

Article

Seeking Authenticity: ‘Method’ Production Design in Narrative Screen Practice

Juliet John

Department of Languages and Cultures, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Melbourne, VIC 3086, Australia; j.john@latrobe.edu.au

Abstract

In contemporary narrative filmmaking, emerging technologies such as virtual production and generative artificial intelligence are impacting production workflows. Yet one central element of the practice remains unchanged: filmmakers seek to create relatable characters who are situated within believable dramatic scenarios. When achieved, narrative authenticity supports audience immersion, which in turn affects the work’s impact. Characters are constructed through a complex matrix of meaning expressed on screen by actors and contributed to by writers, directors, costume designers, production designers, cinematographers, editors, composers and sound designers. Over the last century, the Method technique has been a widely recognised practice used by many actors to find authenticity in their performances. Like actors, production designers rely on developing an understanding of a character’s inner life as a path to designing authentic fictional worlds. Is there an implicit approach in production design practice that aligns with the Method approach used in performance? Are there similarities between the way a production designer prepares a character’s environment and the way an actor prepares to perform in it? And once created, does the design itself perform authenticity? If so, can making this practice more explicit assist with the development and broader understanding of how designers contribute to screen works? As a way of elucidating the comparatively less visible contribution of the production designer, this article compares selected Method techniques used by actors with those used by production designers in seeking authentic characterisations. By placing these practices in dialogue, this article proposes production design as a form of performative practice that implicitly draws on a Method approach to effectively solve the design problem in narrative screen practice.

Keywords: screen production; screen performance; production design; mise-en-scene; Method acting; Stanislavski



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1. Introduction

Despite rapid technological transformation within contemporary filmmaking—particularly the expansion of virtual production pipelines, real-time rendering engines, and generative artificial intelligence—narrative screen works remain fundamentally anchored in character. While technological innovation continues to reshape how films are produced, distributed, and consumed, the mechanisms through which audiences emotionally and cognitively engage with screen narratives have remained comparatively stable. Viewers continue to invest in fictional individuals whose desires, fears, contradictions, and transformations provide the primary vehicle for narrative meaning.

The persistence of character-centred storytelling is striking given the increasing abstraction of contemporary production workflows. Environments can be partially or wholly digital; shot on LED volumes rather than physical locations, and creative decisions can be informed by algorithmic systems that automate or accelerate aspects of design and visualisation. Within these technologically mediated contexts, characters must still feel grounded, embodied, and situated within believable worlds. The challenge facing contemporary filmmakers is therefore not merely technical, but interpretive: how to sustain character authenticity and psychological coherence within increasingly fragmented and virtualised production environments.

Character construction in screen production is inherently collaborative (Bordwell et al. 1985; Naremore 1988; Barnwell 2017). Although actors are most visibly associated with characterisation, screen characters emerge through the intricately coordinated labour of writers, directors, costume designers, production designers, cinematographers, editors, sound designers and composers. Each department contributes to character perception across time and space, shaping audience understanding through distinct yet interrelated expressive systems. Scholarly discourse has tended to privilege acting methodologies as the primary site of character construction, relegating other creative practices to supportive or secondary roles (Naremore 1988; Bordwell et al. 1985; Ede 2010).

This article expands the dominant actor-centred model by examining character building as foundational to production design practice. Production designers frequently begin with an interpretive understanding of character by considering biography, social identity, emotional state, and behavioural patterns as the foundation for spatial and material design decisions (Ede 2010; Barnwell 2022; Tashiro 1998). This tendency parallels Method acting traditions that prioritise psychological interiority and experiential authenticity (Stanislavski 1936; Butler 2014). Production designers likewise interpret character biography and emotional state, translating these insights into expressive spatial and material form (Barnwell 2022; Tashiro 1998; Wille 2017). Designers often report explicit or implicit methods of exploring character that align with Method approaches and philosophies of practice such as interrogating characters' internal psychology, building backstory through close textual analysis, research, and social context and seeking naturalistic behaviours and affective responses.

In my own industrial practice as a production designer, art director and set decorator, I have repeatedly worked through the same conundrum. Embodying the character's inner psychology is the pivotal foundation from which the most authentic design solutions emerge. Through my academic research (John 2017, 2021, 2025; John and Joyce 2020) designers have reported placing themselves in the conditions and environments experienced by the characters, as a path to eliciting authentic material expressions of the characters' fictional world. Designers describe experiential approaches such as walking the same streets (McMicking 2017), visiting the same shops and cafés (Doring 2018) and even living in the constructed setting (Lagacé 2015) as catalysts for inhabiting the characters' inner psychology, behaviours and emotional realities.

This article seeks to explore whether design practice can be enriched through more explicit study of Method performance techniques and conversely whether production design can be better understood. By placing acting and production design in dialogue, this article proposes production design as a performative practice, providing a deeper understanding of how designers contribute to character construction, through both their process and outcomes. In doing so, this article contributes to film studies, performance studies, and design research by offering a more integrated account of collaborative authorship in narrative screen practice.

Initially, the literature will be reviewed to provide theoretical context for the article. Following that, character-building techniques will be considered from the point of view

of the performer and the designer individually and then in combination. The article then concludes with reflections on the implications for collective authorship and future practice.

2. Literature Review: Performance, Production Design and Characterisation

Film scholars have examined how performance methodologies operate within the specific conditions of screen production. Naremore (1988) situates film acting within broader performance traditions while emphasising the unique challenges posed by cinematic fragmentation. Because films are shot out of sequence and assembled through editing, actors must maintain internal character continuity independent of spatial or temporal continuity on set. Acting methodologies therefore function not only as expressive tools but also as stabilising systems that support narrative coherence across disjointed production processes. This notion echoes Barnwell's (2017, 2022) theory identifying the visual concept as a foundational unifying device in film design practice.

2.1. Roots and Persistence of Realist Style

Alongside this necessity for coherence and unity, the pursuit of verisimilitude has dominated cinematic style since the classical Hollywood mode emerged almost a hundred years ago. In the early twentieth century, following trends in literature and as a reaction against earlier melodramatic and Romantic modes, classical Hollywood performance techniques increasingly foregrounded psychological realism in character construction (Pearson 1992; Brewster and Jacobs 1997). The classical style that consolidated in the 1930s established naturalism as the dominant paradigm, marginalising expressionist approaches except in formally distinct sequences, such as dream sequences. Even when Brechtian modernism began to influence cinematic performance styles in the mid-twentieth century, the classical form that privileged naturalism remained persistent. As cinematic performance styles evolved, they remained anchored by this established tendency towards psychological exploration as a means of expressing realism. The following passages provide a chronological outline of several popular Method techniques, establishing a basis for comparison with the production design approaches that follow.

2.2. Evolution of Method Approaches in Cinematic Performance

Early twentieth-century theories of acting, particularly those associated with Stanislavski (1936), emphasised the importance of motivation, intention, and emotional truth. These ideas positioned character as an internally coherent psychological entity whose behaviour could be understood as the outward expression of inner life. Acting, within this framework, became a process of disciplined self-analysis and empathetic creative connection. Likewise, production designers consistently report that seeking internal character logic and empathy is a foundation for their practice. The various facets of the Method style that follow invite further means through which designers can expand their ability to find inner character connection and therefore achieve authenticity in their work.

Richard Boleslavsky occupies a foundational position in the American reception of Stanislavskian acting as one of its earliest translators and systematisers for English-language audiences. Through *Acting: The First Six Lessons*, Boleslavsky (1933) introduced core principles such as given circumstances, emotional memory, and concentration, framing them as practical techniques adaptable to modern theatrical and cinematic production. Boleslavsky's selective emphasis helped shape the conditions through which Method acting later diversified in the United States, providing a bridge between Stanislavski's evolving theories and the distinct approaches that were subsequently developed.

In the post-war period, Stanislavski's principles were adapted and intensified within American Method acting traditions such as those associated with Lee Strasberg at The

Actors Studio in New York City. [Strasberg \(1987\)](#) with his approach foregrounded affective memory, sensory recall, and emotional substitution as techniques for achieving authenticity. Rather than simulating emotion, the actor was encouraged to experience it, drawing on personal memories to generate truthful responses in fictitious circumstances. Character construction became an inward-facing process grounded in the actor's subjective experience.

During this period, Stella Adler became widely recognised for reframing Method acting in ways that proved particularly influential for screen performance. Rejecting an exclusive reliance on affective memory, [Adler \(2000\)](#) emphasised imagination, close textual analysis, and attention to social and historical circumstances as the basis of emotional truth. Her approach aligned Method acting with cinematic realism by foregrounding character psychology as something constructed through context, research, and interpretation rather than through personal emotional recall, offering an alternative lineage to the psychologically introspective techniques associated with Lee Strasberg's work at the Actors Studio. Meticulous character research and textual analysis have become assumed practices across many filmmaking disciplines, including production design.

Another early influential strand of Method-based actor training was developed by Sanford Meisner, centring on behavioural realism and spontaneous interaction, qualities especially suited to screen performance. Meisner defined acting as "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances," emphasising responsiveness, repetition, and moment-to-moment listening as the foundation of authentic performance. His technique foregrounds performance as relational and situational, aligning closely with cinematic modes of realism that privilege immediacy, presence, and the dynamics of interaction within the frame. This approach can be extended to consider not only the relational influence of other performers but also the impact of their environment ([Meisner and Longwell 1987](#)).

Drawing on Stanislavskian principles, a pragmatic and analytically grounded approach to Method-based screen performance was developed by Uta Hagen. [Hagen \(1973, 1991\)](#) emphasised disciplined observation, substitution, and clearly articulated character objectives as tools for achieving emotional truth. Her pedagogy framed performance as a process of conscious problem-solving grounded in everyday behaviour, aligning closely with cinematic realism and with production contexts in which actors must translate interior motivation into precise, repeatable actions for the camera.

Collectively, these historical variations in the Method approach form a multifaceted framework through which contemporary screen actors and production designers pursue verisimilitude. Performance strategies described here- including the exploration of inner psychology, affective recall, social context and behaviour, immediate physical responses, close textual analysis, and detailed research- are identified by designers as integral to their implicit design process, as will be discussed later.

In contemporary discourse, David Krasner challenges the tendency in film and media studies to treat Method acting as a unified or psychologically reductive technique. [Krasner \(2000\)](#) argues that American Method acting emerged as a heterogeneous set of practices shaped by divergent interpretations of Stanislavski, institutional training contexts, and production conditions. Method acting is positioned, not as a singular emphasis on emotional recall, but as a spectrum of imaginative, behavioural, and contextual approaches to performance, providing a critical framework for understanding the array of pedagogies thus outlined.

Sharon Marie Carnicke also provides a crucial theoretical corrective to dominant narratives of Method acting by demonstrating how American interpretations selectively simplified and, in some cases, distorted Stanislavski's later thinking. In *Stanislavski in Focus*, [Carnicke \(2009\)](#) shows that Method acting largely draws on early, psychologically oriented formulations while neglecting Stanislavski's subsequent emphasis on physical

action, structure, and ensemble dynamics. This reframing positions Method acting not as a faithful continuation of Stanislavski's system but as a historically situated reinterpretation, an insight essential for understanding Method-based practices as adaptive methodologies rather than doctrinal inheritances. The adaptive qualities of the Method style also invite its usage in other character-based practices such as production design.

Isaac Butler extends the contemporary reassessment of Method acting by situating its rise within broader cultural and industrial contexts. In *The Method: How the Twentieth Century Learned to Act*, Butler (2014) traces the Method's cultural authority through Cold War politics, constructions of masculinity, and the emergence of celebrity culture, particularly in film and television. Rather than treating the Method as a technical acting system, Butler frames it as a powerful cultural narrative about authenticity, labour, and selfhood, one that continues to shape how screen performance is understood and valued.

Taken together, Krasner, Carnicke, and Butler reposition Method acting as a historically contingent and culturally productive set of practices rather than a unified technique. Where Krasner pluralises the Method genealogically, Carnicke reveals its selective relationship to Stanislavski's evolving system, and Butler explains its enduring cultural power within media industries. This scholarship supports an understanding of Method acting as a flexible methodology shaped by translation, institutional context, and cultural discourse—an approach that opens the concept of “Method” to broader applications across creative labour, including production design.

2.3. The Role of Production Design in Cinematic Meaning-Making

The production designer seeks to build narrative cohesion by creating believable worlds for characters to inhabit (Barnwell 2017). In contrast to theories relating to performance techniques, production design has occupied a more marginal position within film scholarship (Affron and Affron 1995; Wille 2017; Fischer 2015). While film scholars have long recognised *mise-en-scène* as a site of meaning, production design, as an element of *mise-en-scène* is often reduced to descriptive discussion, in terms of visual style, historical accuracy, or generic conventions. Sets, props, and locations are frequently framed as contextual backdrops against which performance unfolds rather than as active contributors to character construction (Bergfelder et al. 2007). Even when scholars acknowledge the expressive power of design, it is rarely, albeit increasingly, theorised as engaging systematically with character psychology.

In contrast, scenographic theories in theatre, as distinct from film theories, have been more commonly conceptualised production design as performative practice. Scholars of theatrical performance have argued that scenography does not merely frame performance but participates in it, shaping audience perception, affect, and interpretation over time. Scenography is understood as temporal, dynamic, and relational, operating in dialogue with performers and spectators. Despite these developments, similar perspectives have been slow to emerge within screen studies, where the division of labour between departments often reinforces hierarchical assumptions about authorship, thereby nudging production design to the periphery.

Although the work of the Affrons, Barnwell, Street, Ede and others has done much in recent decades to advance the field, production design scholarship has historically been comparatively silent on evidencing film design as a systematic contributor to character construction. This tendency reflects the formal imperative that a film's settings blend seamlessly (and invisibly) with the performances that take place in them (Gibson and Hill 1998). In contrast to theatrical settings, production design has long been overshadowed by an at times uncomfortable relationship with the portrayal of ‘reality’ in the filmic form (Street 2004). Through theorists such as Kracauer (1960) and Bazin (1967), and movements

such as Dogme 95 (Von Triers and Vinterberg 1995), production design has been rejected for the way it consciously constructs fictional environments. This belief reveals a discrepancy in the acceptance that actors portray fictional characters, while production designers likewise create fictional story worlds within which those fictional performances unfold.

As a result of both its formal invisibility and at times uncomfortable position, historically, production design scholarship has been notably dominated by those who have been trained in the practice. British film designer Edward Carrick's *Designing for Film* in 1941 is one of the earliest production design texts. In advocating for the appropriateness of the design to the emotion and style of the story being told, Carrick (1941) also highlights the ability of settings to render the believability of its story and characters.

Another early history of film design is French historian-practitioner Léon Barsacq's work called *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions* in 1976, which foregrounds the expressive power of cinematic environments and positions production design as central to film style. Although his own work centred around the French poetic realist films of the 1930s and 1940s, such as *Les Enfants du Paradis* (Carné 1945), in *Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions*, he draws largely on German Expressionism. Barsacq (1976) demonstrates how these distorted architectural forms and stylised interiors externalise psychological states, suggesting that space can function as a visual articulation of character interiority. However, while Barsacq (1976) convincingly establishes the set as an expressive medium, his account remains largely stylistic and movement-oriented, offering limited engagement with how production design collaborates with performance to construct character. This paper builds upon Barsacq's foundational insights but extends them by theorising production design not merely as expressive backdrop, but as an active co-author of character.

In the influential text *Sets in Motion*, Affron and Affron (1995), reposition production design from decorative backdrop to narrative engine room, demonstrating how spatial environments shape story progression and encode character transformation. Through detailed case studies, the Affrons show that décor, architectural scale, and spatial arrangement evolve alongside plot developments, signalling shifts in power, ideology, and identity. Their work marked a significant shift from earlier stylistic histories of film design by embedding production design within narrative structure and by offering a theoretical framework to explain its function. However, while the Affrons established that design participates in character development, they stop short of examining production design as a co-performative practice that actively shapes character embodiment through collaboration with actors and directors. Building on their narrative framework, this article advances a model of production design as an active agent in the construction of character.

Tashiro's (1998) *Pretty Pictures* extends production design scholarship by foregrounding the affective and ideological dimensions of cinematic space. Challenging the dismissal of design as mere ornamentation, Tashiro argues that décor, texture, and material detail shape the spectator's emotional and historical engagement with screen narratives. In the context of the historical film, he demonstrates how environments encode class, gender, and cultural memory, rendering character legible through material culture. While Tashiro primarily analyses design's impact on spectatorship rather than on performance process, his work establishes that production design contributes fundamentally to the construction of screen identity. This article builds on Tashiro's insights by examining how such material environments also participate in the embodied formation of character through collaborative production practices.

As a trained production designer, Jane Barnwell's influential work on the visual concept provides a central methodological framework for understanding production design as a structured meaning-making system within screen narratives. In contrast to stylistic or auteur-focused studies, Barnwell (2017, 2018, 2022) emphasises production design's

collaborative integration with cinematography, costume, and performance. Her articulation of the visual concept foregrounds coherence, narrative motivation, and thematic alignment, establishing design as foundational rather than decorative.

Barnwell's (2017, 2018, 2022) Visual Concept Analysis framework clearly demonstrates how production design contributes to the construction of narrative worlds and character identity and implicitly theorises the embodied interplay between spatial design and acting methodology. She notes that production designers help define actors' movement through the arrangement of space, boundaries, light, colour, and objects and argues that production design is deeply connected to performance because the designed environment shapes how actors move, behave, and express character on screen. By explaining that production design is not just background decoration, Barnwell identifies design's active contribution to narrative, character, atmosphere, and choreography of movement within scenes.

Barnwell (2022) also emphasises that sets and interiors influence the emotional truth of performances. For example, she discusses how domestic spaces in films can reveal psychology, motivation, and tension, allowing actors' performances to interact with the environment in meaningful ways. For Barnwell, this means production design and performance are inseparable parts of visual storytelling: actors perform through the spaces designed around them, and those spaces help communicate emotion and meaning to the audience.

Sir Christopher Frayling's studies of Ken Adam's work advance production design scholarship by framing the designer as an architectural auteur whose spatial imagination fundamentally shapes screen character. In analysing Adam's work on *Dr. Strangelove*, directed by Kubrick (1964) and the James Bond films, Frayling (2005) demonstrates how monumental modernist spaces amplify psychological traits and ideological anxieties, transforming environments into embodiments of masculine power, paranoia, and technocratic conceit. Rather than functioning as neutral settings, Adam's designs construct character archetypes through scale, geometry, and spatial dominance. However, while Frayling (2005) convincingly establishes the authorial and ideological force of production design, his focus remains primarily on spectacle and iconography. This article extends his insights by examining how production design operates not only at the level of architectural symbolism but also within the collaborative construction of character embodiment.

Laurie Ede's scholarship plays an important historiographic role in repositioning production design within film studies. In *British Film Design* (2010), Ede argues that designers have historically been marginalised within auteur-centred criticism, despite their decisive role in shaping visual tone, narrative atmosphere, and cultural identity. By foregrounding the production designer as a creative author embedded within national and industrial traditions, Ede establishes design as a central component of cinematic meaning-making. While his focus is primarily historiographic and institutional rather than performative, his work provides essential groundwork for considering production design as an active agent in the construction of screen character.

The edited collection *Art Direction and Production Design* (Fischer 2015) brings together historical, theoretical, and case-based analyses positioning film design as central to cinematic aesthetics, narrative construction, and ideological meaning. By situating production design within established frameworks of mise-en-scène and film form, the collection advances the legitimacy of design as a scholarly object. However, while the essays demonstrate the expressive and narrative capacities of production environments, they do not fully theorise the embodied and collaborative dimensions of character construction. The present study extends this emerging field by foregrounding production design as a co-performative agent in the shaping of screen character.

Ian Christie's historical scholarship provides an essential contextual reference for understanding the development of production design within British cinema. Through his analyses of British and Soviet film traditions, [Christie \(2009\)](#) demonstrates how studio environments and design practices shape national aesthetics and encode ideological meaning. His work underscores the role of production design in constructing character typologies rooted in class, politics, and cultural identity. While Christie's focus is primarily historiographic rather than performative, his emphasis on the structural integration of design within film form strengthens the case for examining production design as a foundational contributor to screen character construction.

Production designers' own theoretical and reflective writings provide more explicit insight into character-oriented practice. Richard Sylbert, in essays and interviews collected across his career, frequently articulated design as a process of psychological inference and social observation. In "The Architecture of Performance" (2007), Alex McDowell reconceptualises production design as a spatial system that actively shapes actor behaviour and narrative logic. Rather than treating the set as a decorative backdrop, McDowell argues that the designed world provides the structural conditions within which performance unfolds. Architecture becomes behavioural scaffolding, conditioning movement, gesture, and psychological credibility. His practitioner perspective shifts production design discourse toward embodiment and process, positioning design as an integral component of character construction. However, while McDowell foregrounds the performative implications of spatial design, his account remains primarily reflective and practice-led. This article builds on his insights by theorising production design as a co-performative discipline operating in parallel with acting methodologies.

Practitioner-led and interview-based publications offer some of the clearest evidence of character-focused design methodologies. [LoBrutto's \(1992\) *By Design*](#), alongside edited collections by [Halligan \(2013\) *FilmCraft: Production Design*](#) and [Etteedgui's \(1999\) *Production Design & Art Direction*](#) document designers repeatedly framing their work in terms of character biography, behavioural logic, and lived-in detail. Sets and props are frequently described as extensions of interior life and social identity. Despite their consistency and depth, such accounts are rarely theorised as forms of methodological knowledge within screen studies.

More recent interdisciplinary scholarship has begun to address this omission by foregrounding the material and affective dimensions of screen environments. [D'Arcy \(2018\)](#), [Wille \(2015, 2017\)](#) and [Wille et al. \(2025\)](#) have drawn attention to how objects, spaces, and textures carry emotional resonance, narrative memory, and social meaning. This work, informed by material culture and affect theory, supports an understanding of production design as actively participating in character construction by externalising psychological states and lived experience through spatial form.

Taken together, this literature demonstrates that while production design is widely acknowledged as central to cinematic meaning, it is in its relative infancy of being theorised as a systematic, character-building methodology. Designers' own accounts consistently describe practices that parallel character-based acting techniques, researching biography, imagining interior states, and constructing environments that condition behaviour, yet these processes remain under-analysed within film and media studies at large. Addressing this gap enables production design to be understood not merely as a visual or contextual backdrop to performance, but as an interpretive practice that actively collaborates in the construction of character across screen media.

The absence of sustained dialogue between acting theory and production design scholarship obscures the shared interpretive labour undertaken by both disciplines. Actors and production designers both analyse scripts through the lens of character, construct backsto-

ries, and contribute to psychological continuity across the narrative. Recognising these parallels enables a more holistic understanding of collaborative authorship and challenges entrenched hierarchies that privilege embodiment over material and spatial expression.

3. Discussion

3.1. *Performance as Character Construction: Inner Life and Embodied Practice*

Psychological realism in acting is predicated on the belief that behaviour emerges from inner motivation (Stanislavski 1936; Carnicke 2009). Actors typically begin their work through detailed script analysis, identifying a character's objectives, obstacles, relationships, and emotional trajectory (Stanislavski 1936; Naremore 1988). This analytical process establishes a coherent inner logic that informs external behaviour, ensuring that actions appear motivated rather than arbitrary.

Method acting traditions extend this analysis into emotional embodiment. Like production designers, actors construct detailed backstories, often extrapolating beyond the script, to establish a sense of lived experience (Strasberg 1987; Krasner 2000). Emotional memory exercises enable performers to access personal sensations that parallel a character's experiences, fostering authenticity and emotional truth (Stanislavski 1936; Strasberg 1987; Carnicke 2009). Rather than imitating emotion, the actor seeks to experience it, allowing behaviour to emerge organically (Naremore 1988; Butler 2014).

In screen production, these processes are complicated by technical constraints. Scenes may be filmed out of narrative order, emotional climaxes may be shot before establishing scenes, and environments may be incomplete or digitally augmented (Bordwell et al. 1985; Naremore 1988). Acting methodologies therefore function as stabilising systems, enabling performers to maintain psychological coherence across fragmented production contexts (Butler 2014; Carnicke 2009).

Importantly, acting is not an isolated activity. Performers rely heavily on integrated stimuli such as costume, props, sets, and spatial relationships to support emotional truth. Stanislavski (1936) emphasised the importance of physical objects and environment in shaping believable behaviour, while later scholars of screen acting note that performance is inseparable from the fictional world that surrounds it (Naremore 1988; Butler 2014). Costume influences posture and movement; props provide tactile engagement; and environments shape rhythm, gesture, and interaction (Bordwell et al. 1985; Barnwell 2017). Performance thus emerges through continuous negotiation with designed elements, revealing an existing interdependence between acting and production design (McDowell 2007; Barnwell 2022).

3.2. *Method Acting and the Construction of Screen Character: Case Studies*

Method acting rests on the premise that believable performance emerges from psychologically motivated behaviour rather than external imitation (Stanislavski 1936; Strasberg 1987; Carnicke 2009). Central to this approach are the concepts of objectives, emotional memory, given circumstances, and the cultivation of an inner life that motivates outward action. In cinema, Method techniques have been mainly associated with mid-twentieth-century American acting, though their influence continues in contemporary performance practice (Naremore 1988; Butler 2014). The following case studies demonstrate how actors have employed Method strategies to construct complex screen characters.

3.2.1. Embodied Rebellion: Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront* (1954)

Marlon Brando's performance as Terry Malloy in *On the Waterfront* (1954) is frequently cited as emblematic of Method acting in American cinema (Naremore 1988; Butler 2014). Brando's approach foregrounded psychological interiority and spontaneous behaviour. In

the famous taxi-cab scene (“I coulda been a contender”), Brando’s hesitations, fragmented speech patterns, and subtle physical gestures suggest emotional memory and internalised conflict rather than rhetorical performance.

Rather than projecting theatrical intensity, Brando allows pauses and vulnerability to structure the scene. His tactile engagement with props, such as gently handling Eva Marie Saint’s glove in an earlier sequence, exemplifies Stanislavskian attention to physical action as a pathway to psychological truth. [Carnicke \(2009\)](#) notes that such performances embody “experiencing” rather than “representing” emotion, aligning with [Strasberg’s \(1987\)](#) insistence that authentic behaviour must arise from lived sensation. In Brando’s case, character emerges through behavioural specificity grounded in an internalised backstory of regret and marginalisation.

3.2.2. Fragmented Masculinity: Robert De Niro in *Raging Bull* (1980)

Robert De Niro’s transformation into Jake LaMotta in *Raging Bull* (1980) demonstrates a later evolution of Method technique emphasising physical embodiment. De Niro famously gained significant weight to portray LaMotta’s decline, integrating bodily transformation into character construction ([Butler 2014](#)). This commitment reflects the Method’s emphasis on fully inhabiting given circumstances, including physiological conditions.

Beyond physical alteration, De Niro’s performance is marked by contained volatility. His silent mirror scenes convey internalised aggression through minimal gesture and controlled facial tension. [Naremore \(1988\)](#) argues that Method-derived screen acting privileges micro-expressions and subtle shifts captured by the camera’s intimacy. In *Raging Bull*, the character’s psychological fragmentation is communicated through embodied tension rather than overt theatrical display. De Niro’s performance demonstrates how Method actors utilise both physical transformation and emotional memory to construct layered masculinity rooted in insecurity and violence.

3.2.3. Immersive Preparation: Daniel Day-Lewis in *My Left Foot* (1989)

Daniel Day-Lewis’s portrayal of Christy Brown in *My Left Foot* (1989) illustrates Method immersion extended into physical discipline. Day-Lewis remained in character on and off set, using a wheelchair throughout production and insisting on physical constraints consistent with Brown’s cerebral palsy. Such immersive techniques align with Strasberg’s emphasis on sustained emotional and psychological commitment ([Strasberg 1987](#)).

While debates persist about the ethics and necessity of extreme immersion, scholars observe that Day-Lewis’s approach exemplifies the Method’s pursuit of experiential authenticity ([Butler 2014](#)). The performance’s credibility derives from detailed physical specificity such as awkward muscle tension, restricted movement, and expressive facial concentration. Character is constructed through disciplined embodiment rather than imitation. This case underscores how Method acting extends beyond emotional recall into the sustained corporeal inhabitation of circumstance.

3.2.4. Internalised Trauma: Natalie Portman in *Black Swan* (2010)

In the film, *Black Swan* by [Aronofsky \(2010\)](#), Natalie Portman employs a Method-informed approach to portray psychological breakdown. Portman underwent extensive ballet training and reportedly immersed herself in the character’s obsessive mindset. The performance hinges on subtle physical deterioration including tightened shoulders, nervous gestures, and fragmented breath, signalling internal fracture.

[Butler \(2014\)](#) argues that contemporary screen acting often blends Method principles with technical awareness of cinematic framing. Portman’s micro-expressions, captured in extreme close-up, convey paranoia and self-surveillance. Emotional memory and physical

discipline combine to render psychological disintegration visible. Rather than theatrical excess, the performance relies on embodied fragility shaped by internalised pressure.

Across these examples, Method actors construct character through a synthesis of psychological analysis, emotional recall, and physical embodiment. [Stanislavski's \(1936\)](#) original emphasis on objectives and given circumstances remains foundational, while [Strasberg's \(1987\)](#) adaptation foregrounds emotional memory as a means of accessing authenticity. Film scholarship has observed that the camera's proximity intensifies the impact of internalised performance, privileging subtle behavioural truth over declamatory technique ([Naremore 1988](#); [Carnicke 2009](#)).

In cinema, where scenes are shot discontinuously and performance is fragmented across takes, it has been stated that Method strategies function as stabilising systems ([Butler 2014](#)). By constructing detailed backstories and sustaining psychological continuity, actors maintain coherence despite production constraints. Character, in these cases, emerges from disciplined introspection translated into embodied behaviour.

Collectively, these case studies demonstrate that Method acting techniques—emotional memory, physical transformation, immersive preparation, and psychological objective analysis—provide actors with structured approaches to building complex screen characters. While varying in degree and interpretation, each performance reflects the central Method premise: authentic characterisation arises from the alignment of inner experience and outward action. Production design case studies will now be similarly examined.

3.3. Production Design as Character Construction

Production design operates through an interpretive logic that closely parallels acting methodology, though it is less frequently articulated in theoretical terms. Rather than merely identifying locations or visual styles, production designers engage deeply with questions of character: who inhabits a space, how they live, what they value, and what emotional histories are embedded in their environments ([Barnwell 2017, 2022](#); [Ede 2010](#)). Design decisions are thus motivated not simply by narrative function but by character psychology ([Tashiro 1998](#); [Affron and Affron 1995](#)). Method techniques have been normalised in production design practice to the point that they are entirely assumed rather than acknowledged for their similarity to actor preparation.

3.4. "Method Designing" and Immersive World-Building

The interdependence between acting and design is not merely theoretical but is acknowledged within production practice. Veteran production designer Robert Boyle speaking of his set decorator who "felt he could be a Method decorator by put himself into the characters" ([LoBrutto 1992](#), p. 15). The phrase suggests a direct parallel between Method acting and immersive design practice. Jack Fisk, known for his collaborations with directors Terrence Mallick and David Lynch, has been called a Method-style production designer for his fidelity to authenticity, often building period sets with period-appropriate tools. "I sort of approach these films like I'm making a documentary in a way," Fisk says ([Coyle 2024](#)). [Heeney \(2019\)](#) used the term "Method Production Design" to describe the approach Designer Stéphane Collonge developed with director Joanna Hogg in their cinematic collaborations.

Like a Method actor, he thinks deeply about characters' psychology and backstory, and this emotional context informs how he designs the sets. Collonge elaborated, 'You explore within yourself who is that person you are trying to make a portrait of. So that person would have that jumper, or maybe they would have bed sheets rather than duvets. It becomes very specific and precise. You see the desk of that person—is it ordered? What is in the drawers?'

In Grouchnikov (2024), production designer, Patrice Vermette, described his work on *Dune*, a film by Villeneuve (2021) as “Method designing,” anchoring fantasy in material authenticity so that actors could inhabit believable environments. This approach aligns with Stanislavski’s (1936) emphasis on given circumstances and with McDowell’s (2007) conception of design as “architecture of performance.” By constructing tactile, historically grounded spaces, designers provide actors with sensory stimuli that support emotional truth. Donald Graham Burt’s design of *Zodiac*, a film by Fincher (2007) exemplifies another commonly expressed dimension of “Method” design. The film’s meticulous recreation of 1970s San Francisco reflects a pursuit of visual authenticity that scholars describe as analogous to immersive acting preparation. The historical precision of sets, props, and locations anchors performance in a credible material world, stabilising psychological coherence amid narrative complexity (Barnwell 2017).

In professional practice, production designers routinely conduct detailed script analyses that mirror actors’ preparatory processes (Barnwell 2017; LoBrutto 1992). Characters are analysed in terms of socioeconomic background, habitual behaviour, emotional states, and developmental arcs (Ede 2010; Tashiro 1998). Designers ask how long a character has lived in a space, what objects they would keep or discard, how order or disorder reflects their inner life, and how spaces might change over the course of the narrative (Barnwell 2022; Wille 2015). Designer Ethan Tobman inhabited the set for film *Room*, directed by Abrahamson (2015) as a path to ensuring character authenticity in the space he had designed and decorated.

After 6 weeks of building ‘room’ and with 2 days left before shooting, I spent the weekend inside ‘room’. I actually slept there one night. I felt we had missed something, as we often do before Day 1. I decided Ma would have wanted to document Jack’s childhood. Without a camera, I felt she would have drawn pictures of him on any paper or grocery bag Old Nick might have discarded. I got photos of Jacob as a child and drew some and made a tree collage out of them and pinned them to a wall. (Lagacé 2015)

Set decorators routinely imagine the characters’ behaviours, backstories, hobbies and psychology that are suggested, though not necessarily stated, in the pages of the script. Despite not being seen on screen, drawers and cupboards are often filled with layers of appropriate belongings to enhance the feeling of authenticity in the fictional world.

Material choices become central to this process. For example, when wear and decay suggest repetition, stagnation, or endurance; pristine surfaces imply control, privilege, or repression (Affron and Affron 1995; Tashiro 1998). Objects function as repositories of memory, carrying traces of past relationships, aspirations, or failures (Wille 2015; D’Arcy 2018). Through repetition across scenes, these objects accrue narrative weight, sustaining character continuity even when dialogue or performance is minimal (Bordwell et al. 1985; Barnwell 2017).

Design practices akin to Method preparation create spaces that perform alongside actors. Colour palettes and textures function as emotional registers that subtly guide audience interpretation (Tashiro 1998; Street 2004). Warm or muted tones can evoke intimacy or nostalgia, while cold or desaturated palettes suggest alienation or emotional withdrawal (Barnwell 2017; Ede 2010). Spatial organisation influences how characters move, interact, and relate to one another, shaping performance at a fundamental level (McDowell 2007; Affron and Affron 1995).

Crucially, production design unfolds temporally. Sets evolve, deteriorate, or remain static in ways that mirror character development or stasis (Affron and Affron 1995; Barnwell 2017, 2022). This temporal dimension aligns production design closely with acting methodology, which similarly maintains psychological coherence across non-linear production processes (Stanislavski 1936; Naremore 1988). Through these practices, produc-

tion design actively constructs character rather than merely illustrating it (Tashiro 1998; McDowell 2007).

3.5. Production Design as Character Construction: Case Studies

The proposition that production design functions as a co-performative agent in the construction of screen character can be demonstrated most clearly through close analyses of specific films in which architecture, décor, scale, and material elements actively shape acting technique. The following case studies illustrate how spatial design does not merely represent character but also conditions its embodiment.

3.5.1. Emotional Subtext and Spatial Enclosure in *Carol* (2015)

In the film, *Carol*, directed by Haynes (2015), restrained performances by Blanchett and Mara are complemented by production design that sustains emotional subtext through enclosure and reflection. Interiors are muted in colour, layered with glass partitions and framed doorways. Barnwell (2022) demonstrates how domestic and interior spaces function as extensions of emotional states. In *Carol*, such spaces mirror repression within 1950s social norms. Performance and environment operate symbiotically. Blanchett's measured gestures and controlled vocal tone resonate within carefully composed interiors. Early scenes place characters behind windows or separated by spatial barriers, reinforcing emotional distance. Gradual spatial expansion, most notably during the road trip, parallels shifts in intimacy and self-realisation. As Naremore (1988) suggests, cinematic performance is inseparable from framing and mise-en-scène. Here, production design sustains narrative coherence by visualising emotional constraint. Design performs development alongside acting, ensuring continuity across fragmented production sequences.

3.5.2. Emotional Distance and Domestic Separation: *Closer* (2004)

Production designer Tim Hatley constructs domestic interiors as spaces of emotional fragmentation and interpersonal distance in the film *Closer*, a film directed by Nichols (2004). Reflecting Jane Barnwell's analysis of the cinematic home, apartments and private interiors operate as extensions of unstable relationships rather than sites of comfort or intimacy. Clean modernist spaces, transparent surfaces, and carefully organised décor produce emotional coldness and visual separation between characters. Physical distance within the frame becomes central to performance. Actors frequently occupy opposing sides of rooms, reinforcing detachment through spatial arrangement and restricted movement. Barnwell suggests that domestic environments shape how emotion is expressed and contained within performance itself. Similar to her discussion of *Good Night, and Good Luck*, directed by Clooney (2005), where interior spaces reinforce institutional tension and restraint, the homes in *Closer* structure emotional alienation through architectural order and visual emptiness. Production design therefore transforms domestic space into a performative system of psychological and relational control.

3.5.3. Psychological Space and Embodied Alienation: *The Shining* (1980)

In the film, *The Shining*, directed by Kubrick (1980), production designer Roy Walker constructs the Overlook Hotel as a labyrinthine psychological space. Reflecting Barnwell's (2018) arguments concerning the relationship between performance and spatial design, the environment actively conditions character behaviour and emotional instability. Vast corridors, repetitive geometric patterns, and overwhelming architectural scale intensify Jack Torrance's isolation. Jack Nicholson's increasingly erratic performance mirrors the disorientating spatial logic of the hotel itself. Long tracking shots and empty interiors amplify restrained movement and sudden bursts of aggression. Alienation becomes architecturally embodied through spatial repetition and environmental emptiness. Production

design in *The Shining* transforms space into an active component of psychological performance. Cinema continues to position environment as a system that structures embodiment, psychology, and narrative tension.

3.5.4. Spatial Expansion and Character Decline: *Citizen Kane* (1941)

In the film, *Citizen Kane*, directed by Welles (1941), art directors Perry Ferguson and Van Nest Polglase constructed increasingly cavernous interiors to mirror Charles Foster Kane's psychological isolation. Affron and Affron (1995) observe how décor evolves alongside narrative trajectory. In this instance, spatial scale tracks emotional decline. As Xanadu expands architecturally, Kane's figure becomes dwarfed by his surrounding Gothic excess. Orson Welles' vocal projection intensifies to fill these spatial voids. Blocking emphasises distance between bodies across elongated tables and expansive halls. The design enacts isolation before dialogue confirms it. Character disintegration is spatially staged; the performance adapts to architectural emptiness. The set evolves with the character arc, shaping the actor's physical relation to space.

3.5.5. Stylisation and Performance Mode: *The Red Shoes* (1948)

In the film, *The Red Shoes*, directed by Powell and Pressburger (1948), production designer Hein Heckroth crafted expressionist stage environments that shift the acting register from realism to stylisation. As discussed in the context of European studio traditions by Bergfelder et al. (2007), design in such films shapes performance modality. During the central ballet sequence, the set dissolves into surreal colour fields and abstract forms. Shearer's movement correspondingly transitions from narrative naturalism to choreographed theatricality. Character psychology is spatially choreographed as identity dissolves into spectacle. The production design alters the acting technique itself, expanding gesture and expression to match visual exaggeration. Here, design is not merely supportive—it transforms the mode of performance.

3.5.6. Design Ideology and Performance Shift: *Festen* (1998)

The Dogme 95 manifesto, articulated by Von Triers and Vinterberg (1995), rejects constructed production design. In the film, *Festen*, directed by Vinterberg (1998), natural locations and available light replace studio fabrication. This absence of designed space reshapes acting technique. Performances become improvisatory and volatile; emotional confrontation is intensified by environmental immediacy. Without architectural framing to discipline gesture, actors occupy unstable spatial fields. Here, the deliberate removal of production design ideology transforms performance style. The case demonstrates that design's presence or absence directly conditions acting mode.

3.5.7. Contemporary World-Building and Minimalist Embodiment: *Blade Runner 2049* (2017)

In the film, *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Villeneuve (2017), production designer Dennis Gassner constructs a world of brutalist minimalism and vast environmental desolation. Aligned with the world-building approaches discussed by Wille (2015, 2017) and McDowell (2007), the environment operates as systemic narrative logic. Gosling's restrained physicality mirrors the spatial austerity. Long pauses and minimal gestures resonate within architectural emptiness. Alienation becomes spatially embodied. Performance is conditioned by environmental scale and minimal décor. In contemporary cinema, production design continues to structure character embodiment through world-building systems.

Across historical periods and stylistic traditions, these case studies demonstrate that production design participates directly in the construction of screen character. Monumental architecture shapes authority; domestic interiors discipline restraint; material culture scaffolds class identity; studio control standardises performance; minimalist ideology alters

acting technique; and contemporary world-building conditions existential embodiment. The cumulative evidence supports a central claim: production design does not merely illustrate character. It provides the material and architectural conditions under which character is performed, perceived, and understood. Through scale, texture, geometry, colour, and spatial organisation, production design operates as co-performative labour in the shaping of screen identity and production designers use methods to achieve them that align with actor preparation. The following examples demonstrate the intertwined reverberation between performance and designed fictional screen worlds.

3.6. Production Design as Co-Performative Character Construction: Case Studies

3.6.1. Entrapment and Embodiment in *Joker* (2019)

In the film, *Joker*, a film by Phillips (2019), Phoenix's performance articulates character Arthur Fleck's psychological fragility through contorted posture, attenuated movement, and unstable vocal modulation. Phoenix's physicality- shoulders hunched inward, limbs angular and hesitant- embodies vulnerability and social marginalisation. As Naremore (1988) argues, screen acting in the post-Method tradition privileges subtle corporeal detail captured by the camera's proximity. Phoenix's performance exemplifies this internalised technique, in which psychological states manifest through controlled physical gesture.

This embodied characterisation is inseparable from the film's production design. Arthur's apartment is narrow, dimly lit, and visibly decaying; wallpaper peels, surfaces are worn, and spatial depth is restricted. Following Tashiro's (1998) argument that décor encodes ideology and subjectivity, the apartment operates as an externalisation of psychic deterioration. The repetition of cramped spatial compositions reinforces entrapment, while the absence of personal artefacts suggests emotional deprivation. Barnwell (2017) emphasises that production design sustains narrative coherence through visual motif; in *Joker*, the apartment's persistent claustrophobia maintains character continuity even across discontinuous scenes.

Importantly, even in Arthur's absence, the space performs his psychological condition. The apartment becomes a proxy for interiority, sustaining audience engagement. Performance and design therefore operate as entwined systems: Phoenix's embodied fragility is spatially reinforced by architectural confinement. Character emerges not solely from acting technique, but from the interdependence of bodily performance and environmental structure.

3.6.2. Architecture and Class Performance in *Parasite* (2019)

The film, *Parasite* directed by Bong (2019) uses architecture as a primary vehicle for character construction. The Kim family's semi-basement apartment embodies precarity and threat: low ceilings, partial street-level windows, and damp walls situate the family in a liminal, unstable space. In contrast, the Park family's modernist home- designed as a carefully controlled architectural environment- conveys privilege and detachment.

Affron and Affron (1995) argue that production design structures narrative through evolving spatial relationships. Barnwell (2017) emphasises the vertical hierarchy influencing power relations between actors through designed features of a space such as staircases, raised platforms and seating options. In *Parasite*, the vertical organisation of space literalises class hierarchy. Characters perform class through navigation: the Kim family ascends staircases to inhabit the Park household yet repeatedly descends, culminating in the catastrophic flood sequence that forces a return to the semi-basement. As Street (2004) and Bergfelder et al. (2007) note in their analyses of European studio design, architecture can encode social identity through spatial hierarchy and enclosure.

Acting technique responds directly to these environments. The Kim family's movements in the semi-basement are compressed and restricted, bodies bending to avoid low ceilings and tight corners. In the Park home, performance shifts: gestures elongate, voices soften, and posture straightens to mimic upper-class comportment in the spacious and light filled home. Class identity becomes a performed condition shaped by architectural circumstance. Production design and acting therefore co-construct social identity, revealing class not as static category but as spatially enacted behaviour.

3.6.3. Material Culture and Embodied Class in *Barry Lyndon* (1975)

In the film, *Barry Lyndon*, directed by Kubrick (1975), the production design, attributed to Ken Adam and Roy Walker, operates as a form of material "given circumstances" in a Stanislavskian sense. Candlelit interiors, historically accurate furnishings, and painterly compositions create an immersive eighteenth-century world. As Tashiro (1998) argues in relation to historical cinema, such design scaffolds class identity through material detail. Actors move slowly, adopting formalised posture appropriate to aristocratic décor. Gesture becomes ritualised, and bodily comportment reflects architectural symmetry. The weight of costume and furniture modifies performance tempo. Here, production design functions not merely as an historical backdrop but as embodied knowledge. The setting conditions how class is performed, transforming social identity into enacted spatial practice. Character emerges through the interaction between actor and environment.

These case studies demonstrate how acting and production design entwine to construct character in narrative cinema. Building on scholarship that situates performance within *mise-en-scène* (Naremore 1988; Butler 2014) and production design as a structuring force in narrative meaning (Affron and Affron 1995; Barnwell 2017; Tashiro 1998), these examples illustrate how embodied performance and spatial design co-produce character identity. Performance articulates interior motivation through embodied technique, while design spatialises psychological, social, and emotional conditions. Contemporary practitioners explicitly acknowledge this interdependence, describing immersive "Method designing" as analogous to Method acting. Together, these examples reinforce a central proposition: character in contemporary cinema emerges through the dynamic collaboration of actor and environment. Production design does not merely illustrate performance; it conditions, sustains, and co-produces it.

3.7. Production Design as Performative Practice

Reconceptualising production design as performative practice requires expanding conventional definitions of performance beyond embodied action (Schechner 2002; Fischer-Lichte 2008). Performance may be understood as any system that enacts meaning over time and shapes audience perception (Schechner 2002; Auslander 1999). From this perspective, production design performs character intention through spatial, material, and temporal means (McAuley 2000; Hann 2014).

Production design influences how audiences feel about characters before they speak or act (Gibson and Hill 1998; Tashiro 1998). Spaces condition expectation, guide emotional response, and frame interpretation (Bordwell 1989; Sobchack 1992). Because design elements persist across scenes, they provide a stabilising framework that supports character continuity in ways analogous to acting methodologies (Bordwell et al. 1985; Naremore 1988). Recognising production design as performative practice challenges dominant models of authorship that privilege embodiment over material expression (Barthes 1977; Foucault 1969; Caughie 1981). Instead, character construction is foregrounded as a distributed process emerging from collaboration across creative disciplines (Staiger 1985; Caldwell

2008). This reframing has significant implications for film theory, production practice, and pedagogy (Nelson 2013; Borgdorff 2012).

3.8. Collaborative Authorship, Character, and Creative Agency

The comparative analysis developed throughout this article has significant implications for how authorship and creative agency are understood within screen production. Traditional models of film authorship, most notably auteur theory, have tended to privilege the director as the primary creative agent, with performance and design practices positioned as interpretive extensions of directorial vision (Sarris 1962; Caughie 1981). While such models have been productively critiqued over recent decades (Barthes 1977; Foucault 1969; Staiger 2003), hierarchies of creative value persist within both scholarship and industry discourse (Caldwell 2008).

Character construction offers a particularly revealing site through which to reconsider these assumptions. As this paper has demonstrated, character is not produced by performance alone, nor is it simply written into existence at the level of the script (Naremore 1988; Bordwell et al. 1985). Instead, character emerges through a distributed network of interpretive practices, each of which contributes to the audience's understanding of a fictional individual's inner life (Gibson and Hill 1998; Tashiro 1998). Acting and production design, along with many other contributing elements, operate as enmeshed systems that externalise psychological coherence through distinct but interdependent means (McDowell 2007; Barnwell 2017).

From this perspective, production design can be understood as exercising a form of creative agency that is both interpretive and performative (Ede 2010; Wille 2017). Production designers do not merely implement decisions made elsewhere; they actively translate textual character into spatial and material form, making judgements about memory, habit, aspiration, and emotional history (Affron and Affron 1995; LoBrutto 1992). These judgements shape how characters are perceived before they speak or act, conditioning audience alignment and affective response (Sobchack 1992; Bordwell 1989).

This reframing aligns with broader shifts within performance studies and creative practice research that emphasise relational and process-based models of authorship (Schechner 2002; Fischer-Lichte 2008; Nelson 2013). Rather than locating meaning in a singular creative origin, these approaches understand artistic work as emerging through interaction, negotiation, and constraint (Becker 1982; Caldwell 2008). Screen production, with its inherently collaborative structures, provides a particularly rich context for such models.

Importantly, attending to collaborative authorship has ethical as well as theoretical implications. It challenges the marginalisation of design labour within both academic discourse and industry recognition (Ede 2010; Staiger 2003), and it encourages more equitable acknowledgment of creative contribution. In pedagogical contexts, this perspective supports cross-disciplinary training that emphasises shared responsibility for character construction rather than siloed expertise (Nelson 2013; Borgdorff 2012).

4. Conclusions

By foregrounding character as a collaboratively authored phenomenon, this article contributes to ongoing debates about creative agency in contemporary screen production. Rethinking authorship through the lens of character, rather than style or spectacle, offers a productive framework for understanding how meaning is generated within increasingly complex production ecologies (Caldwell 2008; Staiger 2003).

As virtual production and generative technologies become increasingly prevalent, there is a risk that design prioritises efficiency or spectacle over character psychology. Digital environments can easily become generic if divorced from inner life-driven design

principles. The comparative framework outlined in this article underscores the importance of retaining human, character-centred methodologies within evolving workflows. Pedagogically, this suggests value in cross-disciplinary education. Teaching production designers to engage explicitly with acting methodologies, while encouraging actors to understand design processes, may foster deeper collaboration and richer character construction in contemporary screen production.

By placing acting methodologies and production design in dialogue, this article has demonstrated their shared focus on characters' inner lives. Production design emerges not as a supporting background, but as an active performative practice central to cinematic storytelling. Recognising this parallel enriches understandings of collaborative authorship and repositions production design as a core contributor to narrative meaning. As filmmaking continues to evolve technologically, sustaining character-centred approaches across disciplines remains essential.

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