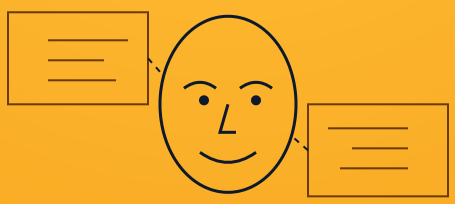
KECUDO

PREMIUM
II
EDITION

Directing AI Performances

AI Filmmaking · Class 2



Characters that hold, emotions that read and dialogue that syncs: how to direct actors, digital doubles and generated characters, shot by shot.

2026 EDITION · CREATOR SERIES

Inside this class

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● ○ ○ Foundation

Chapter 1

What a "performance" means when the actor is generated

An audience doesn't watch pixels; it watches a person deciding something. A performance is a chain of choices — where to look, when to breathe, how long to hold a silence — that reveals what a character wants and fears. When a model generates that person, someone still has to make those choices. In AI filmmaking, that someone is the director.

Three ways a performance reaches the screen

Source	Who makes the choices	Strength	Weakness
Filmed actor	Actor + director	Subtlety, truth, surprise	Cost, schedule, locations
Captured performance	Actor drives a generated character	Human timing in any look	Artefacts; needs consent
Generated performance	Director through prompts & selection	Any world, fast, cheap	Generic, drifting, "average"

Why generated acting looks "off"

- **Averageness.** Models learn the most common version of a smile or a cry. Real people are specific.
- **No intention.** The face moves but nothing is being decided. Eyes wander instead of looking *at* something.
- **Wrong timing.** Reactions arrive too early, too evenly, or last too long.
- **Drift.** Identity, costume or emotion changes between — or inside — shots.

> **The director's job hasn't changed:** know what the character wants in each moment, and choose the take where we believe it. AI changes how many takes you can see, not who decides.

The "want, obstacle, action" test

Before any shot with a character — filmed or generated — write three words on your shot list. If you can't, the shot isn't ready.

Shot	Want	Obstacle	Playable action
Maren hears the lamp fail	Keep the light on	Fear of the dark tower	Freezes, then grips the lantern
Maren on the stairs	Reach the top	Wind, exhaustion	Climbs, stops, forces herself on
Tomas's reflection	Reassure his daughter	He isn't really there	Smiles, nods once, fades

The last column is the one you direct. "Sad" is not playable; "looks away to hide her eyes" is. Models, like actors, respond better to **actions** than to **adjectives**.

The uncanny valley, in practice

The closer a character gets to photoreal, the more small errors disturb us. You have three safe zones:

1. **Real humans** for emotional close-ups (filmed or captured).
2. **Clear stylisation** — painterly, animated, silhouetted — where we accept a different reality.
3. **Distance** — wides, backs, hands, silhouettes — where small facial errors can't be seen.

KECUDO PICTURES CO. · A CHOICE PER SHOT

For the 90-second climb, the team tags every shot before boarding: Maren's face is always the real actress; the tower, storm and lamp are generated; Tomas exists only as a reflection, driven by a real actor's captured performance and stylised with a warm, slightly painted glow so the audience reads him as memory, not ghost.

A real-world warning sign

In 2025 the AI "actress" Tilly Norwood, created by Particle6's AI studio Xicoia, drew sharp criticism from actors and the union; in July 2026 she was announced as lead of a feature, *Misaligned*. Whatever you think of it, the case shows audiences and industry care deeply about *who* is performing. Plan your film so that answer is clear.

Sources: TechCrunch, CBC (Sep–Oct 2025); AFP via New Straits Times and eWeek (Jul 2026).

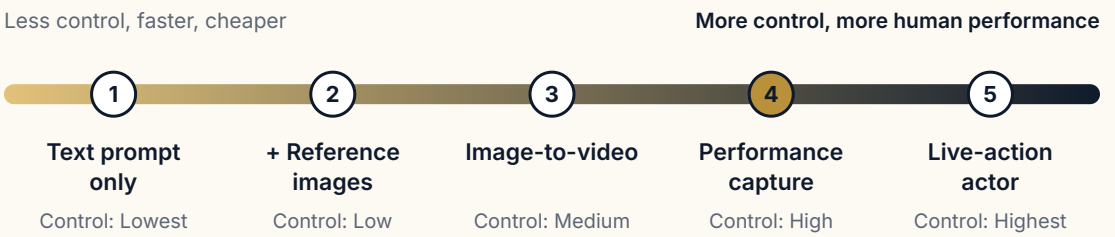
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Chapter 2

The performance toolkit

Every tool for AI performance sits somewhere on one line: how much of the performance comes from a human, and how much the model invents. Moving right gives you more control and more truth — and costs more time.

FIG 2.1 · *The control spectrum*



Tool type	What it does for performance
Reference-to-video	Uses images of a character to keep the face, costume and proportions across shots
Image-to-video	Animates an approved still: you lock pose and expression, the model adds motion
First/last frame	Sets where a performance starts and ends — useful for a turn of the head or a reaction
Motion control	Copies movement from a reference video onto a character
Performance capture	Transfers an actor's face, body and hands from a "driving" video to a character
Lip sync	Matches mouth shapes to recorded or generated dialogue
Voice tools	Text-to-speech, voice conversion of a consenting actor, dubbing
Face/region editing	Fixes eyes, expression or mouth in part of a frame after generation

> **Rule of thumb:** use the cheapest tool that gives you the control the moment needs. A wide shot of a figure on a cliff needs a reference image. A close-up where a girl decides to be brave needs a human.

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Chapter 3

Casting in the AI era: actors, doubles and synthetic characters

Casting used to mean choosing a person. Now it also means choosing a *kind* of performer for each role — sometimes for each shot. Getting this right early decides your budget, your schedule and your legal paperwork.

Performer type	What it is	Use it for	Paperwork
Live actor	A person filmed on set	Leads, emotional close-ups, dialogue	Standard contract
Captured performance	A real actor drives a generated look	Stylised roles, ages, creatures, memories	Contract + capture & use consent
Digital double / replica	A digital version of a real performer's face or voice	Stunts, pickups, de-ageing, dubbing	Specific, informed consent + payment
Synthetic character	Wholly generated; resembles no real person	Background, crowds, stylised worlds	Tool terms; union rules on union shows

Casting questions to ask for every role

1. How many close-ups does the character have?
2. Does the character speak? How much?
3. Does the role need a specific age, era or creature look a real actor can't give?
4. Will the character appear in promotion — posters, trailers, interviews?
5. Is this a union production? (Then synthetic characters need special care.)

> **Union definition to know:** SAG-AFTRA describes a "Synthetic Performer" as a wholly digital creation that appears to be a person but doesn't resemble a recognisable performer and isn't voiced by a person — and says it is *not* a digital replica.

Source: SAG-AFTRA, "Digital Replicas" member guide.

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Chapter 4

Building a character that holds

"Identity drift" — a face that changes from shot to shot — is the fastest way to lose an audience. You beat it before you generate a single clip, with a character bible, a clean reference set and a fixed description you never change.

The character bible (one page per character)

Section	Example: Tomas (memory)
Fixed description	"a weathered man in his 40s, short salt-and-pepper beard, deep-set grey eyes, navy wool fisherman's sweater"
Face anchors	Scar through left eyebrow; crooked front tooth; laugh lines
Costume lock	Same sweater, rolled sleeves, brass watch on right wrist
Body	Broad shoulders, slight stoop, moves slowly and deliberately
Signature gesture	Taps the side of his nose before giving advice
Voice	Low, unhurried, soft Northern accent (recorded actor)
Look treatment	Warm amber glow, painterly edges, slight bloom
Never	No hat; no smiling with teeth; never in bright daylight

The reference set

- **Turnaround:** front, ¾ left, ¾ right, profile, back — same neutral light, plain background.
- **Expressions:** neutral, small smile, worry, grief, surprise.
- **Costume close-ups:** sweater knit, watch, hands.
- **In-world frames:** 2–3 approved stills of the character in the film's actual light.

> **Same words, every time.** Copy the fixed description from the bible into every prompt — don't paraphrase. "Salt-and-pepper beard" and "greying beard" can produce two different men.

Self-assessment

Part A · Basics

A1. What is "identity drift"?

- A. A character's face or look changing between or within shots
- B. A camera slowly drifting left
- C. An actor leaving the production
- D. Audio going out of sync

A2. What does performance capture do?

- A. Records a film's audio
- B. Transfers a real actor's motion and expression from a driving video onto a character
- C. Turns a script into storyboards
- D. Upscales a clip to 4K

A3. Why prompt physical actions instead of adjectives like "sad"?

- A. Adjectives cost more credits
- B. Models refuse adjectives
- C. Visible actions give clearer, more specific, more truthful performances
- D. Actions make clips longer

A4. What does the 180-degree rule protect?

- A. The actor's pay
- B. The frame rate
- C. The colour grade
- D. Screen direction, so two characters appear to face each other

A5. Which shot is the safest to fully generate?

- A. The emotional peak close-up of the lead
- B. A wide shot of a small figure on a cliff, back to camera
- C. A long dialogue close-up
- D. A real actor's new line

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Thank you for learning with Kecudo.

Next in the series · Class 3

AI Sound, Music & Dubbing for Film: building a storm in layers, scoring with and without AI, mixing for festivals and taking your film into other languages.

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