

# (DIS)AGREEMENTS

## A shared task: filmmakers and actors faced with acting

Pablo Hernández Miñano  
Violeta Martín Núñez

Translated by  
David Morsillo  
Jessica Kish

## \_introduction

### To be or not to be... The dilemma of acting

Daniel Gascó

Acting is so impossible to generalise about, so extraordinarily diverse, that it is fair enough to exaggerate and say that there are as many types of actors as there are people, films or directors. To ignore the infinite number of approaches, tools and techniques that have been used to outline the figure of the actor, to vest it with a magnificent, infallible and seductive aura, is as impossible as defining the profession that it is. We need merely to trace a broken line through time to discover stories of cinema that often suggest the contrary. Acting has also consisted in not knowing, being unaware of the process and its meaning within the film, being a puzzled presence, and even a significant absence. In *Domingo de carnaval* (Edgar Neville, 1945), the protagonist wears and removes a mask depending on whether the actor Fernando Fernán Gómez, who was shooting several films at the same time, was present. For the same reason, one of the sequences in *The Spirit of the Beehive* (El espíritu de la colmena, Víctor Erice, 1973), in which the father goes to bed and his wife pretends to be asleep, expands its meaning when we perceive only his shadow – actually the shadow of a sound technician covering up an absence.

In 1961, the producers of *Accattone* did not trust that great newcomer, the poet Pier Paolo Pasolini, and decided to shoot the film again, replacing the cinematographer, Carlo Di Palma, with Tonino Delli Colli who, at the request



Fernando Fernán Gómez in *Domingo de carnaval* (Edgar Neville, 1945)

of the soon-to-be great filmmaker, filmed the same shots exactly the same way to demonstrate the originality of his style. Pasolini did not want actors; he sought faces, most often illiterate people from the street, kids barely capable of remembering lines and who, of course, do not know how to recite them. “Can you count from 50 to 100?” Delli Colli would ask them from behind the camera. They would nod, and... “Go!” Pasolini would approach them and say, “Can it be done this way?” One of his disciples, Bernardo Bertolucci, who in 1968 was in a Roman theatre shooting one of his most secret films, *Partner* gives us the answer: “In Italy there are no spoken films, we do dubbed films. A dubious tradition that this film aims to break.” Italian cinema, like silent films, requires its actors merely to move their lips; others more gifted will dub them. For Pasolini, however, dubbing meant something else: bodies separated from their voices. The same year, a small crew filmed another lover of faces in action, Federico Fellini. Gideon Bachmann’s documentary *Ciao, Federico!* (1970) contains a significant series of close-ups in which the actors of *Satyricon* (Federico Fellini, 1969) exchange impressions: “It’s great to work without knowing what you have to do one minute before shooting.” “Fellini plays all the roles in his films. From the last extra to the main character.” “Being here is an illusion, Fellini takes you on a journey.” “His

world is imaginary; it has nothing to do with the world we live in.” “Before and after, Fellini thinks that the world is a circus and all of us, the actors first, then the viewers, are its amusing inhabitants.” Fellini’s mother, Ida Barbiani, opens the documentary with a story from the filmmaker’s childhood that best explains his relationship with the actor: “At the age of ten, he was passionate about puppet theatre. I made costumes for them as if I were a dressmaker and he improvised shows for his classmates and friends.” Like Lang or Almodóvar, Fellini treated his actors like puppets, tying them to the mysterious strings of his precise vision.

Leap forward to England in the ‘90s. From the set of a conventional film, Robert Carlyle explains his work with Kenneth Loach<sup>1</sup>: “You have to forget [everything] because it’s an entirely different process with Ken, because there is no script. You perhaps get a page the night before the scene or sometimes on the day, sometimes not at all. You have to be very, very open, and you have to just be prepared to, you know, experience anything that Ken is going to put in your path [...]. The last thing that Ken wants to see is someone acting. I think as soon as Ken Loach sees you acting, that’s when he loses it, he doesn’t see it any more after that. It has to be real, it has to be accurate. It has to be plausible. If it’s not, then Ken will lose it.” The British filmmaker also takes his position into account:

“The camera, the filmmaker should respect the characters and shouldn’t be forever pushing in amongst them being obviously interventionist. The camera should show some discretion and respect [...]. The camera is not part of the scene [...]. The cinema is not important. What is happening away from the camera is important.” In Sweden, however, Ingmar Bergman broke that distance, making the human face the landscape most visited. For him, the camera is merely a clumsy and bothersome apparatus that one must master to reach the human being. In *Men filmen är min askalrinna* (Stig Björkman, 2010) we see him sitting, surrounded by actors and technicians, sharing his shooting schedule. But to the camera, he explains: “Over all these years, we have gradually developed a working method. I prepare carefully at home. I create precise instructions for direction and write them down to memorise them. But then, when I’m with the actors and the camera on the set, just before giving them the instructions, suddenly, during the first rehearsal, a tone of voice, a gesture or the suggestion of an actor makes me change everything, because it seems better.” Mike Leigh’s films, however, incorporate the actor into the creative process. The British filmmaker works with a group with nothing written down, except for a theme around which, through improvisation, the characters will be constructed. The director does not write a single line, but chooses certain remarks in this combat between actors that goes on for approximately six months. None of the participants know whether their role will be major or minor. Each character uses the same expressions and words that the actor gave him. There is no division between the two; the actor has engendered the character and, therefore, is a co-author, and plays the role infallibly during the three months of filming. Far from this authorship, the actor’s work may fall apart when it is subjected to a precise shooting schedule that can destroy the individualities, that genuine quality that the actor can offer. In a break during the shooting of Javier Rebollo’s *Lola* (Lo que sé de Lola, 2006), the actor Michael Abiteboul described to me his relationship with two eminent filmmakers: “Michael Haneke doesn’t accept suggestions. He knows exactly what he wants. But then, shooting, he realizes that it doesn’t work and in a burst of rage he changes everything. Lars von Trier, however, is very sweet with the actors.” Stellan Skarsgård<sup>2</sup> says of von Trier: “His first five feature films were total control. He designed every movement of the actress and everything and they were technically brilliant and, of course, dead. When I saw his first feature film, *The Element of Crime*, in a festival I said, ‘I want to work with this director when he gets interested in people.’”

In a landmark document<sup>3</sup> Daniel Auteuil touches on the enigma of his profession: “Acting is a simultaneous action that happens very quickly. The audience will discover it months later, but the impression is the same. I gladly give myself up to careless abandon, allowing myself to be

carried along by the situation. I never know what happens before or after; I try to be in the moment. But it is true that I’m the one who plays the characters, and so I necessarily and intentionally make them say the things that I want to say. And it is true that a part of the mystery, of the unsaid, is better explored or analysed in the films than in my life, because I use films to create an image of myself, to enhance my own worth with an image that I would like to have. The characters I choose are the ones that resonate with me, and, because it’s an art, it’s better expressed in my characters.” Art... In 1996, the actor José Luis Gómez<sup>4</sup>, greeting his master Jerzy Grotowski, took up the question again: “‘Jerzy, Art as a vehicle for what?’ He looks at me in silence. After a pause, I add: ‘To Be?’ He looks at me again and says: ‘Yes’.”

Spotlights illuminate, but the only true brightness that the camera detects is that of the performer who makes us forget that there is an actor, that we are witnessing a performance. In *La direction d’acteur par Jean Renoir*<sup>5</sup>, the French filmmaker insists that the first script reading must be cold, monotonous, without expression, like reading a phone book. From the beginning, the goal is to relax, not to act, to be yourself, to put aside something already seen, a cliché. An exercise that seeks to find the mysterious connection between the person and the character that is in the lines, and reveals how to get at the truth of the character without preconceived ideas, how to achieve a true creation, an original character, unlike any other. Acting, Jeanne Moreau suggested, is related to subtle emotions. It is not putting on a mask. Every time an actor acts, he does not hide, but exposes himself. Acting is stripping oneself, overcoming prejudices, breaking down the barrier of the story, and its unfolding in a space can only be achieved in a duet between filmmaker and actor. ■

## Notes

\* *L’Atalante* would like to thank Regia Films for permission to reprint the images from *My Life to Live* and *My Night with Maud* that illustrate this section. Acknowledgements are not included in the promotional images from films currently discontinued in Spain as we understand these images to be in the public domain since no distribution company has purchased the rights to market them in this country. In any case, images are only ever included in articles in *L’Atalante* in a manner similar to quotations, for analysis, commentary and critical assessment (Editor’s note).

1 *Citizen Ken* Loach (1997), episode of *Cinéma, de notre temps* directed by Karim Dridi, edited by Intermedio.

2 Taken from an interview with Stellan Skarsgård included in the Spanish DVD edition of *Nymphomaniac*. Vol. 1 (Lars von Trier, 2013).

3 Taken from *Il mistero della fiction*, a model interview by Mario Sesti, included as an extra feature in the Italian DVD of *Sotto falso nome* (Roberto Andò, 2004).

4 Gómez, José Luis (1999). “Una búsqueda irrepetible.” *El País*, 16, January 1999.

5 Directed and performed by Gisèle Braunberger, 1968.

# \_discussion

1. For you, what is the essential stage in which you as a filmmaker intervene in the work of actors in your films (casting, prior planning, shooting, or post-production)? What are the main decisions you make and the main strategies you adopt at this stage of your work with the actors and actresses?

.....

## Mariano Barroso

Really all four stages that you mention are essential, and they're also in that order of importance. You could say that casting decisions definitively mark a film. An error in casting can be irreparable, while the right choice can be the key to a memorable result. There are many examples, from *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) to any film that has marked the life of an actor. It's not so much a question of the *quality* of the acting (you always have to work with great actors), but that there may be problems with the *type* of acting that an actor delivers, which can result in a miscasting. What would've become of *The Bridges of Madison County* (Clint Eastwood, 1995)—I've just reviewed a few scenes—if, instead of Clint Eastwood playing the lead role, Robert Redford had done it, as was planned? Or if an actor in his forties had played the role, as the character's age should have been according to the script? Without question it would have been a completely different film. I really enjoy doing this kind

of exercise, *re-casting* the films I watch, something that I can't let myself do with the ones I make (Kubrick, on the other hand, did let himself do that, or sometimes Woody Allen...).

Later, in the preparation stage before shooting, it's not so much the planning that would affect the work of the actors, but rather the staging, the movements, the physical actions... Helping the actors find the right actions and movements determines the result, the tension in a scene.

The same is true of the shooting stage, which is always the culmination of the previous one. And now, finally, in the calm and semi-solitude of the editing room, you can rethink a scene, give a character more prominence, push someone else into the background... You can even change the point of view of the scene, and in so doing, change how the audience identifies with it. There are many factors, decisions that are difficult but exciting.

Clint Eastwood in *The Bridges of Madison County* (Clint Eastwood, 1995)



### **Celina Murga**

The casting stage is absolutely essential to me. In my first film, *Ana y los otros* (2003), I did it all myself, and it took me over a year. Now I do it with a casting director I really trust, whom I met while casting *Una semana solos* (2007), and with whom I share similar ideas about work methods. I'm not there all the time now, but I still try to be as involved as possible. I think it's key to get to know the actors; I usually meet with them a number of times before making a final decision. These meetings take on different forms, not always on a casting call; rather, the aim is to get to know the person behind the actor, beyond their professionalism as an actor. Also, because I often work with non-professional actors, I feel it's crucial to understand what qualities they may have in common with the character. In both cases, with trained and untrained actors, I feel it's important to get to know their nature as much as possible, what issues might be useful to them when they're acting, what will stimulate them to do this or that. Every actor is a world of their own, and may need different things to develop their potential to the maximum.

Casting also helps me to keep questioning the character and the script. I believe in *questioning* as a creative work method; it helps me to generate the process necessary to move forward artistically. There's a quote from Truffaut that I really like. He says: "it is important to film against the script and edit against the shoot." I've made this quote my own because I believe it contains the formula for moving forward: to constantly ask questions and create environments that are conducive to them. With each stage of the work you end up questioning the previous stage in some way, and this enriches it, makes it grow and strengthens it. I like the challenge of stretching the limits of the material, finding the things that can enrich it, even if that means risking unexpected or unlikely situations.

This questioning of the material doesn't have only one answer, nor does it involve excessive rationalizing; often it comes from intuition and it helps me to make decisions, to move forward. Casting is one of those decisions. What could this actor bring to the character? What about another actor? Even though the character is written in the script, each person who plays the role can take that character in one direction or another, can accentuate certain traits over others. This is why I really believe in this stage.

I also consider the rehearsal stage to be essential. It's the time when we start constructing the physical embodiment of the character together. Beyond the script readings, and the possible explorations that arise from them, I really believe in the actor giving a body to the character and to the story itself. And as a director, you also have to give it a body, and that means creating the work space, the conditions that allow the actor to try out things and find elements in a more intuitive way. I believe there are

things that can only emerge from a place of intuition, which I consider very valuable. This doesn't mean improvising on the shoot, but simply allowing part of the *writing* of that character to emerge from the actor's body, to put it into action at an earlier moment.

### **Felipe Vega**

I'd take something out of all those stages. And all of them definitely shape the final result. Choosing the right actor for me is more than fifty percent of the work. After that, the *method* that I try to pursue with the actors (it's not always possible because of *scheduling* issues, i.e., production) is a lot like what's used to prepare a play: read-throughs, script readings, short rehearsals, adapting the lines to the tone and voice of the actor...

Perhaps the planning might be the aspect that I've most lost interest in over the last ten years, more or less, precisely because I believe that the *staging* needs to revolve around the movement of the actor in relation to the set, and not the other way around. First the actor, then the camera. A *beautiful* frame shouldn't spoil the movement of a body. In short, I believe that the actor should not be restricted by the camera's position... no offence to Monsieur Bresson, of course.

The editing entails a reencounter with each actor. A critical reencounter that's sometimes filled with great loves and hates. Luckily, the editors are there to alleviate our crises and bring us back to the harsh reality of the material we've shot.

### **Pablo Berger**

Without a doubt, all the stages are important, but if I have to highlight one in my work with actors, it would be the casting call. It's a stage that I enjoy immensely and that I like to do *hand-in-hand* with a casting director, one of my most intimate collaborators.

A great actor or actress can't play just any character. That's why the *perfect* pairing of actor-character is, without a doubt, one of the keys to a film's success. Not even the best director can fix a wrong casting decision in the filming stage.

I consider myself a cerebral director in many regards, but to choose my actors I only use my heart. If during an audition an actor excites me and gives me goose bumps, the role is theirs. I also firmly believe in the *group shot*. I like to imagine a picture with the protagonists all in the front row, the supporting cast in the second, and the extras in the back. I believe there are no small roles. For me, that picture of the whole cast has to make sense. During the casting stage, I also start defining the general tone for the performance, a decision that will mark the path for all the actors to follow, and which is my responsibility to maintain from beginning to end.

1. The actor's work on a film project unfolds over the course of various stages. In some of these stages, such as the casting stage, most factors are beyond the control of the actors and actresses. To what extent do casting decisions affect your performance? How do you approach your work in relation to the rest of the cast?

.....

### **Àlex Brendemühl**

Casting is a process of the job that can often be uncomfortable, because it involves preparing a character in a limited time, with limited information, and there are a lot of unknowns. It involves putting yourself to the test, and that means putting your nerves to the test. You learn to control them better as you gain experience, but they never completely go away. However, over time I've learned to look at it also as a kind of casting of the director and the fellow cast members, to decide whether I'm interested in taking part in the project and whether we're all going to get along. If the communication breaks down in this stage, you can save yourself from a nightmare filming stage. It's a critical moment to listen to your own intuition and not let yourself be blinded by projects that might be good but are perhaps not the right ones. Obviously, problems sometimes come up later on, during shooting, though in general the keenness to get the project off the ground and make it successful always prevails, both for your own good and for the good of the film. Generally speaking, if you're willing to learn, have fun, and commit yourself, then you'll usually end up with good projects.

### **Eduard Fernández**

Working on a film is a question of teamwork. I can decide on things about my character, but I always have to remember that my job is to tell a story that someone else, the director, wants to tell, and I am helping him to tell it. In this sense, the casting choices that the director or producer makes for whatever reason will mark the direction of the work, and I have to adapt. Even if I think they haven't made the best artistic choice of actor, I have to accept that that's how it is and work with it to tell the story that's been presented to me.

### **Emilio Gutiérrez Caba**

I believe that the casting call only serves to confirm the ability of an actress or actor to adapt to a given character, but in some way it also reveals the acting ability of the performer. Someone may be perfectly prepared for an audition, focus their limited ability on it and suggest a performing ability that they don't have when it comes to developing the character. Personally, I don't believe that casting calls give most actors the chance to show what they're really capable of, as real actors; on the other hand, as I said, they can mask a mediocre performer. So the casting call is only useful for introducing actors to directors or

producers, who in most cases they should already know given their professional status. Casting calls have no effect at all on the subsequent task actors have in developing their characters.

The relationship that you need to establish with the rest of the cast depends, in large part, on the strategy that the filmmakers want to apply, although you can of course suggest a general or specific work method based on the scenes and their relative complexity. Every production is a world of its own.

### **Tristán Ulloa**

Everyone has to focus on their own work. And ours is fatally prone to subjectivity. When you work on a film, you accept whatever vision the director may have, whether it relates to the cast or to the aesthetic and technical approach of the film. Placing yourself in the hands of a director is an act of trust, of faith, in many cases. When you go into a film project, theoretically speaking, you accept the conditions, at least the basic ones. My work is just one more cog in the machinery that the director imagines in his head—nothing more, nothing less. It will be the director who will assess my contribution to the film, whether that be during shooting or in the editing room.



## 2. In your films, to what extent is the form of a film conceived with the actors and actresses in mind, or, conversely, is the actors' work adapted to other staging decisions?

### Mariano Barroso

I view a film as a global process. I wouldn't be able to say that one thing comes ahead of another. It is my firm belief that a film, like a television series or a play, is built on two pillars: the script and the actors. The idea, the script, the dialogues, what isn't said, the subtext...those come first, the origin of everything. And then come the actors. All the other elements are there to support one or the other.

The analysis of the script gives me the key to the scene and to the acting strategy. Then, the camera will come in to support these elements. The same goes for the set, the wardrobe, the editing, the music... But the primary emotion is in the actors. The camera and microphone have to capture that emotion. I belong to a school of thought that views the director as the one responsible for the emotional aspects of the film. All the other departments are responsible for everything else. We directors are very fortunate to be able to work alongside such great talents in visual, sound, and set design... I believe that, no matter how beautiful the music or the cinematography may be, if the actor isn't *plugged in*, that beauty won't get captured, it'll go to waste. In that sense, the people responsible for the areas misnamed "technical" (*technical* seems to imply a certain disdain) would do well to support the actors, because whether their work shines or not depends on them. Indeed, the most beautiful music can sound flat if it's accompanying the wrong actor. The subtlest lighting can be unbearably dim if the actor is not emotionally present.

### Celina Murga

In my case, I think, it's a rare balance. I very much believe in the actor's expression, in filmmaking that gives importance to the actor's body, gaze and voice. There are directors, perhaps the most iconic example might be Godard, for whom the actor is really no more than just another element of the staging. And obviously that works perfectly fine for Godard.

In my work, I believe that actors are more important than any other element. Even so, I'm not one of those directors who has the camera freely following the actor... I'm interested in developing an idea of the camera that responds to an idea of staging in which the actor is included. What I'm really careful not to do is to let myself get carried away with visual or staging ideas, which in theory might be great, but ultimately aren't organic for the actor or the character. Directors face a great temptation to succumb to the siren call that their preconceived mental ideas can be. I think that you have to be present during each stage of the process of making a film and know how to recognise whether the

idea is working or not, both in rehearsals for it and on the day of shooting it. And, if necessary, to know when to let go and have faith in what's being created in doing so.

### Felipe Vega

Part of my previous answer applies to this one. They are years of changes, which others call "evolution of style."

### Pablo Berger

My way of understanding filmmaking is as a whole. Staging, cinematography, art direction, wardrobe, music, hair-styling, makeup, effects, editing, and, of course, the actors, constitute the main bricks that make up the film. I think of the story as the cement that binds these bricks together, and the script is like the blueprints and instructions for the whole team to follow for the construction of a cinematic work. This is why I believe that actors shouldn't be at the service of the camera, or vice versa, since both have to be, above all else, at the service of the story that we want to tell.

For me, a day of filming starts with me meeting with the cinematographer and with the actors on location to do a "mini-rehearsal" of what we're going to shoot. Although I've already done storyboards, it's in that moment, in that rehearsal, that the scenes find their final form on film.

*My life to live* (Vivre sa vie, Jean-Luc Godard, 1962) / Courtesy of Regia Films



**2. Does the film style of the director you work with on each film influence how you approach a character? To what extent do the staging decisions that depend on the film's director or the technical crew affect your work as an actor? What other crew members do you usually work with most closely?**

.....

## ACTORS

### **Àlex Brendemühl**

Every director not only has their own style of working but also their own way of relating to the cast and crew. Obviously, you're compelled to try to understand where they're going and how they express themselves. As actors, we are at the service of a story, and I don't think that you have to put yourself above the storytelling structure. The rest is the job of editing; it will ultimately be polished in the editing room and it's beyond our control. Finding the tone, the overall mood of the script is a mysterious and exciting game played by the whole cast and crew. A good atmosphere on the set, with mutual understanding and without unnecessary tension, always helps, although you learn to overcome all adversities; I try to learn from successes and failures. Mutual understanding with everyone on the crew usually helps me, although being in tune with the cinematographer is sometimes crucial, because when you don't get along with the director, he's the one who offers solutions and deescalates any problems.

### **Eduard Fernández**

More than my performance affecting the director's style, I would say that the director's style marks or changes my ideas about the character. I love it when a director gives a clear "yes" or "no." I believe that an actor should be flexible, that inflexibility in an actor or actress is only a sign of fear. I usually work, firstly, with the production assistant (who decides on the work plan: what shot of the day will be filmed first, etc.), then with the focus puller, the cinematographer, wardrobe...

### **Emilio Gutiérrez Caba**

I think that you have to show the director a proposal of how you're going to play the character, and settle any potential disagreements that might arise. Under no circumstances should the actor's opinions prevail over the director's, unless you find yourself faced with a monument to ineptness who has no clue what they want to film and how. The film's technical crew doesn't generally influence our work, except for three departments: makeup, hairstyling and wardrobe, whose work can either make ours easier or harder. I'm in favour of creating a good atmosphere of relationships with those three departments, and of speaking calmly about things if one of the aspects they propose in terms of the aesthetic composition of the character clashes with your point of view.

Nevertheless, once shooting has begun, I personally try to connect with the rest of the departments in a different way: with camera and sound, very frequently; with set design, to go over aspects that seem odd to me; and with direction and production, constantly.

### **Tristán Ulloa**

Of course. Working with a fixed camera is not the same as working with a hand-held one. Similarly, it's not the same to work with very measured lighting as it is to work with more arbitrary lighting, or with certain depths of field, lens apertures, the importance given to focus... The combination of different production and lighting styles affects our work, which has to coexist with a technique inherent to cinema, and is closely linked to the work of the camera crew. Many of my best film crew friends are on camera crews. We're doomed to get along, to be dance partners and to *negotiate* everything together: focal lengths, respecting markers, lighting, keeping the scope of the shot in mind while we're working, eyeline matches (in a shot-reverse shot you look as closely as possible towards the camera axis), looking at false markers, looking at markers filling in for characters...



### 3. Could you name a filmmaker who is a role model for you, or for whom you feel a certain affinity in terms of their way of working with the actors and actresses in their films? Could you explain the similarities and differences between your respective approaches to film acting?

#### Mariano Barroso

There are a lot of examples. I love the depth and precision of directors like Elia Kazan and his successors, who are all directors who consider the actor's work to be the backbone and driving force behind a film. American and British directors are trained in this principle. There are some glorious exceptions, but most directors from Britain and the United States have received dramaturgical, theatre or acting training or a combination of all three. Beyond Elia Kazan there would be Nicholas Ray, in my opinion (an assistant of his, incidentally). Ray takes all the work and the acting tradition of Kazan, and adds a tremendous visual potential. Ray is a more cinematic, more visual Kazan.

There are many subsequent filmmakers who inspire me or whom I study closely. They generally have all had connections to theatre or the acting world. Outside the Anglo-American school, I am eternally grateful to Bergman, Fellini, Truffaut, Kurosawa, Ford, Renoir... to mention a few; of the Spanish directors, Borau, Fernán Gómez, as well as our immortal legends, Buñuel, Berlanga, Saura, Erice, and Almodóvar. And, more recently I have been impressed by the work of Linklater, Fincher, and Haneke... it's an endless list. Despite the fact that it is very difficult to make good films, we have numerous models to follow. As filmmakers we are privileged to have more than a century of film history behind us.

#### Celina Murga

I really admire Cassavetes's work with actors. I always enjoy his movies and writings. What we have in common, above all, is our desire to build a truly trusting relationship with the actor. And also to trust in what comes out of their particular work in relation to the character, to give it a body. I have heard that he could be very tyrannical in his search for a specific outcome. I don't feel that I am like that; I don't believe that the means are justified by the ends. I think that a director's talent in working with actors lies in finding a way to guide them without suffocating them, without imposition, like something gradually being revealed, something that emerges through collaboration, through give and take.

Sometimes actors get anxious and try to find rational answers which I don't think are very useful. Often, psychological explanations – saying: “the character does this because he's like this” – are statements that calm an actor down for a moment, but in reality they flatten the actor's work, take it to a more linear place. It's not interesting to explain behaviour. As J. C. Carrière says, “a film is anything but a conclusion.”

Why should we *calm down* the actor if what we want is to create dramatic tension to construct the plot of a film? The tension is or is not in the actor's body, and this is the key to developing a scene.

I am interested in achieving real characters (although not necessarily realistic ones) that have substance, contradictions, ambiguities. I don't think it's important for the actor to take a moral stance, to determine whether the character is good or bad. On the contrary, that could even be a problem. What is important is understanding the character in all his complexity, without judging him. This is how the most powerful characters are created.

#### Felipe Vega

I have to acknowledge the fame I have received from so many critics over the years as a disciple of Éric Rohmer. And although these days film history forgets its creators overnight, I still feel a great affinity for the work of the auteur of *My Night at Maud's* (*Ma nuit chez Maud*, Éric Rohmer, 1969); for his approach to acting, his work with the actors or his adaptation of the dialogue to each cast member. It is a work that is full of patience and precision, values hidden in the folds of each scene in a film so apparently simple or even simplistic. I believe Rohmer's films contributed to laying the aesthetic foundations of a fascinating balance between classical and modern, artificially overcome by a postmodernity that is more cosmetic than ethical. In terms of parallels between Rohmer's work and my own, you can take it however you like, but I still take the word “modesty” very seriously.

*Mi noche con Maud* (*My Night with Maud*, Éric Rohmer, 1969) / Courtesy of Regia Films



**Pablo Berger**

Of the great filmmakers, I feel a special affinity for Woody Allen and his way of working with actors. I feel embarrassed to put the master's name in the same paragraph as my own, as at his side I feel like a *lowly intern* in the world of the script and directing:

- The script. For Woody Allen, directing the actors starts with the script; I feel the same way. The keys to every film are in the script. It is the treasure map. Every adjective, every adverb, every action that describes the characters, and the actors should view the script as the first and most important link to the director.
- The casting. Woody Allen collaborates very closely and totally trusts his casting director; so do I. His casting director, is Juliet Taylor, with whom he has worked on over forty films. I have been fortunate to have worked with Luis San Narciso and Rosa Estévez.
- The film shoot. Woody Allen does not believe in giving excessive instructions to the actors during filming. He thinks, as do I, that if an actor has been chosen for a certain role it's because you completely trust that actor completely.

### 3. Could you name an actor who is a role model for you, or for whom you feel a certain affinity, in terms of their approach to performing?

.....

## ACTORS

**Àlex Brendemühl**

I don't have a clear role model for my work, but I tend to prefer European actors over American actors. Marcello Mastroianni, Vittorio Gassman, Fernando Fernán Gómez, Bruno Ganz, Klaus Kinski, Max von Sydow, and all of the great English actors inspire me. And Americans like Philip Seymour Hoffman. In terms of contemporary comedy, Adam Sandler or Ben Stiller.

**Eduard Fernández**

Which actors do I have as role models? It almost sounds like a trick question. Like everyone else, the good ones: Al Pacino, Philip S. Hoffman, Mastroianni, Paco Rabal, Javier Bardem, Robert de Niro, Ricardo Darín...

**Emilio Gutiérrez Caba**

It's hard to choose just one actress or actor who meets all of the expectations that I would like to have met. Of course there have been performers who were masters of their

work: in comedy, Cary Grant, in drama, Fredric March, Franchot Tone, Gérard Philipe, Adrien Brody, Marlon Brando, and Paul Newman. There are so many. When I think about their work I am amazed by their abilities and I try to rationalise their way of making things so easy, so full of truth, their ability to transmit and connect with the audience, the consistency of their work, their vocal and body language. It is amazing to witness the infinite nuances that can be achieved in a good performance and the possibilities – ignored by most of society – of this great treasure, lost on so many because it doesn't satisfy our innate human instinct to play with emotions, situations and experiences.

**Tristán Ulloa**

Philip Seymour Hoffman, to mention one who recently passed away. His technique in front of the camera and his level of commitment to his work are worthy of study and admiration. ■

Philip Seymour Hoffman in *Capote* (Benett Miller, 2005)



# **\_conclusion**

## **The living map of Javier Bardem**

Lola Mayo

Five years ago I met the actor Javier Bardem. Our conversation about acting was never made public, because he never authorised it. The interview remains stored away. I cannot show it to anyone, but the impressions that our encounter left me with are still very vivid, and define for me what since then I have come to believe it means to be “an actor”.

What I remember of that meeting, and of his words, will form my conclusion to the words that other actors and filmmakers have shared on these pages. Not the words of Javier Bardem, but the memory of the words of Javier Bardem, who dazzled me with his insightful reflections on his craft, while as a person he seemed to me so very dark, so very fragile and, in his fragility, wounding.

Cinema is much more democratic than literature. Because cinema always gives the character a body. And if the actor portraying that character is Javier Bardem, the character not only has a body, but *is* that body. A character portrayed by Bardem is charged with emotions, with the past, with reasons and with language, but always, and above all, with physicality, with an inescapable physical presence. This is why when I came face to face with the real body of the actor Javier Bardem I had the sensation that I didn't know him. He is bigger, smaller, stronger or weaker than his characters. I knew his characters, not him. He is somebody else. Perhaps that is what makes him a real actor.

Javier Bardem has a strong, solid physique, and a uniquely photogenic quality. If he is in a shot, it is impos-

sible to keep from looking at him. Because the quality of being photogenic is that miraculous phenomenon that determines whether a face will truly leave its mark on a film. And yet, Javier has dedicated his career to keeping his own body off the screen by making it totally present but transforming it into another, in spite of himself, hiding his own body in the shell of his roles.

Javier knows that the body doesn't lie, that it is reactions and not reasons that define the truth of a character. He has gone beyond imitation. This is not a contest; he himself says so. To capture the essence of a character, you have to imitate the inimitable. When he talks about his method of becoming a character, it seems to me as if he has entered a kind of priesthood, as if he has decided to dedicate his life to a complex, startling investigation, and that he has no idea where it will lead him.

Javier spoke to me of the two pillars of his work: observation and memory. He also spoke of his trouble with reading, with working with books; he has to force himself to read. His characters are born out of a gaze on the world. Javier always takes his models from the outside world. Although today it is obviously difficult for him to watch without being watched, this is what he does to distance his characters from the archetype. He knows that for an artist it is essential to continue to belong to the world.

When he talked about memory, he explained that it is a double-edged sword. You have to travel through your own memory to give a character emotions, but you need to be able to get out, to leave your own story out of it in order to tell the character's story. And it is here, in this revocation of vanity, that we find the work of a true master, Juan Carlos Corazza, a mentor and inspiration for so many actors of his generation. Few actors with a career like his continue to place themselves in the hands of another. Bardem believes that sooner or later, all actors develop their formulas, knowing just what works for them, and only someone coming from outside can deconstruct them, and compel the actor to work again with empty hands. It is a question of fighting against the paradox of the actor, who is by definition pure vanity and self-consciousness.

Javier Bardem began his career in the early nineties. Bigas Luna saw in him a strong man who could be broken. Together they managed to reveal the fragility of a body that only appeared strong. Too strong. His first films were *Las edades de Lulú* (1990), *Jamón jamón* (1992), *Huevos de oro* (1993). He then struggled with characters who because of their simplicity required an extraordinary effort: *El detective y la muerte* (Gonzalo Suárez, 1994) and *Carne trémula* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1997). With Mariano Barroso's *Éxtasis* (1996), for the first time he felt that it was the character rather than him who was in control. His first great mutation came in *Perdita Durango* (Dance with the Devil, Álex de la Iglesia, 1997). It is a visceral, violent character, which makes him bigger and heavier. But it is probably the characters

that make him smaller that reflect the full extent of his talent: the junkie in *Días contados* (Running Out of Time, Imanol Uribe, 1994), the poet Reinaldo Arenas in *Before Night Falls* (Julian Schnabel, 2000), or the humble and loyal police officer in *The Dancer Upstairs* (John Malkovich, 2002). His personality is so strong that it would be easy to imagine that he was at risk of being limited to performing only big-name characters: Reinaldo, Ramón Sampedro, Santa, Florentino Ariza, or the great hypocrite Lorenzo Casamares in *Goya's Ghosts* (Milos Forman, 2006). The circle of big names closes with Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men* (Ethan & Joel Coen, 2007), in which Bardem demonstrates his capacity for control, precision of movements, and, once again, explores a body the way an immense landscape might be explored with a magnifying glass.

The stature of his characters is so great that the films he stars in are even threatened with being crushed under the weight of his talent. And yet, this has yet to happen to him. No doubt he has also considered this danger. This is why he works continuously to better himself, to avoid shortcuts, to learn more, even though it would seem there could be nothing more for him to learn. It is perhaps for this reason, and not for some frivolous desire to make the banal "leap into Hollywood" that Javier began working abroad around 2000; perhaps this is why he decided at one point to accept roles in English, a language that is alien to him and in which he admits he is not really fluent. Language is another obstacle, another hurdle to jump over to prove to himself that he can walk further along the wire; that he can add yet another ingredient and still keep his balance.

My meeting with Bardem happened over two afternoons in the months of May and June. Javier welcomed me into his home, after a call from the director of the Alcalá de Henares Film Festival, who has known him for some time. On the day of the meeting I arrived a little early and bumped into him on the street. He was carrying a huge painting that somebody had given him as a gift. It was raining, and we entered his house with wet feet. I took off my shoes, as if I was at home. I accepted the soft drink he offered me. For many hours on those two days, we talked. We didn't talk about anything that I didn't have written down on paper; we didn't talk about anything other than acting.

I think Javier took the interview like a job, seriously, with dedication, never evading even one of my questions, making an effort to understand where I wanted to go with them. For the world of acting, so undefined, so hard to delimit, so ambiguous for anyone outside it, this actor has the exact words, having created a vocabulary to speak about his craft. He is sincere and bold; he makes an effort to explain himself and always achieves it.

I imagine him in that peaceful and orderly house in the heart of Madrid, writing ceaselessly in a notebook, preparing the indeterminable list of questions with which he will accost each director, drawing a map of scenes inch





Javier Bardem in *Jamón Jamón* (Bigas Luna, 1992)

by inch, a dense network of connections that run through a script from the top down and which, from a bird's eye view, would no doubt compose the face of his character.

He has taken on some big challenges; many more are probably to come. For one, it would be quite an event to see him on the stage. Javier is a man of the cinema; he has rarely acted live. This doesn't make him either a better or a worse actor. But the theatre would surely leave him naked in the wilderness. This, I thought then, is how Bardem starts all of his roles: defenceless in the woods, bewildered at a crossroads.

I don't know where Bardem is now. I learned a lot in that meeting now five years past. That closed, complete and unpublished interview is for me a whole universe, a whole capacity for reflection which it is sad that other actors, other readers, have never been able to see.

The universe of actors was completely unknown to me before I began the book *La piel y la máscara* (Madrid: Al-cine 38, 2008), for which I did that interview with Bardem. With great generosity, the actors I interviewed constructed a world before my eyes in a matter of hours.

After meeting those people, those actors, I concluded that only through searching and uncertainty can something truly valuable be obtained. In the actor's equation there are always two unknowns, the same two of all human life: the body and the spirit. The rough breed of actors goes on trying to resolve them, travelling from one to the other, adding body and subtracting spirit, multiplying spirit and dividing body... rising up above the power of both. The result is always zero, or infinity. ■

**Daniel Gascó García** studied Business Administration at the Universitat Jaume I of Castellón, where he managed the Aula de Cine for three years. He was a member of the Editorial Board of the Valencian journal *Banda Aparte* (1993-1997). He has worked as film critic in various media (press, radio and television), has contributed to several anthologies, and has been a member of the jury in different film festivals (Alcala de Henares, La Cabina, Radio City, etc.). Currently, he writes articles for *Caimán Cuadernos de Cine* and *Lletres valencianes* and teaches the subject of Comparative History of Cinema at the Academia Idecrea. Since 2004 he has been the manager, together with his sister Almudena, of the video store Stromboli, which houses a significant catalogue of cinema history. He also organises film series for the Festival Cine Europa and for the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea (CGAC).

**Lola Mayo** is a screenwriter, producer and writer. She has written and produced the three films directed by Javier Rebollo: *El muerto y ser feliz* (2012), which received a Goya Award for Best Leading Actor and the FIPRESCI Prize at the Festival de San Sebastian; *La mujer sin piano* (2009), winner of the Silver Shell for Best Director at the Festival de San Sebastián and Best Film at the Los Angeles Film Festival; and *Lo que sé de Lola* (2006), FIPRESCI prize winner at the International Film Festival of London. She also co-wrote Javier Rebollo's fourth film, *La cerillera*, with the director himself. She is currently writing the script for the Colombian film *Como cloro en tela negra* to be directed by Ana María Londoño, and directs documentaries for the programme *Documentos TV* (TVE). Since 1996 she has produced fifteen short films through her production company Lolita Films, which all together have received more than one hundred awards at festivals worldwide. She is the coordinator of the Documentary Department at the Escuela de Cine de San Antonio de los Baños in Cuba, and continues to teach Documentary Scriptwriting and Creation at the Instituto del Cine de Madrid and the Escuela Oficial de Cine de Madrid. She has written poems, a novel and a book on film.

**Mariano Barroso** (Sant Just Desvern, 1959) made his name in the film world upon receiving a Goya Award for Best New Director for *Mi hermano del alma* (1994). This interesting debut has been followed by films like *Éxtasis* (1996), *Los lobos de Washington* (1999) and *Todas las mujeres* (2013). He has alternated his cinematic presence with his work for television and a very active teaching career. Trained at the American Film Institute and at the William Layton Laboratory, he is the coordinator of the Diploma in Film Directing at the ECAM and has directed the Department of Film Directing at the Escuela de Cine de San Antonio de los Baños in Cuba. Acting is one of the key focuses of his films, as evidenced by the 2005 documentary *El oficio del actor*, which featured Javier Bardem, Luis Tosar and Eduard Fernández, actors who regularly appear in his films.

Since training at the Universidad del Cine in Buenos Aires, **Celina Murga** (Paraná, 1973) has worked in various capacities in the film industry. Director, screenwriter, producer and editor, she became known in the world of short films with titles such as *Interior-Noche* (1999) and *Una tarde feliz* (2002). *Ana y los otros* (2003) was her first feature film, and her second, *Una semana solos* (2007), premiered at the Festival Internacional de Cine Independiente de Buenos Aires. In 2009, she took part in a two-year sponsorship program that allowed her to work alongside Martin Scorsese. In addition to her creative work, she has worked as a teacher at the Centro de Investigación Cinematográfica de Buenos Aires.

The work of **Felipe Vega** (León, 1952) in the world of cinema has ranged from directing and scriptwriting short films, feature films or commercials to writing articles on film criticism for prominent journals and teaching cinema at the Escuela de la Cinematografía y el Audiovisual de la Comunidad de Madrid. Active since the late 1970s, he has received several awards at the el Festival Internacional de Cine de San Sebastián, for titles such as *Mientras haya luz* (1988) and *El mejor de los tiempos* (1989). Over the course of his film career, he has been associated with names like producer Gerardo Herrero Herrero (*Un paraguas para tres*, 1992; *Nubes de verano*, 2004) and writer and journalist Manuel Hidalgo, with whom he collaborated on *Grandes ocasiones* (1998), *Nubes de verano* and *Mujeres en el parque* (2006). His most recent work is the documentary *Elogio de la distancia* (2010), co-directed with Julio Llamazares, who had also written the screenplay for *El techo del mundo* (1995) fifteen years earlier.

Until the release of *Blancanieves* (2012), **Pablo Berger** (Bilbao, 1963) had only directed one short film (*Mama*, 1988) and the feature film *Torremolinos 73* (2003), although he had enjoyed a long career in the world of advertising and music videos and as a teacher at the New York Film Academy. With his second feature film he became one of Spain's most acclaimed filmmakers, as the film received a total of ten Goya Awards, including Best Film, Best Original Screenplay and Best Original Song, authored by the director himself. The actresses Maribel Verdú and García Macarena also received awards for their roles.

With a background in theatre and television, since his debut as the star of *Un banco en el parque* (Agustí Vila, 1999) and his consolidation in *The Hours of the Day* (Las horas del día, Jaime Rosales, 2003), playing the everyday serial killer, the roles of **Àlex Brendemühl** (Barcelona, 1972) in film have often been associated with the debuts of unknown directors or with filmmakers with a markedly independent quality. For example, he has worked under the direction of Pere Portabella (*El silencio después de Bach*, 2007), Óscar Aibar (*El bosc*, 2012) and, more recently, Lluís Miñarro (*Stella Cadente*, 2014) and Isaki Lacuesta (*Murieron por encima de sus posibilidades*, 2014). He combines his acting work in Spain with roles in the film industries of other countries such as France, Argentina or Germany.

Born into a family of actors, and with almost two hundred acting credits in film and television, **Emilio Gutiérrez Caba** (Valladolid, 1942) has been one of the essential faces of Spanish cinema and theatre since the early 1960s. He founded his own theatre company in 1968 and starred in some of the best-known titles of the new Spanish cinema of that decade, such as *Nueve cartas a Berta* (Basilio Martín Patino, 1966) and *La caza* (Carlos Saura, 1966). His career was revitalised in the early years of the new millennium thanks to directors like Alex de la Iglesia (*La comunidad*, 2000) and Miguel Albaladejo (*El cielo abierto*, 2001), and his presence in television hits such as *Gran Reserva* (TVE: 2010- 2013).

After beginning his career in theatre performing works of the classics (Shakespeare, Molière, Beckett), **Eduard Fernández** (Barcelona, 1964) began to make a name for himself as a film actor after his appearance in *Los lobos de Washington* (Mariano Barroso, 1999), for which he received the first of his eight nominations for a Goya Award. Known for playing characters with strong personalities, he made an impact as the lead actor in films *Fausto 5.0* (La Fura dels Baus, 2001), *Smoking Room* (Julio D. Wallovits, Roger Gual, 2002), *El método* (Marcelo Piñeiro, 2005), *Ficción* (Cesc Gay, 2006) and *La mosquitera* (Agustí Vila, 2010), and as a supporting actor in films like *Son de mar* (Bigas Luna, 2001), *En la ciudad* (Cesc Gay, 2003), *Alatriste* (Agustín Díaz Yanes, 2006), *Pa negre* (Agustí Villaronga, 2010) and *El Niño* (Daniel Monzón, 2014).

One of the most popular faces in Spanish film, television and theatre, **Tristán Ulloa** (Orleans, 1970) began his career in front of the camera in the late 1990s. His role in *Mensaka* (Salvador García Ruiz, 1998) catapulted him into the spotlight with a Goya Award nomination for Best New Actor. Since then, he has alternated leading roles (*Lucía y el sexo*, Julio Medem, 2001) and supporting roles, taking part in around thirty feature films and in television shows such as *El comisario* (Telecinco: 1999-2000), *Gran Reserva* (TVE: 2010-2013) and *El tiempo entre costuras* (Antena 3: 2013-2014). In 2007 he co-directed (with his brother David) his first film, *Pudor*, which was nominated for Best Screenplay Adaptation and Best New Director at the Goya Awards.