



## Casting About ★★★★☆

BY [NICK SCHAGER](#) ON MAY 9, 2007

*Casting About* may be a definitive account of the cinematic audition process, yet what makes it one of this year's finest documentaries (so far) is its even more penetrating portrait of the craft of acting. Culled from over 70 hours of casting footage shot by Barry J. Hershey in preparation for a planned dramatic feature, the film affords a narration- and narrative-free view inside Hershey's claustrophobic audition studio, where over 350 actresses tried out for parts. Using nothing more than a lyrical piano score to underline his material, the director proves fascinated with the interplay between "authenticity" and "artifice," with the actresses' introductory chitchat about themselves—including one woman's discussion of having just come from attending the court sentencing of her abductor/rapist—and their subsequent, scripted monologues subtly depicted as analogous forms of performance. Calculated meet-and-greet banter and earnest screen tests convey these women's fears, anxieties, hunger, doubts, and excitement, just as montages of gesticulating hands and the actresses entering the room and shaking hands with the (heard but unseen) director insightfully capture truths about human modes of communication and expression. Via early scenes of the actresses showing off their skills at regional accents, issues of self-analysis and identity reconfiguration become part of the film's thematic mix, and in a final performance by an intense German actress, the primacy of silent facial expressiveness in acting is stunningly reconfirmed. Though one wishes even more time was lavished on certain points of interest—such as the way in which physical movement and comportment reveal interior character—*Casting About* never succumbs to superficiality, consistently maintaining its focus on auditioning as an act of naked exposure for thespians, all of whom bare intimate details about themselves through their choices and actions in front of the camera. Nowhere is this more striking than with regard to the question of whether the actresses are willing to do nudity, which is required for one of the roles. And in the director's tactless posing of said question to his would-be leading ladies, as well as his camera's penchant for lingering on his subject's chests, the film also astutely owns up to another basic aspect of the casting process: its crassness.

DIRECTOR(S): Barry J. Hershey DISTRIBUTOR: Kino International RUNTIME: 86 min RATING: NR YEAR: 2004