



# A Comparative View of Stage Action and Movie Action

Lu Liu, Ye Yu\*

Harbin Normal University, Harbin 150000, Heilongjiang, China

DOI: 10.32629/asc.v2i4.557

---

**Abstract:** Dramatic actions are the foundation of performing arts. Whether on the stage or in a movie, only through the expressive actions of the actors can the characters of the playwright be transformed into vivid images. Although both stage actions and movie actions are dramatic, they are different in terms of content, form, and quality. This article discusses the differences between actors' actions on stage and in movies from three aspects: the integrity and fragmentation of the performance content, the singleness and diversification of the form, and the hypothesis and the sense of the reality of the quality.

**Keywords:** dramatic action, stage and film, performance

---

Hegel once said, "It is the action that can express the individual's thoughts, character, and purpose most clearly. Only through the action can the most profound aspect of a person be seen in reality."<sup>[1]</sup> From this perspective, whether it is drama or movie is still novel, as long as the art of human study is involved, the importance of "action" cannot be ignored. When performing performance creation, the actor's actions mainly include three elements: what to do—why—how to do it. These three points are complementary and interlinked that form the basis of the actor's actions. Drama, film, and television performances are the art of "human beings acting". There are similarities and subtle differences between their stage actions and movie actions.

## 1. Integrity and fragmentation of the content

On the stage, once the curtain is opened, the entire performance is controlled by the actors. Theatrical performance is always "now in progress", and the actors' words and moves on stage are always tested by the audience. After the curtain is opened and the performance begins, the actors' movements on the stage are carried through to the end, and there is no chance to stop and come back again. This is very similar to a long shot of a film and television work. The drama *Thunderstorm* through a series of complete stage actions that Fanyi called to come to Lu's mother, drive away Sifeng, keep Zhou Ping, and refuse to take medicine to show Fanyi dares to love and hate, highlight the suffocating oppression of this feudal family. Therefore, performing on stage requires actors to have expressive external actions, whether they are performing physical actions or verbal expressions, they can use the body freely and organically complete role tasks.

Unlike on the stage, the actions of actors in movies have fragmented performance characteristics. The working procedure of a movie is different from that of a drama. It usually takes a few months of shooting time. The long shooting cycle makes the actors' performances staged and fragmented. It is mainly manifested in three aspects: first, because of the indirect communication with the audience, the film performance can have multiple opportunities. The actor does not achieve satisfactory performance, you can do another shot. Second, a complete character action will be divided into multiple segments for shooting due to the constraints of the film's performance methods and the director's ideas. Finally, the preparation cycle of the movie is long, and the filming is usually not carried out in the order of the development of the plot, which leads to the situation that the actor's performance may be reversed. Fragmentation of external movements can also lead to the incoherence of the actors' internal movements. The actor's performance is from the inside to the outside, and then a cyclical process from outside to inside. Because of these characteristics of film shooting, film actors cannot be as complete as their actions on the stage. This requires actors to have a strong sense of belief and can make the performance conduct continuously and smoothly even in an incoherent shooting environment.

## 2. Singleness and diversification of the form

"Any conscious action of a person is produced by a certain inner will. It is an intuitive manifestation of the character's thoughts, feelings, and psychological state."<sup>[2]</sup> Therefore, the internal action is the basis of the external action, and the external action is the outward form of the internal action. The form of performance on the stage is relatively simple. In addition to the use of the actor's physical movements, audio can also be used, such as the sound of "Da Da Da" footsteps, which indicates that someone is coming. Sound effects can also create actions that are inconvenient to show on stage, such as

chaotic fighting scenes, large-scale car accident scenes, bloody occasions, and so on. Although the rational use of audio can enrich stage actions, compared with movies, the actions of characters on the stage are still limited, and there is no diversified expression method of movies.

The form of expression of the film is more diverse than drama. Different from the art of independent appreciation on the stage, the performance of the actors in the film must be combined with other technical means. At this time, the performance becomes an element of film art. Because of that, the performance of the actor's actions is more diversified. First, the camera can take the place of the actor's physical actions. For example, if the previous shot is a person looking out the window, the next shot can use the subjective shot taken by the camera from the person's perspective to express the "what you see" in the previous shot. Second, post-editing can enrich the actors' actions. Editing can analyze the inner thoughts of the characters, and visualize the internal actions that the characters are difficult to express in language. For example, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* uses flashback, cross-montage, the montage of sound to suppress the heroine the emotions in the depths of the soul are revealed—even in the past many years, in Hiroshima — another city swept by war, the memories had been forgotten once again licked her wounds like a poisonous snake, and the audience also fell into thinking: Can you forget the unforgettable experience? Finally, the use of digital technology makes impossible actions that actors cannot achieve be possible. Edward in the movie *Twilight*, as a vampire, can move very quickly, block a speeding car with one arm, and even use "mind-reading" to know the thoughts of others. If these actions rely solely on the actor himself, it is impossible to do all of the external actions, but relying on digital technology, these wild ideas have become wonderful shots on the screen.

### 3. Hypothesis and the sense of the reality of the quality.

Theatrical performance is limited by the stage space. Theatrical performances often have no physical performance. For example, Chen Peisi's sketch *Eating Noodles* uses only a pair of tableware and a drum and then expresses the audience through expressive actions from the desire to eat noodles to the resistance. The transformation of eating noodles and the empty bowls are also enriched by the actors' strong sense of faith and outstanding performance. In traditional Chinese opera performances, hypothetical movements are used more. In Chinese opera, hypothetical actions are also called program actions, which refer to standardized and formatted actions that have been refined from life and artistically processed, such as Zhengguan when the characters appear on the stage, Qiba when the general is on the march, and Tangma when riding a horse galloped. Actors also need to have a sense of reality when performing hypothetical actions.

Film actors are restricted by film technology and need to take into account the changes in scenes, the scheduling of scenes, and the differences in lighting. This requires actors have a strong ability of physical expression. When using close-up and mid-range shots, the action of characters will be enlarged. It is necessary for actors to have a more realistic performance and to be able to grasp the sense of scale in close-up shots. "Film performances sometimes need to be delicate, so that the slight twitching of the corners of the character's mouth and the slight frown of the brow can convey the psychological feelings of the character at this time."<sup>[3]</sup> It is almost difficult to see hypothetical actions when watching a movie. Even if the actor's performance in the movie is sometimes exaggerated, his actions must be real. In *Crazy Stone*, there is a scene of Huang Bo stealing bread and being chased. The dark-faced Huang Bo grabs the bread and runs. It is accompanied by the Patrick Russian dance music from Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*, which is very joyful. Huang Bo, who ran away frantically, didn't forget to put bread in his mouth to enhance the reality of the character's hunger.

### 4. Concluding remarks

Action is the basis of an actor's performance. Without action, there is no character. As a "close relative art" of drama, the actor's performance of the film is influenced by drama. In the early stage of film performance, movies draw on the form of drama. It was not until the efforts of a group of filmmakers that it had a unique performance style. Therefore, the same performing arts are different on stage and in movies, especially the actions of actors. Moreover, we have to take different actions according to different situations in the performance, to achieve the purpose of shaping the image of vivid characters.

## References

---

- [1] Hegel. *Philosophy of Fine Arts*. Volume One (Translated by Zhu Guangqian) [M]. The Commercial Press, 1981. P270
- [2] Tan Peisheng. *On Drama* [M]. Peking University Press, 1981. P17
- [3] Jiang Bin. On the physical and motion creation training of film and television actors [J]. *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, 2007.06