a “matchless shape shifter,” while Jeffrey Anderson describes Sellers as a chameleon. Glenn Erickson writes that Sellers’ performances in *Dr. Strangelove* result in the actor “effectively outdoing previous champion chameleon Alec Guinness” (Erickson [a]). Peter Sellers is regarded as a high-quality actor, whose flexibility and persistent ventures into multi-role acting reinforce the myth of his lack of personality. These qualities are exemplars of the apparently brilliant acting that Sellers engages in. The presence of these qualities in intertextual moments and accounts of Sellers’ skill allow for the assembled image that viewers have of Sellers to be found in the films. Furthermore, this persona is present in films where Sellers is also understood through his private self and characters. This collision makes his observed self visible.

3.3 Sellers’ Observed Self in Action

Shifting from a discussion of how the three parts of the screen actor are present within individual films, thus creating the collisions of identities that are necessary for creating an observed self, I will now examine how the observed self of Peter Sellers is deployed in these two films. In both films, there are several moments that complicate the viewer’s experience of screen actors. The multi-role structure in which Sellers performs demands that the viewer understand him in terms of his observed self.

As already noted, Johannes Riis writes that viewers find comfort when a character and an actor are paired together. When this is interrupted, when there is a “decoupling” of character and actor, the viewer experiences “[a] kind of abstraction” (Riis 263). I have suggested that this phenomenon, also described by Paul McDonald as the basic contradiction of film star acting, creates a need for the observed self: the viewer adjusts to a moment of decoupling by relying on their understanding of an actor as a collection of identities. We readily understand this collection

as “actor”, and can couple this with the performance that we see on screen to preserve a Riis-ian viewing experience.

Moments of decoupling are catalysts to the consummation of an observed self. But what exactly are they? While Riis does not go into detail, the answer is found in the work of James Naremore and Donna Peberdy. In *Acting in the Cinema*, Naremore touches on multi-role acting and performances in which many actors play one role, looking at Sellers’ performance in *Dr. Strangelove*, as well as Buñuel’s *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977). Naremore writes that such performances interrupt an “expressive coherence,” a concept that he refers to throughout his book. By interrupting expressive coherence, he argues that these performances create “a split between actor and role” that attacks “the very foundation of ‘organic’ Stanislavskian aesthetics,” or a “realist” conception of performance (77, 79). Peberdy picks up on these threads in “Narrative Trans-Actions,” writing that the multi-role performance “challenge[s] the realist conception of performance whereby the body and mind of the actor and character should be coherent” (172). Multi-role performances function as moments of decoupling, as they remind the viewer that one actor is not in an exclusive relationship with one character. Yet, this “split” or “challenge” does not prevent the viewer from creating the necessary coupling of actor and performance. The viewer makes use of an observed self to compensate for this complication. As I have suggested already, we do this by viewing actors as individuals that engage with a Foucauldian sense of transgression: they have “limits” within them (boundaries between their component parts) which can be crossed, allowing for the viewer to understand the actor as a mixture of their component pieces. In sustaining our vision of the actor as “coupled”, we view them as beings that have these borders in place (existing as only one of these pieces at a time), while also understanding them as beings that transgress these borders. Moments of decoupling—

multi-role performances—can still complicate this. If a viewer is reminded that an actor is playing many roles (not restricted to one character), this relationship would fail. However, again, an observed self can accommodate this, as it can house many characters. In other words, the viewer can understand that one actor plays many characters if they can pair each individual character to an actor's observed self (which will be equipped with the actors' other characters).

From this, we can see that the screen actor is inherently transgressive, that transgression is a part of the observed self, and that multi-role performances can provide moments of decoupling that activate an observed self. It could be argued that the entirety of a multi-role performance serves as one extended moment of decoupling. Certainly, Peter Sellers provides many of these moments throughout his career. Playing multiple roles is standard practice for him, doing so in both films discussed here, as well as *Penny Points to Paradise* (Tony Young, 1951), *Let's Go Crazy* (Allan Cullimore, 1951), *The Case of the Mukkinese Battle-Horn* (Joseph Stirling, 1956), *Soft Beds, Hard Battles*, *The Prisoner of Zenda* (Richard Quine, 1979), and *The Fiendish Plot of Dr. Fu Manchu* (Piers Haggard/Sellers/ Quine, 1980). His role in *Lolita* also submits to his career-long interest in playing many roles, venturing into many impersonations in his portrayal of Clare Quilty. As useful as these performances could be on the whole, I believe that we can find several moments within these performances that demand an observed self's deployment. These moments of decoupling are occasions where an actor's characters intersect with each other—points when we know that the actor is “present” in more than one location. In these instances, the physical limits of human individuality are crossed, leaving actors on their own plane of reality. Viewers cope with these jarring moments by understanding that these duplications have logical explanations, like tricks of editing or the use of stand-ins. In concert with this rational impulse, serving as container for our explanations for these moments, is the

compound individual of the observed self, which we subtly and readily create.

In *The Mouse that Roared* and *Dr. Strangelove*, these moments occur when Sellers' characters are in the same frame as each other, when we hear one of his characters speaking while seeing another, when one of his characters speaks to another, and when we can identify that his characters are occupying the same physical space as one another. In these moments, where the actor violates our sense of regular performative reality (in which they would have an exclusive relationship with one role), viewers use an observed self as a reminder that actors house numerous individuals.

From the very beginning of *The Mouse that Roared*, Peter Sellers' various characters interact with one another. In the opening sequence, the busts of all three of Sellers' characters are shown on screen. As this happens, the voice over jokes: "If many Fenwickians seem to resemble each other, this may perhaps be ascribed to the influence of the founder, who was in every possible way the father of this country". Sellers' multi-role performance is being foregrounded at the outset: all the film's cards are being laid out on the table, as the viewer is reminded that Sellers plays all three roles. From here, we get moment after moment that reinforces Sellers' multi-role existence. As the leaders of Grand Fenwick come to their decision to wage war on America, the Duchess and Mountjoy are on screen simultaneously, held in a long shot with each restrained to one side of the frame. In the very next scene, Mountjoy and Tully are in the same room, and (without occupying the same frame) converse about how Tully is meant to set off for war. As the army is being given final instructions in a courtyard, all three of Sellers' characters share the narrative space (again, without being framed together). The same form of presence occurs when Tully returns from war: all three of the characters share a space with each other. In this case, the Duchess, Mountjoy, and Tully all speak to one another. In a later scene in one of the

chambers of the castle, as Grand Fenwick receives a message of support from China (“not Red China, the other one”), all three characters are once more in the same room as each other. Soon after, all three characters converse with each other again. Later, Mountjoy approaches the Duchess while resigning as Prime Minister, and again the two characters are shown in the same frame without the use of doubles. Soon after, Tully is shouting to a woman that he has fallen in love with, while Mountjoy is on screen. At the close of the film, as new Prime Minister Tully is working through a new peace treaty with the United States, the Duchess and Tully are in the same room. There are shots where Tully is on screen while the Duchess’ voice is heard (and responded to with sharply accurate timing by Tully and other characters). All of these instances, where Sellers’ characters encounter one another, serve as potential moments of decoupling. But the viewer’s understanding of Sellers as an actor, as a being capable of transgressing standard rules of humanity, allows for a coupling of any one role with his observed self (which can house the other characters).

While there are less of these moments in *Dr. Strangelove*, they still create the conditions that require the intervention of an observed self. Group Captain Mandrake spends a great deal of his screen time attempting to make a call to the President Muffley, a direct form of acknowledgement from one of Sellers’ characters to another. The narrative also suggests that President Muffley and Doctor Strangelove are in the same room for the entirety of the film. While Strangelove does not make his first appearance until later in the film (except for a few shots of President Muffley that appear to have an out of focus Strangelove double in the background), this late introduction confirms that two of Sellers’ characters have been in each others’ presence for all the preceding events. Once Strangelove is introduced, he and the President converse with each other on many occasions. In the film’s final sequence, as

Strangelove stands up from his wheelchair, the President (played by a double) is sitting in the foreground with his back to the camera. Again, the observed self steps in to avoid the effects of a Riis-ian decoupling, allowing the viewer to corral all of these coexisting and intersecting pieces of Peter Sellers into a single individual.

In identifying the component pieces of the actor in these films, I have shown that they all come together in these works to create an observed self of Peter Sellers. I have then given examples of moments where this observed self makes its way into the viewing experience. Otherwise hidden behind a tireless flow of characters and tricks of editing and make-up, the private self is present on screen through Sellers' supposed comfort and bliss in being in character (and being in many characters) as much as possible, his apparent tributes to Alec Guinness, his use of friends and acquaintances to inspire his characterizations, and his improvisational style. The persona that revolves around Sellers paints him as a supremely talented actor, as well as a figure who creates characterizations that are so malleable and pervasive that he is believed to have no personality of his own (does this make his fans a cult of personality without the personality?). This persona becomes manifest in his film roles: his brilliance is recited over and over in critical accounts; his skill is traced back to his ability to create characters that are independent of one another and his "shape-shifting" nature; and his playing of multiple roles reinforces his status as someone with no natural state of self. These two aspects of Sellers, in combination with the presence his characters, create an observed self in these pieces. This entity, something that viewers make use of quite naturally and is equipped to handle Sellers' aesthetic of multiplicity, is necessary in sustaining a viewing position that couples together the actor and the performance. Moments in which Sellers' characters cross paths and interact with each other are jarring, and make it necessary for an observed self to be put into action. This entity, which allows

the viewer to understand Sellers' apparent multiple bodies as a partner to his performance, includes the idea that Sellers is engaging in transgressive activities, and allows for the continuation of a familiar experience.

Chapter 4: Multi-Role Performance and Buster Keaton

In step with chapter three, this chapter will analyze multi-role performances in a comedy film. My focus here will be on a performance from one of early cinema's most lauded comedians (and directors): Buster Keaton. Keaton, whose career begins with a stint as Fatty Arbuckle's screen partner, plays multiple roles in four Arbuckle pictures: a gardener as well as a delivery man (who then becomes a police officer) in *The Rough House* (Arbuckle and Keaton, 1917); a Keystone Cop in addition to Arbuckle's rival in *Coney Island* (Arbuckle, 1917); a psychiatrist at a sanitarium alongside a brief appearance as a woman who is tossed about by a windstorm in *Good Night, Nurse!* (Arbuckle, 1918); and an uncredited character that an intertitle dubs "A Timid Customer" on top of his role as a mechanic in *The Garage* (Arbuckle, 1920). In his well-known *Sherlock Jr.* (Keaton and William Goodrich, 1924), Keaton's character falls asleep in a projection booth as a second visage of Keaton appears on screen: a ghostly version of the actor that is used to suggest that the following scenes are the content of the projectionist's dreams. Later in his career, Keaton plays dual roles in *Le Roi des Champs-Élysées* (Max Nosseck, 1934). Most notably, Keaton portrays multiple characters in *The Play House*, a film that comes after the Arbuckle partnership. The first sequence of the film, a legendary six-minute series of carefully timed and meticulously staged shots, sees Keaton playing twenty-six characters in total. Most of these shots use a special attachment that covers part of the camera's lens, allowing for many Busters to appear on screen at once (with some shots containing a painstaking nine Keatons).

All of these performances create an environment for an observed self to be called into action, and establish that observed self on screen in order to allow the viewer to maintain their standard experience of film stars. The objectives of this chapter are in line with those of the previous chapter: I determine the location of Keaton's character, persona, and private self on

screen, and then identify moments at which an observed self comes into use for the spectator. Once more, the presence of the “character” component of the actor will be assumed throughout. This study of the man dubbed “The Great Stone Face” will revolve around *The Play House*, although some of the reviews to be used are holistic accounts of Buster’s career or of DVD collections of his work. These will be relied on to establish Keaton’s persona and private self, allowing for the identification of these pieces on the screen in *The Play House*. While Buster Keaton’s other multi-role performances will be referred to, *The Play House* is the film on which I base my claims, and where each section of analysis will be attached.

Similar to the last chapter, in showing how the observed self is present in the film, I rely on Michel Foucault. To repeat, the observed self is present in films in which the character, persona, and private self of a screen actor can be found, and I’m looking to identify each of these in *The Play House*. The observed self, though subtle and often unnoticed, springs to action when the viewer is reminded that the actor is equipped with the unique and jarring ability to be simultaneously present in many places at one time. To tease out Keaton’s screen persona, I appeal to Foucault’s ideas of technologies of the self and spirituality. These are used to conceive of the persona as a part that is present in an actor’s performance, rather than as a piece that is created purely in the realm of discourse and only projected onto an actor. Following from the analysis in chapter two, the Foucauldian parts of an actor’s persona are found in moments of intertextuality (proof that the actor executes technologies of the self) and performances of apparent brilliance (access to the rewards/beatification that accompany personal work in Foucault’s spirituality). While aspects of care of the self help in pinpointing two components of an actor’s persona, the appeal to Foucault’s notion of transgression allows us to identify moments that make the observed self necessary for the viewer: moments where we are reminded

that actors are inherently transgressive. These are found in large doses in multi-role performances: we are presented with that very same condition of the actor's existence when one actor's characters intersect and collide. While care of the self helps in placing all three parts of an actor within a single cinematic being, transgression displays the way that an observed self comes into use: it sustains the Riis-ian coupling that the audience of screen actors requires, allowing the observer to understand the actor as both composite figure and an isolated individual (e.g. only a character, only a private self, etc.). This allows the viewer to immerse themselves in a film character, while retaining the observed self in the event that a moment of decoupling arises.

This chapter is divided into three main parts. The first of these will survey accounts of Keaton and his work in order to tease out the private self that is projected onto him, before identifying where this private self is found in *The Play House*. Academic and critical accounts focus on Keaton's personal history in vaudeville, his tendency to craft innovative pieces of cinema, and the courageous execution of his physical gags, which I will identify as components of Keaton's private self. The second section will do the same for Keaton's screen persona: first identifying it in discourse, and then pinpointing it in *The Play House* (utilizing the devices identified in chapter two). The intertextual screen being that Buster repeatedly plays in many films (known as the "Keaton character"), Buster's supposed intertextual structure of surreal forms of storytelling, and the actor's apparent brilliance are the main ingredients of his screen persona. After finding these components of the observed self, I will move on to the third section, which will investigate the first sequence of *The Play House*. Here, I argue that Keaton's multi-role performance demands that the viewer make use of an observed self to sustain their preferred Riis-ian experience of the screen actor. In this sequence, the observed self is deployed in moments that would threaten this experience: shots with multiple Keatons inside of them;

performative trickery to create the illusion of eye contact between Keaton's characters; the mystery behind how Keaton creates his shots; the ostentatious nature with which he presents his own multiplicity; the synchronization of his characters' movements, and his use of on and off-screen spatial relationships to place his characters in a shared environment.

4.1 Keaton's Private Self in *The Play House*

Before serving as a supporting player in Fatty Arbuckle films, starring in and directing shorts and features, and becoming one of the biggest figures in 1920's Hollywood cinema, Keaton worked on stage. Growing up in show business, Buster was a part of a family vaudeville troupe known as "The Three Keatons". Along with his mother Myra, and his father Joe, Buster spent nearly two decades honing his ability to take falls, and produce laughs with his bodily and facial expressions. According to Fritzi Kramer in her review of *The Play House*, Keaton debuted on the vaudeville stage at the age of three, becoming a regular contributor at the age of five. Buster's "part in the family's vaudeville act was to be thrown across the stage," where he would collide with objects, fall to the ground, or drop into the orchestra pit. Mentions of vaudeville are deemed relevant to Keaton's career by numerous reviewers: Neil Lumbard writes that "Keaton was involved in a vaudeville act with his family and grew up with a heavy background in physical comedy"; Gordon S. Miller notes that "at an early age, [Keaton] learned the art of the pratfall and his trademark deadpan look, both of which served him well throughout his career"; and Chris Hick writes that "Keaton came from a vaudeville family where he was not averse to being tossed around on stage by his father". In a holistic review of Keaton's film work, Roger Ebert also chalks up Keaton's supposed mastery of physical comedy to his many years on the stage, further noting that Buster's childhood vaudeville "suits even had a handle concealed at the waist, so Joe could sling him like luggage" (Ebert [b]).

Keaton's apparent technical knowledge and directorial ability is as oft-noted as his vaudeville past: Hick praises Keaton for the "inventiveness" of his comedy and techniques; Lumbar documents how Keaton's "interest in creating elaborate concepts for comedic scenes was on display from the start" of his career until its end; Kyle Anderson argues that shot composition and visual "perspective is something that Keaton all but revolutionized in the early 1920s"; and Gary Tooze writes that Buster "conceived and engineered some of the most breathtaking stunts and feats of visual trickery" that early cinema had to offer. Unsurprisingly, Keaton is also widely known to possess a great amount of courage, which assists him in the execution of daring stunts in his films. As Ebert writes, "no one had more courage than Buster": in "films that combined comedy with extraordinary physical risks, Buster Keaton played a brave spirit who took the universe on its own terms, and gave no quarter" (Ebert [b]). As with his time in vaudeville, Keaton's personal courage is almost unanimously raised in reviews of his work: Ebert continues, writing that "no silent star did more dangerous stunts than Buster Keaton" (Ebert [b]); Hick writes that Buster "would defy any logic with regards to health and safety and his athleticism was clearly apparent" in his work; Anderson lauds Keaton's "ability to put himself in actual danger for the purposes of the laugh"; and *Slant Magazine's* Budd Wilkins describes Keaton's exploits as "feats of seemingly effortless physical agility and alarming recklessness". These three aspects of Keaton's private self—his years spent as a vaudeville performer, a tendency in his directed works towards inventive techniques, and his fortitude in the face of life-threatening stunts—find a home in *The Play House*.

As I begin to place Keaton's private self within the film, I briefly step outside of these three primary aspects. Critics have found a pot-pourri of other aspects of Keaton's personal history in the film. *The Play House* is divided into two sections: a six-minute sequence where

Keaton astoundingly plays handfuls of characters that appear on and off stage inside of a theatre, and a second part that reveals this first reel to be a dream sequence. In the second segment, Keaton is awoken from his dream to find himself a theatre hand, eventually stumbling his way into two stage performances. At one point in the first sequence, where characters played by Keaton are littered across the set, one of his characters exclaims: “This fellow Keaton seems to be the whole show!”. According to David Kalat’s review of *The Play House*, Keaton used this line, and the concept of performing in every role, as a playful jab towards Thomas Ince. Ince, a key figure in the silent era, was famous for placing his name in the billing of a film as many times as possible: “Thomas H. Ince presents a Thomas H. Ince production, supervised by Thomas H. Ince”. Keaton verifies this joking inspiration in an interview with Kevin Brownlow (194). This suggests that the all-Keaton cast of the first sequence is driven by a real-life desire to make a joke of Ince, thus communicating a part of Buster’s private self. In *Keaton’s Silent Shorts*, Gabriella Oldham notes that the exclamation may also have been inspired by Keaton’s memories: a piece of advertising for *The Three Keatons* once declared that “Little Buster Keaton is a whole show within himself” (136). Oldham also writes that Keaton, who plays six instruments in the film’s first segment, may have taken inspiration from his mother, who could play three instruments by the time she was eleven, and was the first female stage performer to play the saxophone in the United States (128). These experiences, in being projected onto Keaton and referred to as cases of his memory “sneaking out” into the film, declare that his private self is present in *The Play House*.

According to numerous critics, memory also plays a key role in bringing Keaton’s vaudeville stage history to *The Play House*. For James L. Neibaur and Terri Niemi in *Buster Keaton’s Silent Shorts, 1920-1923*, the film allows “Buster Keaton [to revisit] his theatrical roots

while continuing to explore cinema's technological possibilities" (107). According to Oldham's discussion of *The Play House*, Keaton's performance "rolls his memories of vaudeville through the proscenium and frame for some of the most vivid illusions in silent cinema" (125). In the first part of the film, the stage is occupied by a minstrel performance comprised of nine separate Keatons, who are described by Neibaur and Niemi as "vaudeville acts striving to be a part of a successful stage show" (110). In the shots of the minstrel show, according to Fritzi Kramer, Buster "puts on a complete vaudeville show in which he plays everyone". Oldham suggests that the execution of the minstrel show achieves a level of accuracy that owes to Keaton's vaudeville work environment. Buster's use of African American characters to tell jokes, and a white interlocutor to serve as straight man "re-creates a native American entertainment, with which he was also closely familiar" (Oldham 129).

More components of *The Play House* refer to Keaton's vaudeville history. In one scene, two Keatons dance side by side on stage. Oldham argues that these "soft-shoe twins represent one of many vaudeville acts": particularly the "transformation dancers" and "legmania, an eccentric high-kicking dance form of which Joe Keaton was master" (133). At the outset of the dream sequence, Keaton plays all members of a six-piece orchestra, as well as their conductor. Oldham suggests that Buster's "familiarity with a vaudeville orchestra, into which he often flew with his father's propulsion, certainly helped him concoct this madcap ensemble" (128). In a later scene, a young woman shows off her lung capacity by entering a tank full of water and holding her breath for the audience's entertainment. Oldham notes that this scene "perhaps commemorates typical novelty vaudeville acts like 'Blatz, the Human Fish,' who would eat a banana, play the trombone, read and sleep underwater in a tank" (143). Shortly after he is awoken from his dream, a fully costumed Buster fills in for a missing orangutan that is meant to

be a part of a stage show. In his review of *The Play House*, David Kalat argues that this scene “is an homage to one of Buster's onetime vaudeville peers, a performing chimp named Peter the Great”. Before dressing up as the orangutan, Keaton is sweeping backstage, where he leans on a broom that drops into a knothole in the floor. According to Neibaur and Niemi, Keaton also “revisits his own vaudeville past” with this gag—“a bit that date[s] back to the Three Keatons” (113). All of these sketches, apparently sourced from Keaton’s memories of vaudeville stage shows, place his private self inside of *The Play House*.

Along with his vaudeville history, Keaton’s perceived status as technical savant allows his private self to shine through in *The Play House*. In the film’s first sequence, which Kramer describes as a “fabulous example of camera virtuosity in the silent era,” Keaton has many shots in which some of his twenty-six characters appear on screen with each other. These shots were obtained using a custom lens with many shutters. One or many shutters would be closed at a time, capturing a desired section of the iris’ total range while Keaton performed in front of the open shutters. Then the film would be cranked back and the shutters re-oriented so that Buster would be captured on another part of the same stock (Neibaur and Niemi 109). Kalat writes that Keaton achieves “superior results, despite working more than ten years before” others who make use of double exposure techniques, “in a substantially more primitive environment, with hand-cranked cameras and custom-made equipment designed by Buster himself”. Hitting the same notes, Richard Cross writes that “Keaton’s technique is way ahead of anything any other moviemaker would achieve until the advent of computer generated images around seventy years after this movie was made”. In functioning as part of his makeup as an auteur, Keaton’s ingenuity and penchant for technical experimentation is made to channel his personal preferences and concerns to the viewer, communicating his private self in the process.

A great amount of courage, and the dedication to physical danger that accompanies this, is another piece of the private self that is projected onto Buster Keaton. In most of his films, Keaton's stunts are breathtaking and life threatening. In his holistic review of Keaton's work, Roger Ebert writes that "Buster survives tornadoes, waterfalls, avalanches of boulders and falls from great heights" (Ebert [b]). His most famous stunt, first seen in *One Week* (Cline and Keaton, 1920) and more widely screened in *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (Charles Reisner, 1928), involves Keaton standing in front of the falling façade of a house. Buster coolly stands in its path, saved from injury by his measured positioning, allowing his body to pass unscathed through an empty window frame as the wall falls around him. Many reviews of *The Play House* describe how the stunts are purposefully tame by Keaton's standards, due to a broken ankle that Keaton acquired on the set of *The Electric House* (Keaton and Cline, 1922). Kalat writes that Keaton was "worried about falling behind schedule with his monthly releases," and decided that "he needed to make a film that found its laughs in something other than his typical pratfalls and physical stunts". However, considering that Keaton was injured while filming, his stunts are still rather daring and free of caution. The soft shoe dance sequence involves many impacts and turns on both ankles, while Keaton runs on his broken ankle numerous times throughout the short film. In the film's second sequence, Keaton jumps from the top of a climbing wall that is at least ten feet high, and later recklessly dives through a curtain. While impersonating the orangutan, Keaton crouches, jumps onto chairs, and climbs up one wall of the theatre's set. This wall then fails to support him, and he falls to the ground from at least twenty feet in the air, landing very firmly on both feet before carrying on in his ape performance. While these stunts are not the life-threatening variety that Keaton is most widely known for, they still do present a formidable amount of danger and potential for harm. This is only compounded by Buster's injury, something

that could have been further complicated by any of the exploits in *The Play House*. His performance in the short, though often regarded as a more laid back version of his usual daring stunts, fits into Keaton's private self and its supposed commitment to (and comfort with) danger and injury. This, in concert with the influence of his stage career and his cinematic creativity, allows the viewer to identify Keaton's private self in *The Play House*.

4.2 Keaton's Persona in *The Play House*

In Keaton's films (and especially his shorts), his characters will often go unnamed. Instead of separating his characters from one another, Keaton relies on a blanket characterization of himself that he can use across many pictures. In his article, "Keaton: Film Acting as Action," Noël Carroll refers to this as the "Keaton character", an individual that is based on a set of characteristics, or "underlying set of preoccupations," that appear in most of Keaton's film roles (Carroll [a], 198). As with Chaplin's Tramp, the Keaton character is defined by many recurring visual themes. For Carroll, "Keaton's film acting is concerned, first and foremost, with the manipulation of objects and, by extension, with the manipulation of people as physical objects" (Carroll [a], 199). Keaton's pork pie hat and demeanor also famously carve out this character in many films, and his legendary facial expressions connect the vast majority of his performances. Buster's unique deadpan expression is his characters' most recognizable feature, and leads to his most well-used nickname: "The Great Stone Face". Neil Lumbar notes that "Keaton's legendary stoic deadpan expression became one of the most iconic images of cinema history". Roger Ebert notes that Keaton created the expression as a comedic device in his vaudeville years: "Buster and Joe discovered that when he was hurled through the bass drum and emerged waving and smiling, the audience didn't see the joke in treating a kid that way...but when Buster emerged with a solemn expression on his face, for some reason the audience loved it" (Ebert [b]). The Keaton

character, operating independent of any one particular film and connecting many of Buster's performances together, is a large part of Keaton's persona.

Like Peter Sellers, Keaton's persona is based on numerous accounts that prop him up as a genius of the cinema. Chris Hick writes that "the word genius is probably a moniker that is used all too readily," before saying that the term "can certainly be levelled at the likes of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton". Philip French refers to Keaton, Chaplin, and Harold Lloyd as "the three towering comic geniuses of the silent cinema," later singling out Keaton's films as especially "hair-raising in their execution and sublimely funny". Neibaur and Niemi expand on the ways that Keaton distinguishes himself from his contemporaries: "other comedians of the same era—and there were many competent ones other than the established "Big Three" of Chaplin, Keaton, and Lloyd—did not have the command of cinema's form and function as did Keaton...in fact, neither did Lloyd or Chaplin" (116). Many praise Keaton's abilities as a director: Gordon S. Miller refers to Buster as "one of the most highly regarded silent film comedians/filmmakers"; Budd Wilkins writes that Keaton's vision places him "alongside the very greatest filmmakers"; Charles Wolfe dubs Buster "an American artist *par excellence*" in "Buster Keaton: Comic Invention and the Art of Moving Pictures" (64); and Michael Brooke writes in *Sight and Sound* that Keaton is "silent cinema's most accomplished physical and technical virtuoso". Neil Lumbar also has effusive praise for Keaton's career: "one of the most iconic legends of cinema history is the comedian Buster Keaton...the history of cinema changed forever when he became involved as a supporting player in a short film production". Roger Ebert, referring to Buster as "the greatest actor-director in the history of the movies," sums up the wide critical acclaim for Keaton: "the greatest of the silent clowns is Buster Keaton, not only because of what he did, but because of how he did it...no filmmaker has ever had a better run of

genius than Keaton during that decade” (Ebert [b]). Keaton’s status as brilliant performer and filmmaker, along with the character that he plays in most of his films, create his screen persona.

Keeping with the emphasis on intertextuality that emerges from my link with Foucault, the qualities of Keaton’s serial screen character appear many times throughout *The Play House*. Keaton makes use of the objectification that Carroll documents, especially in scenes where Keaton’s own body is captured and recaptured for the sake of three-shots and nine-shots full of uncharacterized minstrel show Busters. He turns himself into flattened objects that are simply present to occupy space in the frame. Keaton’s standard costuming and performance style are also present in the film. His dancing twins wear the pork pie hats and deadpan expression that define this character. Buster’s conductor and all the members of his orchestra remain deadpan throughout the full duration of their screen time. When Buster is awoken from his dream and made to go back to work, he promptly dons his trademark headwear. Made to impersonate an ape, Keaton maintains his famous stoic expression throughout all stages of the process: realizing that the orangutan is lost, realizing that he must dress up and perform in its stead, and during his performance. For Wilkins, the film also contains an “anarchic insubordination that colors much of Keaton’s best work,” and defines his screen character. In the second part of the film, Keaton employs this insubordination often: sleeping on the job, trying to get out of work, enraging those that are around him, and being blatantly and stubbornly inconsiderate (even marking one woman with a painted “x” when he cannot tell her apart from her sister). Roger Ebert notes that Keaton’s screen character will often exercise “the application of perfect logic” (Ebert [b]). This aspect of Buster’s character shines through in one scene in the second part of the film. A character’s beard has caught fire in front of a large “No Smoking” sign, and Keaton springs to his aid. Buster finds an axe on the wall, inside of a case that reads “For Fire Only”. After a brief moment of

deliberation, Keaton grabs the axe, and self-assuredly hits the man in the beard with it. These gags and recurring intertextual signifiers ensure that Buster's usual screen identity is present in the short, allowing his persona to appear on screen.

Outside of the Keaton character, there are many moments of intertextuality in *The Play House* that also bring his persona to light. David Kalat notes that the plot of *The Play House*, where Buster undermines the stage show, stems from his 1919 film *Back Stage* (Arbuckle). Kalat charts this concern across the whole of Keaton's career: "time and again Buster would find ways to disrupt someone else's show and bring his unique brand of chaos to the stage: *Free and Easy* (Edward Sedgwick 1930), *Speak Easily* (Edward Sedgwick 1932), *The King of the Champs-Élysées (Le Roi des Champs-Élysées)...**Hollywood Cavalcade* (Irving Cummings and Malcolm St. Clair, 1939), even to *2 Marines and a General* (Luigi Scattini), one of his last feature appearances in 1966". Neibaur and Niemi also link *The Play House* with *Back Stage* (109), and then continue to expand on Keaton's intertextual aesthetic. In the latter part of *The Play House*, Keaton has difficulties telling two twins apart. He would "revisit this premise in his 1937 Education Pictures two-reeler *Ditto* (Charles Lamont)" (113). In *The Play House*, Buster uses a bass drum as a boat and a violin as a paddle, a gag that Neibaur and Niemi trace back to *Convict 13* (Cline and Keaton 1920) (113). Oldham also documents many of Keaton's intertextual moments: she identifies Buster's use of the "legmania" tribute in both *The Play House* and *Convict 13* (133); she connects Keaton's impersonation of an orangutan with a sequence in *Hard Luck* (Cline and Keaton, 1921) (139); and she compares his leap through the theatre's backdrop with his search for a hideout in *The High Sign* (Cline and Keaton, 1921) (140). Oldham also documents Keaton's tendency to use dream sequences in his films, including *Convict 13*, *The*

Haunted House (Cline and Keaton, 1921), and *Sherlock Jr.* (127). *The Play House*, as a result of being mapped onto Keaton's network of texts, contains his screen persona.

The dream sequences that Oldham mentions also feature in a supposed occupation with the surreal, another of Keaton's pressing intertextual concerns. Wilkins notes: "dream sequences abound in Keaton's films". Wilkins goes on to write that Luis Buñuel drew great inspiration from Keaton's surrealistic content, where viewers would often be unaware that they were being dragged through the contents of a character's dreams. For Neibaur and Niemi, while "many of Buster Keaton's films explore dreams and imaginations," *The Play House* "reaches a particularly intricate level of surrealism" (109). The opening sequence, where Keaton dreams himself into more than two dozen roles at the theatre creates what David Kalat calls "a mesmerizing surrealism". Wilkins describes Keaton's cinematography techniques as "surrealistic examples of camera trickery and legerdemain," before describing the film as "pure proto-surrealism". Keaton, employing his surrealist sensibility in *The Play House*, places the film within his network of intertextual references. This access to Keaton's preoccupations ensures that the film houses Buster's screen persona.

The same is true of Keaton's apparent brilliance as a performer and director, also stemming from the relationship between screen acting and Foucault's notion of spirituality. The opening sequence, in which Keaton acts opposite himself time and time again, is widely regarded as a stroke of Keaton's genius. Neibaur and Niemi describe the performance as "a tour de force for Buster Keaton as an actor" (115). Buster's dance sequences are timed so that his every move is synchronized with his own previous performance, he acts out bits of conversations that he completes while playing another character, and he acts as his own background players. Richard Cross describes the opening multiple exposure sequence as "a testimony to the comic and

technical genius of the man. For Kalat, “the opening reel of *The Play House* is as sustained a sequence of comic innovation and cinematic craftsmanship as anything ever filmed”. Kalat goes on to say that the shot containing nine Keatons in the minstrel show places the viewer “in the presence of something extraordinary”. Keaton’s execution of this sequence allows the brilliance that defines his screen persona to shine through in the film, allowing that piece of his identity to appear on screen. Buster’s use of intertextuality in *The Play House*—playing a character that he impersonates in many works, using gags that appear in many films, and the expression of his interest in surreal scenarios —makes his screen persona apparent. Additionally, the same results are achieved by the apparent technical and performative brilliance that are found in *The Play House*, sourced from accounts of the film that reify Buster.

4.3 Keaton’s Observed Self in Action

Buster Keaton, therefore, appears as a private self, as his persona, and as characters in *The Play House*. This film’s first sequence, with its more than two dozen Buster Keatons, is also an environment in which the viewer requires Keaton’s observed self to understand him in comfortable Riis-ian terms. As in chapter three, I will identify transgressive “moments of decoupling” that Riis, Peberdy, and Naremore refer to, having argued that these can be found in multi-role performances where one character encounters another that is played by the same actor. These occurrences, which are deeply woven into the fabric of *The Play House*, incite the viewer to make use of Buster Keaton’s observed self. Keaton’s many characters demand our use of an observed self, to understand him as the transgressive being known as actor, who exists in tension between an individual piece of an actor and a being that is made up of a series of other identities (private self, persona, and other characters in this case). Thus, my analysis will be slanted towards identifying moments where Keaton is on screen as many characters, and where his

characters acknowledge each other. These are junctures in which Keaton most energetically sets forth the decoupling that makes an observed self necessary.

Keaton's other multi-role performances do not produce these moments at the high frequency of *The Play House*. In *The Rough House*, Keaton's characters are never on screen at the same time, nor do they share a space with one another, speak to or about one another, or otherwise encounter each other in any way. The same is true of Keaton's pairings in *Coney Island* and *Good Night Nurse!*. In fact, in each of these films, Buster plays one role in which he is nearly unrecognizable. Unless a viewer is familiar with Buster's gait, his style of physical comedy, and can pick his features out of brief grainy long shots, it is possible to miss the fact that the actor plays a police officer in *Coney Island* (where half of his face is covered by an absurdly large moustache), or a woman on the street in *Good Night, Nurse!* (dressed in rain gear, with a hat and umbrella over his face). In *The Garage*, Keaton's customer character stands in the same room that his mechanic character sometimes occupies, but the customer's only scene occurs without the presence of Keaton's mechanic. The film never suggests that they are in each other's presence. nor does it document any form of interaction between the two.

The Play House, however, has many transgressive moments that call on the actor's observed self. Keaton is present on screen in multiple locations in these moments. Additionally, his characters will speak to one another, look at one another, or coordinate their movements. Richard Cross describes how Keaton's characters interact, in scenes where the multiple exposure process requires perfect timing from Keaton and cameraman Elgin Lessley: "there are no unrealistic pauses between responses, no sense that one person isn't really aware of the other person or people beside them". In miming his interactions so convincingly, Buster makes his observed self even more necessary: their potential to provide decoupling effects raises with the

added authenticity of the encounter. Though viewers know that actors can transgress standard bonds of space and time, Keaton's meticulous performance of the conversation and eye contact between his characters combines with the mystery of his unique lens (and likely a general knowledge about the lack of such elaborate digital effects in the silent era) to provide an experience that truly demands the observed self. Most viewers will not know how Keaton executes these shots, and will be able to exclude many sensible options (the use of a double, computer effects, mirroring one exposure within the same frame): without knowing *how* Keaton does it, they will simply know *that* he does it, and will be sure that he has not cloned himself. Thus, in the first sequence of *The Play House*, the observed self is especially necessary. This comes as a result of potential moments of decoupling that are marked with the convincing illusion of eye contact and attentiveness, the purposefully overt fact that Buster is playing every role, the lack of an obvious solution to how Keaton executes his shots, phenomenally timed interactions between Keatons, and the presence of many Keatons on screen in the same spatial reality.

The first of these moments comes when Keaton plays all of the members of his orchestra, in the first vignette inside of the concert hall (after a lone Buster purchases a ticket and walks inside). The scene begins with a shot in which Keaton, as orchestra conductor, takes up his position at a music stand. He looks into the crowd (which we later learn is also populated by Buster Keatons), and nods politely before the performance. In this acknowledgement, Keaton's band leader is already interacting with other Busters off screen, recognizing the implicit presence and applause of his other characters. Keaton's other characters, otherwise left in an off-screen abyss, are brought into the conductor's immediate spatial reality as the film establishes the space of the Keaton-packed theatre. The encounters between Buster's characters continue, and what

follows is a series of occasions in which Keaton's characters demand the use of an observed self as they share glances and space inside and outside of the frame, move and dance with heavily choreographed gesticulations, and declare Keaton to be entangled in his own presence.

The conductor begins to count time with his baton before turning to his left to begin the overture. A new shot reveals the target of his gaze, and a more direct moment of interaction between his characters. Keaton plays three band members in the shot: the upright bassist, the cellist, and the violinist. The three musicians share the space of the orchestra pit, moving their bows vigorously, before stopping in unison. They look away from their music and towards Keaton the conductor. He is shown briefly, as he quickly turns his attention away from the string trio, before we see the other half of the orchestra: three Keatons again, this time on clarinet, trombone, and drums. The trombonist glances at the conductor, before he stops playing altogether, causing the drummer to stop as well. The trombonist asks a question of the drummer, who answers with a prompt nod. Both wait for a couple of beats before beginning to play again, re-entering the song at the same moment. All seven members of the band are wearing the same suit, and have no costume covering their faces. Keaton is easily recognizable in all of these roles, making the effect of his "being multiple" even more striking than the experience of seeing him in more than one place, and seeing his characters time their movements as though they are really interacting with each other or playing in unison.

The sequence continues with a series of short gags, including some very short transition shots of each side of the orchestra, before more Keatons take the opportunity to share the space and interact with each other. The conductor signals a stagehand Buster, who appears to call out "Ready?" as he catches the conductor's eye. The stagehand opens the curtain, before the film cuts to the famous shot of the nine-fold Buster minstrel show. All nine Busters move in the

shot—most of them do the same dance (with different rhythms, showing that each character is a unique impersonation and emphasizing Keaton’s split presence), while another plays tambourine, and the show leader—known as the interlocutor—stands nearly still while slowly turning his head. Keaton’s interlocutor, positioned in the middle of the stage, asks the other eight Keatons to be seated. In unison, all nine characters sit down on the chairs behind them. The interlocutor speaks with the two Keatons on his extreme right and left (Mr. Bones and Mr. Tambo), while the remaining six Keatons say nothing throughout the scene. As each of the three speaking characters is shown, the frame includes two other silent Keatons. The surrounding Busters move their heads from the speaker to the target of the address, pantomiming their involvement in the conversation that is going on around them. Some of the characters in this scene are less recognizable as Buster—particularly Bones and Sambo, who the actor is impersonating while in blackface. If this would somehow distract the viewer from the fact that Keaton is visibly multiple on the screen, the next scene offers a rather blatant reminder of this fact.

The film cuts to a two shot in a balcony box, where two Keatons are taking in the show—a man on the left and a woman on the right. The woman, waving her fan to keep herself cool, has her eyes trained on the stage show, giving the impression that she is looking at the nine Keaton characters on stage. The man is looking around the theatre audience below and above him, before he grabs for his program and opens it. The program reads: “Keaton’s Opera House: Buster Keaton Presents Buster Keaton’s Minstrels”. The camera scrolls down the cast of the show and the staff of the theatre, with every position in the program being billed to Buster Keaton. The man scratches his head and says to the woman: “This fellow Keaton seems to be the whole show”. With that, the viewer of *The Play House* is reminded that Buster is at the heart of every role in this first sequence, whether hidden by make-up or not. The scene continues as the man

finishes his observation of the program. He and the woman beside him appear to look at each other, before speaking to one another shortly.

The next vignette opens on another two shot of a balcony box, where Keaton simultaneously plays a young child (who holds a lollipop) and a grown woman (who has a bottle of water in front of her). They both look into off-screen space to their right: again, presumably watching the nine Buster show on stage and creating the illusion of shared space between eleven layers of Keaton characters. To begin another sequence of crisply timed interaction, the young boy puts his feet up on the ledge of the box. When the woman notices, she scolds him for a second. When she finishes, the boy looks over at her, and begrudgingly takes his feet down from the ledge. In a new two shot, an older couple sit in another balcony box. A woman looks to her right, in the same direction as the boy and woman that were just shown, as the man sleeps. When she notices that her partner is asleep, the woman becomes visibly frustrated, and yells at him briefly. He springs awake at the moment that the short shout is completed, and after a brief look at his partner, confusedly begins to applaud. Before he can connect his hands for a third time during his ovation, the woman looks at him and angrily tells him to stop. The man looks at her and does as she says, before the two take turns saying short words and exchanging brief glances. The timing of this sequence is especially convincing, forcing the viewer to rely on Keaton's observed self even more heavily than they would have otherwise.

The scene continues as the film cuts back to the boy and the woman. The boy leans over the rail to get a better look at the stage, and appears to block the view of the woman to his left. She immediately leans forward to compensate. The boy drops his lollipop, and it falls into the lap of the older woman that had just woken up her husband. While viewers could have used the direction of the characters' gaze to guess that these two balcony boxes were on the same side of

the theatre, this act clarifies the spatial relationship between these four Keaton characters. More importantly, it also establishes that they are sharing the same space, and brings them into confrontation. When the old woman notices what has happened, she looks above her and yells. The boy and woman in the higher box look down, before the upstairs woman returns some shouts. She tips her drink over while yelling downwards, pouring its contents out. The scene cuts back to the lower box, where the older woman is looking upward and yelling, as her sleeping husband is getting doused with the upstairs woman's beverage. Keaton's old man character awakes, and opens an umbrella to counter the actions of Buster's upstairs woman character. The older couple share a brief but well-orchestrated conversation, taking turns with dialogue that rapidly bounces back and forth without any overlap.

The scene comes to a close with another example of Keaton's characters synchronizing their movements and activating his observed self. We return to the shot of Buster's nine-person stage show. The interlocutor stands up and says a few words, before making an upward motion with his hands. The eight characters that surround him all jump out of their chairs in unison, standing in front of the audience for what is presumably a round of applause from the off-screen Keaton crowd. After about five seconds, everyone on stage raises their hands into the air and waves in simultaneity. Keaton's stagehand character, seeing that the Buster minstrels are finished with their show, takes his gaze away from the off-screen stage and lowers the curtain. Once more, Keaton's many characters recognize each other between shots, making use of off-screen space to weave together an area in which all of his characters are co-existing. Such an intense collection of Keaton characters demands that the viewer, in their time inside of the duplication arena of Buster's dream world, heavily rely on the actor's observed self.

The film's opening sequence concludes with the next scene, which contains more examples of jarringly exact timing, and potentially disrupting sharing of space. The whole stage is in frame as one Keaton walks in from stage right, and then another from stage left. They see each other and stop in their tracks at the exact same moment. The left Buster extends a hand toward the front of the stage, as though inviting the other to join him for their upcoming dance. The right Buster shrugs, and immediately the left Buster performs the same movement as the two walk forward to begin their dance. The camera moves slightly closer as the dance begins, framing the two Keatons in a long shot. They dance in unison, and for a time it appears that Keaton may have only performed the dance once before mirroring it to create the second dancer. But as the act goes on, it becomes obvious that these are two separate performances: one looks to their right while the other looks straight ahead, one kicks slightly higher than another, one's coat gets caught on his sleeve while the other's does not. In an interview in *Keaton* by Rudi Blesh, Buster says that the synchronization of this scene was achieved by timing his movements to banjo music, and starting his dance as ten feet of leader ran out (168). The dance number concludes and the performers run off opposite sides of the stage, before simultaneously returning for a brief bow and recognition of Keaton's observing characters. The opening sequence of the film concludes with one balcony box couple applauding the dancing Keatons, and Buster wakes up to realize that this whole sequence is a dream. With the dancers' harmonious actions, Keaton makes no attempt to hide the effects of his multi-exposure technique. The dancers in this final scene, along with the six non-speaking members of the minstrel show and the members of the orchestra, not only occupy the same space: they occupy the same costumes. Shots of these characters, where Keaton plays characters in the exact clothing and posture as those around him, unquestionably present Buster as multiple on screen. While this fact may be covered over in

other shots, where make-up works to take some of his facial features away, here Keaton is startlingly on display in his playing of multiple characters. Again, Keaton's performance in *The Play House* is so forthright in his portrayal of multiple characters, calling the observed self into action. This also stems from how Keaton's many guises interact with one another in time and space: precisely scheduled movements and actions, and sharing of space both on and off the screen. In this first sequence, the observed self pushes the viewer away from any effects of Riis' moments of decoupling, and the viewer can base their understanding of multiple Busters inside of the transgressive nature of the singular actor.

I have identified here how critics construct Buster Keaton's persona and private self, and then identified each of these in *The Play House*. Along with the presence of his characters, these components of Keaton ensure that his observed self is found in the film. Normally dormant, this comes into the viewer's experience of the film's first sequence, where Keaton plays over two dozen roles and appears opposite himself in most shots (on some occasions, many times over). Keaton's private self is brought out in the references to and memories of vaudeville that appear in the film, the apparently inventive qualities that are assigned to him as a filmmaker, and the use of highly perilous stunts that disregard his existing injuries. Keaton's screen persona is based on a character that persists throughout his career and appears in many films and other intertextual components, and declares him an actor and filmmaker of great talent. This becomes manifest in *The Play House* through his use of the trademark facial expression, costuming, and spirit of the "Keaton character", the intertextual references that Keaton makes throughout the film, his engagement with an ongoing cinematic interest in the ideology of the surreal, and critical consensus that his genius is on display in *The Play House*. When combined with the presence of his many characters, the private self and screen persona ensure that Keaton's observed self is

present in the film. This is something that a viewer will subtly make use of to sustain a familiar viewing experience, one which pairs the actor with their performance. In the first sequence of *The Play House*, Keaton's characters collide often. Harmonious timing of gesture, appearances of many characters in single frames, conversations between characters, and the execution of parallel actions work to create a sense that these characters share an area that is comprised of spaces both on and off screen. Here, the observed self comes into play, ensuring that the viewer is experiencing Keaton as a screen actor: a transgressive being that is equipped with an observed self, which houses many individuals, and remains in tension with his performance.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued for the existence of the observed self of the screen actor by identifying films in which the components of the observed self are present. I have also examined moments in which the observed self is used to sustain the dominant viewing position that audiences take towards screen actors (Riis), and to support a core contradiction that governs our understanding of actors (McDonald). In doing so, this work responds to the central concern in studies of cinematic acting, and continues a recent trend in which the self-construction of actors is considered in film studies. This thesis also identifies a new component of the screen actor, which has otherwise not been examined. The observed self allows film viewers to maintain their affectual connection with actors, preventing any potential decoupling effects that otherwise threaten a standard viewing experience. Though this component of an actor is used often, and with minimal difficulty, this thesis is the first attempt at explicating its presence, its contextualizing power, its importance to acting reality, and its overall function. Further consideration of the observed self could investigate how this being functions outside of films: in interviews, or at film screenings in which an actor is physically present.

This thesis also establishes links between acting and the work of Michel Foucault. The observed self sustains a Foucauldian subject, assuring that we continue to understand actors as people restricted to one body, tracing their multiplicity back to the singular. Both Sellers and Keaton receive immense adulation for their performances, ensuring they fall in line with Foucault's notion of spirituality. Both actors also perform in roles and films with uncommon amounts of intertextual references to their other works, ensuring the presence of Foucault's technologies of the self. This thesis has also documented how actors are equipped with Foucault's notion of transgression, in which limits are crossed while remaining intact. Further

examinations of the relationship between Foucault and acting can surely delve into the philosopher's arsenal of concepts with much greater depth. Obviously, Foucault's work on observation, discipline, and performance could produce fascinating results. If equipped with interviews from actors regarding the experience of being victim to an anonymous and penetrating gaze, a study could open more consideration of power and the film viewer—an odd relationship in which a viewer is voyeuristically peering at the visage of someone who is no longer present, and not a direct accessory to observational power.

There is much more to say about actors playing many roles in single films, and while there is currently no work that meditates on multi-role acting and an actor's interiority, works of this variety fit the recent flavours of acting discourse. While no studies use the label of the observed self or clarify the consequences of collisions between an actor's different segments, some scholars have embraced thought around the implications of being multiple on screen. These works use one of two organizing principles in selecting the case studies that facilitate their reflection on the collision of an actor's selves. The first of these features is motion capture. In "Articulating Digital Stardom," Barry King considers the condition of being that motion capture technology announces for screen actors. Discussing James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), King notes that the film's performers experience a diminution of their "capacity to project the interiority of character through the medium of his or her person," becoming stuck in "a situation of increased dependency on externally 'activated' resources (276). King is measuring the effects of a relationship between the character and private selves that is potentially interrupted by technological intervention, noting that "*Avatar* does not announce a new condition of being, but a new means of deploying the formative and performative powers of cinema" (281). James Tobias also discusses *Avatar* in "Going Native with Pandora's (Tool) Box," remarking that viewers'

perception of human characters that become avatars differs from their perception of those who exclusively exist as the blue beings of Pandora (349-50). When viewers are given a human referent for motion capture's physical transformation, it is a different experience than simply seeing the being created by the technology. In other words, performances that connect the private and character selves in *Avatar* demand a different viewing position than performances that are without such a strong collision or human referent. Sharon Marie Carnicke also discusses motion capture in "Emotional Expressivity in Motion Capture Technology". Discussing the work of Andy Serkis in *The Lord of the Rings* films, Carnicke suggests that "performances created with motion capture technology, like that of Gollum, can be subjected to the same kind of analysis and assessment as any other screen performance" (Carnicke [a], 332). Like Tobias, Carnicke's reflection on motion capture posits a connection between the performing private self and the embodied character.

The second organizing principle that is used in these discussions, where actors' selves collide with each other, is an appeal to an actor's inherent fragmented inner being. Carnicke is also present in this case, with her piece "The Screen Actor's 'First Self' and 'Second Self'". Using John Wayne as a case study, Carnicke argues that the actor's first self plays their second self like an instrument, with "Wayne as actor (his 'first self')" consciously controlling "his audiences' reactions to his characters (his 'second selves') through manipulations of his vocal apparatus" (Carnicke [b], 190-91). In this case, the private self encounters the character through these exertions of manipulation and control, which in turn creates a star persona. Vivian Sobchack also provides a study where actors are regarded as the grouping of fragmented identities. In "Being on the Screen," Sobchack argues that actors are comprised of four different bodies: the personal body (found in the way that personal characteristics have been mobilized

into comportment, gesture, rhythms), the prepersonal body (found in an actor's unique physical characteristics), the personified body (the lasting reified "celebrity" persona), and the impersonal body (the character) (Sobchack [a], 440-2). In line with Carnicke, Sobchack suggests that performances bring together what discourse would define as the character, persona, and private selves. The personal and prepersonal body, made up of performative gestures, rhythms in movement and speech, and physical appearance, give constitution to the private self. Simultaneously, actors are made up of the personified body and the impersonal body, or the persona and character selves. For Sobchack, as for Carnicke, King, and Tobias, placing these "bodies" or "selves" within the same subjectivity creates a grouping or collision of disparate beings. Where these studies stop short is in accounting for how all of these beings are attended to within one singularity (or how the observed self comes to be in these performances). Studies in line with these, which focus on motion capture and ad-hoc theories of an actor's subjectivity, could absolutely reflect on an actor's interaction with the observed self. These particular examinations also reflect how scholars are producing many different attempts at fully contextualizing what is at stake in the identity of an actor. Whatever its focus, literature on acting is in the midst of an exciting period.

This thesis focuses exclusively on multi-role performances in its analyses, which is an area of acting that is rarely excavated. Responding to the work of King and McDonald, I set out to find actors that appear in enough important works to make an analysis of a star persona possible, and was able to identify various forms of identity in Sellers' and Keaton's multi-role work. It is worth noting that many of the reviews consulted for this thesis are very vague, and feel almost hollow in their praise of Sellers and Keaton. While they serve the purpose that I require of them for this work, I think that reviews of multi-role performances require further investigation. In the

pieces consulted here, the universal consensus is that both actors are brilliant, and that their performances in these three films are acts of genius. But very few of these reviewers documented the source of that brilliance: almost no piece went into detail on what it is about Sellers and Keaton that made these performances so good. Future investigations could survey the work around many multi-role performances, discover if this is a universal phenomenon, and potentially uncover a relation between multi-role acting and assumptions of brilliance. The same could apply to works of comedic acting, where the word “brilliant” or “genius” is likely used as a stand-in for the word “funny”. Perhaps there may be other connotations that accompany multi-role performance, such as personal pathology, or a damaging level of work.

Another fascinating area of examination stemming from this focus on multi-role acting would be an overview of the cinematic techniques that have created multi-role performances: bits of ingenuity such as Keaton’s special lens, or whatever technique allowed Sellers’ characters to appear on screen simultaneously in *The Mouse that Roared*. I see an audit of the development of these techniques as a project that emerges very naturally out of this thesis. Further work on this brand of acting may also consider the differences between multi-role performances in various genres. I have focused exclusively on comedy films in this thesis, but a good amount of multi-role performances are found in dramatic productions, and are steeped in themes of the psyche or mental illness. Fortunately, for any excavation of a topic related to multi-role acting, there are many films that have never been academically discussed in terms of their performance, making the subject a very rich area for future work.

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