

Typecasting

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In January 2000, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) protested the lack of representation of people of color in American TV shows and demanded more diversity in casting, to provide more opportunities for actors of color and to more accurately reflect the multi-racial diversity of America. Shortly thereafter, the NAACP signed diversity agreements with all the major networks—NBC, CBS, ABC, and Fox. The networks agreed to increase opportunities for people of color, both behind the scenes and on-screen, but with most public attention and scrutiny focused on the promise for better casting practices and image portrayal.

This recent protest strongly echoes a World War II protest in which—frustrated with Hollywood's perpetuation of stereotypes that Donald Bogle famously encapsulates as "Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks" (Bogle 1973)—the NAACP demanded better representation of African Americans in Hollywood films, claiming it would be hypocritical to denounce Nazism without addressing racial issues at home. The issues of concern to the NAACP in both protests have also been of concern to the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) (est. 1933), which began issuing Casting Reports in 1977 to keep data on film and TV roles, numerically cataloguing them by gender, age, race, and ethnicity; and which resolved in 1990, following the debacle of *Miss Saigon* casting, that performers of color should receive preferential consideration for ethnic roles. A related movement is Non-Traditional Casting, which works to advance the open casting of actors of color, female actors, and actors with disabilities.¹ These movements, like the NAACP protest, endeavor to ensure that casting practices are representative and fair. They seek diversity both in the kinds of roles performed and among the actors who perform them.

Defining diversity another way, SAG staged a somewhat different protest over casting practices in March 1950. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that SAG was waging a campaign to get motion picture studios to stop typecasting. Angry that an actor would be consistently cast in, say, bartender parts, SAG spokespeople were quoted in the *Los Angeles Times* (27 March 1950) as saying "Typecasting should not prevent an actor who is established in the public mind as the portrayer of one particular role from being given the opportunity to display his acting talents in other types of roles." Rather than racial diversity, SAG's 1950 protest aimed to open up casting practices to allow individual actors the right to portray a diversity of roles, rather than be typed in one kind of role. At stake is the actors' desire to show their versatility and

also to escape being typecast in bit parts, thus failing to climb the Hollywood ladder to leading roles and stardom.

Interestingly, almost a hundred years earlier, theater actors had protested *against* versatility requirements and *demand*ed a form of typecasting. In 1864, the American Theatrical Protective Association formed. In its first set of resolves the union asked for 1) "a fixed minimum salary for each distinct line of business, from leading to utility" and 2) "a return to the old system of engaging members of the profession for definite lines of characters, thus obviating all professional misunderstanding and preventing any artists from undertaking any more than his or her legitimate business, and by such means keeping another professional out of an engagement" (McConachie 1992, 248). This protest differs markedly from the 1950 SAG protest in that it aims to protect an actor's right to perform a single type of role, or "line," consistently across his or her career rather than be forced to play multiple and diverse roles. Here, the stakes are job security and the right to maintain one's earned place in the "lines-of-business" hierarchy of roles (which I will discuss in detail shortly).

Each of these protests, spanning three separate entertainment forms, and crossing three centuries, protest unfair casting practices. None of them succeeded in their goals. I begin with them because they seem to me to provide useful touch-points for thinking about the relationship between acting and identity, and particularly changing notions of type. Each of them makes clear that typecasting is political practice, not only as a labor issue but also as a touchstone for ideologies of identity. The shift between the 1860s Theatrical Protective Association resolution and the 1950 SAG campaign, especially, reflect a sea change in the discourse around acting, and especially shifting notions of what constitutes realism in acting. The 1990s NAACP protest represents the culmination of that changing discourse, which leads to an increasing demand for a homology between actor and role, and which, ironically, enforces typecasting in the service of diversity.

Typecasting may be, as one critic put it, "one of the theatre's deadly sins" and the "sublimation of the unprofessional in acting" (Isaacs 1933, 132) but, as these somewhat contradictory responses to typecasting suggest, typecasting in film is, to a large degree, inescapable. Insofar as the business of film acting, and especially the star system, relies on recognizability, marketability, and the necessity for known commodities, typecasting will be part and parcel of the institution. Further, insofar as the actor represents human characters, film acting relates to changing conceptions of identity and identity politics, and thus the actor will inevitably negotiate stereotypes and represent identities inflected by race, gender, ethnicity, class, and national differences. Rather than something imposed on actors and audiences from without, or simply an effect of casting or performance style, typecasting occurs at many varied levels, and is equally something spectators and fans enact or impose on actors. As Patricia White succinctly explains: "Casting and performance are already a reading of type; the audience performs a reading on another level, informed by cultural and subcultural codes, spectatorial experience of the star in other roles, and subsidiary discourses" (White 1999, 149).

Rather than critique or defend typecasting, this essay explores competing notions of type, especially as they relate to discourses of realism, and discusses typecasting in its most literal sense as a labor issue and as institutional practice in Hollywood: that is, in terms of historical casting practices.

Types and realist discourse

Borrowing from Richard Dyer, I am defining type as "any simple, vivid, memorable, easily-grasped and widely recognized characterization in which a few traits are foregrounded and change or 'development' is kept to a minimum" (Dyer 1980, 28). Type can be opposed to the novelistic character, "defined by a multiplicity of traits that are only gradually revealed to us through the course of the narrative, a narrative which is hinged on the growth or development of the character and is thus centered upon the latter in his or her unique individuality, rather than pointing outwards to a world" (Dyer 1993, 13). Put simply, type is relatively simple, shallow, and unchanging, whereas character is complex, deep, and developing.

In terms of acting, type refers most broadly to an actor's ability to embody something typical or representative of the human condition. Bruce Wilshire captures this broad sense of type in his characterization of theater as "the theory of acting and identity—or what we must suppose about persons if we would understand how it is possible for them to be convincingly projected and enacted on the stage" (Wilshire 1991, 91). According to his formulation,

The actor cannot stand on stage without standing in for a type of humanity. This characterization will occur even though there is no script and his character is given no name and he says nothing. We recognize him as a type in the family of man, and the fact that we abide in his presence and recognize him as such authorizes him as such; and since we stand in with the character only through his standing in, he authorizes us (Wilshire 1991, 6).

In its exemplary form, this general human type will exemplify moral or metaphysical principles, as an archetype or allegorical type. In its most insidious form, typing is exclusionary, as in the stereotype. A narrower definition of type relates to the actor herself, who functions as a unique type, characterized by her appearance, distinct performance style and type of role (often tied to certain genres) across a body of work. In between, we can locate social types such as the doctor, the politician, or the teacher; stock characters such as the heavy, the ingenue, and the clown; genre-specific types such as the *zanni* (*zany*) of *commedia dell'arte*,² and national or regional types, such as Australia's *larrikin*,³ or the Yankee of American theater and film. In any given situation, these different and often overlapping functions of type are likely to be at play.

As I've said, in most modern discourses on acting, the notion of the actor as type is viewed as a sign of an actor's lack of talent, a limitation imposed on the actor by a brutal and unimaginative studio system, a sop to audiences' inartistic tastes, or a combination of all three. Stanislavski's opinion has been particularly influential in this regard. Stanislavski's views on type reflect his larger project in developing a new naturalistic approach to acting, and are typical of realists such as Ibsen who seek to replace stock types from earlier theatrical traditions with individuated, complex characters. Stanislavski says, "To my way of thinking there can be only one type of actor—the character actor" (Stanislavski 1968, 18). But he acknowledges that theaters are filled with types, not characters. Stanislavski claims that typecasting stems from the conditions of work in 19th-century repertory theaters. In particular, he links typecasting to the "lines-of-business" tradition which dominated 18th- and 19th-century theater and was indigenous to the stock system, appearing in virtually all professional theaters of Europe from the Renaissance forward.

As James C. Burge explains, "lines-of-business" refers to the notion that, within a stock company, there is a "tacit and implicit agreement between actors and managers concerning the casting of that actor through a season or series of seasons" to allow an actor to maintain a particular line, or type of role (Burge 1986, 5, 277; see also McArthur 1984). The lines are hierarchical and based on the idea that an actor can ascend through the ranks (see Figure 1). Thus, an actor may begin as a supernumerary or extra, then gain general utility roles, until he ascends to roles in a line such as the heavy or juvenile, and possibly lead comedian or tragedian.

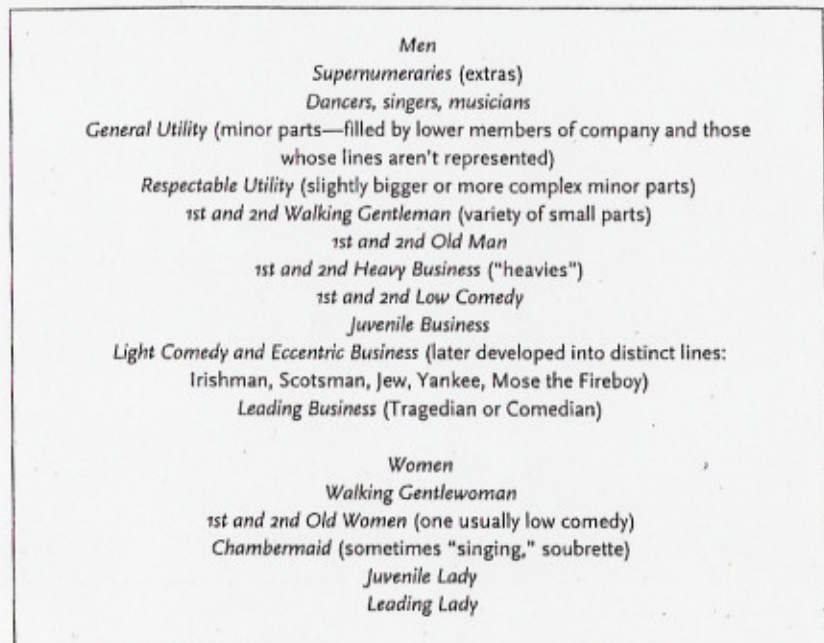


Figure 1 Lines of business

Rather than view each character as a psychologically defined individual—as realist modes of performance and dramaturgy would do—the lines-of-business tradition sorts characters into recognizable and repeatable roles. Therefore, the lines-of-business tradition emphasizes the *similarity* between plays and assumes that in each play there will be roles suited to most of the various lines. In virtually any given play performed by the company, there would be need for one or more musicians or dancers, some supernumeraries or extras, various non-speaking parts for those actors assigned to general utility roles, one or two small speaking parts for those actors slotted to play the walking gentlemen or old man, a role that could be categorized as a chambermaid role, another for an old woman, some quirky or comedic character requiring a bit of eccentric business (a catch-all for ethnic impersonation, and heavily accented roles reliant on peculiar make-up and costuming), perhaps some villainous role appropriate for a

heavy, young and romantic roles for juveniles and ingénues, and two leading roles, whether tragic or comic.

Despite the promise of mobility and versatility, in the lines-of-business tradition, an actor's movement is limited and determined by the actor's seniority, rules of succession, precedence in performance, and "possession of parts." "Possession" refers to "the assumption by an actor of the privilege to play every part in which he appeared with success before the public in any and all subsequent revivals of the play until he resigned the part, retired, or died" (Burge 1986, 3). In the lines-of-business tradition, "possession" is literal. Since actors are not given whole scripts, but only the "sides," or sheets with just their lines, if an actor owns the sides, he owns the part. Thus, the actor may, through possession, stay in a line that another actor could perform better and for which he or she is no longer well suited—and there seem to be numerous cases of juveniles being played by actors with seniority who are well past their prime.

Most often, an actor in the lines-of-business tradition will settle into a line and perform all roles in the repertoire that apply to that line, occasionally picking up general utility roles when a play does not contain his or her line. As is the case with Hollywood's division between character actors and stars, actors in the lines-of-business tradition are unlikely to shift between leading roles, such as Hamlet or Tartuffe, to mid-level character roles, such as heavies or eccentric business. Rather, an actor will develop a specialty within a line, perhaps serving only as a lead tragedian, never doing comedy, or narrowing his eccentric business to specialize in Irish or Jewish roles. Furthermore, the interpretation of the role in the lines-of-business tradition is, to a large degree, fixed. Historically, the interpretation of a role was taught to an actor by the playwright, and then handed down from one actor to another, along with sides and costumes—and the interpretative mode tended toward frontal displays, declamation, and codified poses.

As the 1860s American Theatrical Protective Association protest suggests, lines-of-business and possession of parts were the actors' preferred mode of operation. In the stock system, actors worked in a number of different plays, in high rotation, with virtually no rehearsal, and they supplied their own costumes. Thus, it was in their interests to be identified with a particular line or set of roles and typecasting was a very practical response to the material circumstances of theater production.

From Stanislavski's perspective, the stock system necessarily produces bad mass-produced acting and leads actors to create types rather than characters. Citing the large number of plays performed and the general lack of rehearsal for them, he asks, "Is it astounding then that these unfortunate and hard-pressed actors have recourse first to craft and then to mass production methods in their parts? What happens is a division of labor with each actor having his own specialized field of endeavor" (Stanislavski 1968, 16). He claims that the division of labor, in turn, attracts people who cannot act but who can be a type: "The most ardent partisans of the custom of type-casting are the poorly endowed actors, whose range is not broad but rather one-sided. Such gifts as they have are somehow made to do for narrowly circumscribed types, but they are unlikely to be sufficient to meet any wider demands" (Stanislavski 1968, 16).

In an interesting twist on the Stanislavskian critique of typecasting, avant-gardists such as Brecht have viewed the anti-realist aspect of typecasting as offering a crucial alternative to mainstream commercial practice and have embraced the use of types linked to *commedia dell'arte* and other anti-realist traditions, like vaudeville, as a means of achieving alienation

effects that de-naturalize the assumed fit between actor and role. By contrast, some avant-garde theorists and practitioners have regarded typecasting as a means of ensuring greater realism. In Soviet cinema, for instance, a form of typecasting, called "typage," calls for the use of non-actors, selected solely on the basis of appearance, to create a realist effect.

The principles of typage were articulated by Lev Kuleshov in his 1929 *Art of the Cinema*. Arguing that "real things in real surroundings constitute cinematographic material," Kuleshov states that "imitating, pretending, playing are unprofitable, since this comes out poorly on screen" (Kuleshov 1974, 56, 63). For example, he relates, "If you need a tall, stout man, but your actor is thin, and you pad your thin actor with cushions, and the like . . . the results on screen will be obviously false, theatrical, a prop, a game." Therefore, he claims:

Because film needs real material and not a pretense of reality—owing to this, it is not theater actors but "types" who should act in film—that is people who, in themselves, as they were born, constitute some kind of interest for cinematic treatment. That is, a person with an exterior of character, with a definite, brightly expressive appearance could be such a cinematic "type" (Kuleshov 1974, 63–64).

For Kuleshov and his followers, including Eisenstein, and, later, Italian neo-realists like De Sica, the use on non-actors lends films a documentary touch. The non-actor not only fulfills realist criteria for physical appearance, but also is taken to reflect and be typical of the reality represented. As Siegfried Kracauer puts it, "It is precisely the task of portraying wide areas of actual reality, social or otherwise, which calls for 'typage'—the recourse to people who are part and parcel of that reality and can be considered typical of it" (Kracauer 1960, 99).

In its emphasis on the exterior appearance of the non-actor, and its recognition of real persons as types, typage differs from those versions of typecasting that refer to stock character types, such as the juvenile, or the heavy. Ironically, however, as Kracauer points out, the non-actor in typage clearly resembles a different concept of type in Hollywood—the star:

The typical Hollywood star resembles the non-actor in that he acts out a standing character identical with his own or at least developed from it, frequently with the aid of make-up and publicity experts. As with any real-life figure on the screen, his presence in a film points beyond the film. He affects the audience not just because of his fitness for this or that role but for being, or seeming to be, a particular kind of person . . . The Hollywood star imposes the screen image of his physique, the real or stylized one, and all that this physique implies and connotes on every role he creates (Kracauer 1960, 99).

Both the non-actor in typage and the Hollywood star create a role homologous with themselves, a "character identical with his own or at least developed from it" that is, as Kuleshov says, defined in large part by "exterior of character" and "expressive appearance."

One term used to describe Hollywood casting that would also apply to Soviet typage is "face casting," or casting based on external appearance (Yoakem 1958). This mode of casting—in which a pretty girl and not an aged male, plays the ingénue, and the man with the broken nose and cauliflower ears will be cast as a boxer, not a banker—tends to be taken for granted. However, it is worth noting that other modes of performance and casting do not place the same emphasis upon the actor's individual appearance. For instance, certain kinds of

non-realist theater—*commedia dell'arte* and kabuki among them—rely on masks and ritualized modes of performance in which the actor's face and external appearance are irrelevant. In a different vein, because of its emphasis upon song, Hindi cinema has long relied upon the use of playback singers to dub actors' voices, and in the 1940s attempted "voice casting, or the use of a singing voice that matched both the speaking voice and personality of the actor" (Majumdar 2001, 167). Later, and continuing to the present day, Hindi cinema dropped the practice of voice casting and created a new model of stardom in which both the on-screen actor and the playback singer achieve stardom with a split between visual and aural stardom. While the on-screen star may be cast according to principles like those of Soviet or Hollywood cinema, the playback singer, cast as only a voice, and equal to or greater in stardom than the onscreen actor, challenges the primacy of the face. Rather than assumed as the norm, then, face casting should be seen as merely one possible response to certain conceptions of realism.

While both Soviet cinema and Hollywood emphasize face casting, however, the non-actor in typage differs markedly from the Hollywood star because the two models of type are based on competing notions of identity and the role of the individual. In typage, the non-actor represents a social type, characterized by social class and social role—a Bolshevik, a sailor, a member of the aristocracy, etc. The individual serves as a stand-in for a class or caste and is meaningless in himself.⁴ Rather than individual psychology, typage relates the character's individual personality and problems to larger social forces, such as poverty, and uses non-actors to represent "ideas, elements in an intellectual argument" (Heath 1981, 183). Thus, a person may be cast as something he is not, since the role is based on physical appearance (he *looks* like a czar) and is not meant to reflect his real identity. In fact, the role might run counter to the non-actor's ideology, personality, and class. For instance, according to Eisenstein, when he cast non-actors, they often resisted playing characters different from themselves when the role was viewed as negative, because they did not want their friends to take their screen persona as reflecting their real self. Thus, he would have to "resort to tricks." He says that when filming *Ten Days*, "Everyone wanted to play the Bolsheviks and no one wanted to play the Mensheviks . . . [so] we gave the actors the text of an inflammatory speech and they spoke it with great fervor. After this we added titles that said the exact opposite" (Eisenstein 1988, 198).

In contrast to the Soviet model, Hollywood characters are generally defined in psychological and not social terms. Social situations, such as a war or the Depression, may establish action, but then the narrative will focus on how individuals respond. Thus, Hollywood adopts a classically realist model of narration and character: narrative action springs from individual characters who function as causal agents with psychological motivation, goals, and desires. Not surprisingly, then, the Hollywood star is not generally seen as representing a member of a class or caste. Instead, she is considered a unique individual. Stanley Cavell usefully explains the distinction:

The creation of a (screen) performer is also the creation of a character—not the kind of character an author creates, but the kind that certain real people are: a type . . . Does this mean that movies can never create individuals, only types? What it means is that this is the movies' way of creating individuals: they create *individualities*. For what makes someone a type is not his similarity with other members of that type but his striking separateness from other people (Cavell 1979, 29, 33).

This notion of type, then, emphasizes not only the actor's unique physiognomy but also his personality and performance style, and these are viewed as distinguishing him from the masses.

An additional difference between the actor in typage and the actor in Hollywood has to do with issues of recognizability and repetition. The actor or non-actor cast according to the rules of typage can appear and fulfill his role as a type in a single appearance on film. By contrast, if viewed only in a single appearance, the star might be viewed as performing a role as a realist character, in the Stanislavskian sense. Typification—and, indeed, stardom—occurs through the actor's recurrence across a number of films in different roles. Recognition of the actor in a series of films creates a double identification in which we see not only the character but also the star. This recognition is crucial both to the star's function in the text and his or her extratextual success. On the one hand, as Murray Smith notes, recognition is the most basic level on which viewers grasp and construct characters. We know a character in a film and perceive her as a continuous agent because we recognize the body that coheres around her and "the star system provides an especially well-developed set of character models" to enable recognition (Smith 1995, 119). On the other hand, repeated recognition enables the commodification of the star. As Gaylyn Studlar suggests, "acting stars who disappear into their roles are never stars for very long":

The Hollywood system appears too dependent on the extratextual as well as textual overvaluation of star faces and bodies as recognizable commodities . . . While it is not unknown for stars to transform themselves physically in the process of creating codes of character (such as Robert De Niro's weight gain for *Raging Bull*), it is generally acknowledged that making your star unrecognizable is dangerous. This is because the value of stardom is most frequently measured in audience anticipation at seeing—and recognizing—their favorite box-office attraction (Studlar 1996, 237–238).

Whereas typage requires only the recognition of the social type through external clues, recognition in Hollywood entails a complicated relationship between audience recognition of the star and the character.

In Hollywood, the star image is used in the construction of character and the characters that a star plays are seen to reflect aspects of the star's "real" self. To borrow a phrase from Erving Goffman, the star achieves a form of "expressive coherence" between his social front—his outward performance and appearance—and his "true" inner self (Goffman 1959, 56).⁵ There may be instances when the star and role seem at odds but these are generally viewed as exceptions to the rule: failures. Understood in this way, not only stars but also character actors are types. As Cavell says, "Not to remember the name of a traditional Hollywood bit player is possible, if hardly excusable; not to remember their faces and temperaments is unthinkable" (Cavell 1979, 76).

Of course, the individual actor type may also represent a social type, stock character, or stereotype. Smith notes that particularity, even in the realist novel, will also be in the service of types. For instance, proper names individuate agents but also perform a typifying function insofar as proper names bear connotations of class, region, nationality, gender and race (Smith 1995, 30 and *passim*). For Cavell, there is a distinction between the actor as a type, individuated through his eccentricity, or striking separateness from others, and the caste-system of social types and stereotypes. He says, "Until recently, types of black human beings

were not created in film: black people were stereotypes . . . We were not given, and were not in a position to be given, individualities that projected particular ways of inhabiting a social roles; we recognized only the role" (Cavell 1979, 33). To be a type is to individuate the social type, stock character, or stereotype. Thus, according to this notion, Marilyn Monroe may be the quintessential dumb blonde, representative of a class; Thelma Ritter may never rise above the rank of low comedy eccentric; and Butterfly McQueen may be stuck in racist maid roles; but, as a type, each is unique in the way she inhabits the role.

Ironically, then, it is Hollywood's adherence to realist principles of individual character psychology which allow the realist character—who exists in a single film—to be transformed into a recurrent type, the star or character actor. This suggests that, despite the anti-type discourse of realism, the break between pre-Stanislavski acting and post-Stanislavski acting isn't as strong as it might seem. And, in fact, in his essay on type, Stanislavski's litany of types includes not only traditional stock roles, such as "farce comedians" and "dandies," but also realist types such as "Ibsen types" and "neurasthenic Hauptman roles," thus emphasizing his point that typecasting occurs due to the way theaters are organized, and cannot be simply altered by performing different kinds of texts (Stanislavski 1968, 13). The seeming conflict between a realist aesthetic and typecasting in Hollywood, then, can be explained by acknowledging the fact that the discourse of realism in most 20th-century theories of acting deals with *performance style*, whereas typecasting reflects a complex web of *institutional practices*. It is not the case that acting style and institutional practice are unrelated. Stanislavski, after all, recognized that in order to transform acting one had to transform the institution of theater by enhancing the role of the director, adding rehearsal time, cutting the number of plays performed, creating new realist set designs, etc. However, in Hollywood, acting style and institutional practice, and in particular casting practices, represent a case of uneven development, with acting style shifting increasingly to the dominant naturalist model while casting maintains a residual outmoded theatrical model.

Typecasting and acting in early cinema

As many critics and film historians have argued, because technological limitations encouraged the use of a frontal, presentational style of acting and the lack of dialogue seemed well-suited to pantomime, early cinema adopted the performance style and character conception of 19th-century melodrama rather than Stanislavskian or novelistic modes of realism. Most accounts of early Hollywood acting thus recount a tale of the new film form having to overcome outmoded theatrical traditions as part of a progressive march toward a more naturalistic and more cinematic acting style. For instance, in her analysis of acting in the films of D. W. Griffith, Roberta Pearson argues that there is a shift from a "histrionic" or theatrical, melodramatic pantomime style of acting influenced by theories of pantomime, such as Delsarte's system of poses, to a "verisimilar" style, which is more realist, and involves by-play and small gestures; and she links this stylistic change to cinema's transition from its status as cheap amusement to respectable mainstream mass media (Pearson 1992). With a different emphasis, Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs argue that more naturalistic styles developed as film developed faster editing, which left actors little time for posing and insisted instead on fragmenting the performance into parts (Brewster and Jacobs 1997, 109). Similarly, James Naremore traces the shift from melodramatic styles to more naturalistic or "invisible"

approaches. Acknowledging that pantomime exists residually in classical Hollywood, Naremore also argues that cinema realizes a Stanislavskian ideal through such technical innovations as close-ups, directional microphones, and shot-reverse shot editing, that enable a transparent, gestureless, un-ostentatious acting style (Naremore 1988, esp. 9–98).

Without denying the importance of melodramatic styles and theories of pantomime, or technical limitations, for understanding acting in early cinema, I would suggest that we can supplement these accounts of early film acting by considering early Hollywood's institutional structure, which increasingly models itself on the outmoded stock system and lines-of-business tradition at the same time that it moves toward progressively more naturalistic acting styles.

By most accounts, the lines-of-business tradition and theatrical stock companies largely expired in America in the 1860s and 70s.⁶ First, as I have been suggesting, the turn to realist modes of theater challenged the precepts of lines. More importantly, realist theater displaced the manager in favor of the director, and placed casting in the director's hands, not the actors'. In addition, the rise of the star system threatened stock. The rise of the star can be traced back to 18th-century Licensing Acts in England, which limited the number of new plays performed and stabilized the repertory so that companies tended to rotate a stable group of plays, thus highlighting the work of a few actors, like David Garrick, in roles that could be repeated time and again. The star system developed further in America in the 19th century through the development of long-runs and combination systems. Motivated by economic rationalization, the long-run allowed a performer to play a single role for a longer period of time than repertory theater, and thus highlighted the role of the virtuoso. Combination systems created traveling companies that would tour a single play throughout the country, rather than perform a repertory in a single theater. Consisting of a star and supporting players, combinations meant that actors were hired for single parts, instead of lines.

However, while touring companies and headliners displaced one version of stock, 19th-century melodrama created another. According to David Grimsted, melodrama arose in large part as a way of competing with the burgeoning star system. Whereas stars were associated with sure-fire old plays and revivals, especially Shakespeare, stock companies offered new plays, and especially melodrama, in order to compete (Grimsted 1968, 92–93). Due to its reliance on stock characters such as the virtuous heroine, the villain, the old man father, and low comedy men and women, melodrama was well suited to the lines-of-business tradition.

In addition, the lines-of-business tradition was still an undercurrent in casting practice outside the stock system. As Benjamin McArthur explains, the combination system created new casting needs (McArthur 1984, 17). While the star headliner might tour with the show, smaller parts were often cast city-by-city. No longer an in-house process, casting became rationalized in the 1860s and dramatic agencies were created. Much as they do today, dramatic agents served as brokers for actors and managers. Actors registered at agencies and filled out questionnaires, describing the parts they had played, their physical characteristics, and their wardrobe. When managers contacted agencies, they tended to request actors using terminology from lines-of-business, calling, for example, for a soubrette or a heavy, rather than describing the particulars of the role.

So, lines-of-business typecasting existed residually in 19th-century melodrama and casting practices. In addition, the realist theater created a new kind of type. The new realist style, as popularized in America by William Archer, advocated "a reliance on personality. By this was simply meant that the actor infused his personality into the role he played—openly

and without apology" (McArthur 1984, 183). This was intended to help the actor break free from typification and toward creating individuated and psychologically defined characters, but "critics charged that modern actors . . . played every role in a similar fashion, making the author's character merely a vehicle for their individual personality" and decried "an era of typecasting, with outward appearance valued more highly than proven acting skill" (McArthur 1984, 183). This new type, defined by the actor's appearance and personality, is akin to, and often overlaps with, the star.

Thus the 19th century establishes new trends toward typecasting despite anti-type discourse and changes in theatrical institutions. Lines-of-business and typecasting by role exist residually in melodrama and the rise of dramatic agencies; and star systems and realist acting create an emergent new type, hinged on the individual actor. All these tendencies and trends will be reproduced in early cinema.

In terms of performance style, early cinema adopted many of the features of 19th-century melodrama, including not only its presentational style and use of pantomime, but also its mode of characterization and reliance on stock types (Musser 1990, 3–5). More importantly, and with more long-lasting institutional effects, early cinema modeled itself on the stock system. Initially, as Charles Musser points out, when films were first made, there was not yet a category of the film actor. Early cinema has been famously described by Tom Gunning as a "cinema of attractions" linked to novelties, amusements, and modes of display and spectacle, rather than narrative. Early film included actors from theater and vaudeville, entertainers from the circus, boxers, dancers, and non-actors caught in actualities or put on screen for staged events (Musser 1987, 57–62; Musser 1990, 3; Gunning 1990). Rather than acting, their activity on film was understood as a form of modeling, or posing (DeCordova 1990, 34f). As the "cinema of attractions" gave way to story films, the notion of film acting began to be developed. The rise in story films coincided with the nickelodeon boom in 1907 which created a demand for more films and, therefore, greater rationalization (Musser 1987, 58; DeCordova 1990, 27). To handle the greater demand, film companies could no longer rely on the casual and intermittent use of actors for individual films and so created permanent stock companies of actors.

These stock companies initially emphasized versatility. An actor in a Griffith film, for instance, might, according to Roberta Pearson, "play the lead in one film and appear as an extra at a garden party the next" (Pearson 1992, 88). And, as late as 1909, there are claims that actors in stock companies receive equal pay, five dollars a day (DeCordova 1990, 79). In addition, indicating how far removed film acting still is from theater, actors were uncredited and anonymous. Despite these differences, film production was similar to the mode of production in theatrical repertory theaters. Until about 1912, film production was still not concerned with the whole script. Leads might be given a script beforehand, but minor players wouldn't know anything about the film until they were called for rehearsal and they still wouldn't know the whole (Pearson 1992, 85–86).

Over time, rather than diverge further from theatrical models, the stock system became increasingly similar to repertory stock. According to a 1913 actor's manual by Frances Agnew, would-be film actors would register with dramatic agencies to gain entry to the studio system and both agents and studios typed actors by lines. She writes:

The number of players carried in the stock organization differ with the various film companies. Some have as many as thirty or more on the regular list, both at the principal

studio and in the western headquarters. Such a company includes five or six emotional and ingénue leads (actresses); about the same number of leading actors; three or four "heavies" (both actors and actresses) (this type is sometimes called the villain of the play); three or four character artists; two children for juveniles and half a dozen or more minor players who serve for general business, playing various parts and requiring some versatility (Agnew 1913, 51, 53).

As in repertory theater, actors were required to supply their own costumes, and do their own make-up (Agnew 1913, 75–78). Under the stock system, the director initially controlled casting, selecting leads from his stock company and extras from anyone who appeared at studio "bull-pens" (Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger 1985, 149). As in the lines-of-business, actors in the studio stock system could ascend through the ranks, from extra to lead (Agnew 1913, 44, 65).

As actor Charles Graham makes clear, early film casting adopts terminology and practices from the lines-of-business tradition. He describes how he was picked out of a bullpen to begin acting in 1912:

We joined a crowd of people . . . We had said not a word to a soul, and no one had questioned us, when a man in shirt sleeves and with a green shade over his eyes came into the room and scrutinized first one and then another. He picked out one or two, then came to Arundel and myself. "I can use you," said he, and handed each of us a card. My card bore a number and the mystic words "Walking Gent Card Scene." Arundel's card bore the same number and the same words. We learned that the film would be known by this number till its name was revealed to a waiting public, that we were the "walking gents" in a card playing scene which was to be shot that morning and that we were to take the card to the wardrobe room.

Told to wear their own clothes, but with straw hats, Graham and Arundel are made up and sent to the studio. For about three hours, "we smiled the same smiles, we frowned the same frowns, we played the same cards and at last the big lights went on and we did it all again while the cameras shot the scene." Graham, limited in knowledge to his activities, has no idea of the whole film: "Mr. Young . . . was the producer, and if he knew what he was producing I certainly did not" (Graham 1998, 19–20).

As film production expands, and director units are overseen by producers, the assistant director takes over casting and major players hire agents. Then, in 1915, the first casting director is hired.⁷ As Janet Staiger explains:

The phrase "type-casting" has literal implications within this mode of production. In order to set up such a system, the casting director, an expert who replaced the more casual approach which the firm had employed, needed some method to classify the potential players for his system . . . the selected classification became somewhat permanent as it went down on a card with other statistics and into the casting director's indexed and cross-indexed files (Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger 1985, 149).

Increased rationalization of the stock system thus leads to more codified systems of casting and increased typecasting.

At the same time, the studio stock system, like theatrical stock, finds that it cannot maintain its policy of anonymity and versatility. The stock system of repetition leads film fans to recognize leading players and to nickname them according to which studio's stock company they belonged. For instance, Florence Turner becomes known as The Vitagraph Girl, and first Florence Lawrence and then Mary Pickford are recognized as Biograph Girls. Recognition creates a star system. Competitive bidding for leading players begins in 1909 when Carl Laemmle hires Florence Lawrence away from Biograph to become the Independent Moving Picture Company Girl, or IMP Girl (Musser 1987, 58–59). Then, publicity for individual actors is generated, producing what Richard DeCordova has called the "picture personality," an intermediate identity for film actors before a full-fledged star system develops.

Fan recognition begins with the actor's image—her physical appearance. The picture personality indicates fan interest in "the personality of the player as represented on film." According to DeCordova:

Personality existed as an effect of the representation of character in a film—or, more accurately, as the effect of the representation of character across a number of films. It functioned primarily to ascribe a unity to the actor's various appearances in film. However . . . the illusion that it had its basis outside the film was constantly maintained (DeCordova 1990, 86).

Film discourse around personalities asserts a connection between the actor's identity and the characters she plays on screen. This in turn requires that the personality portray consistent character types, if not literally the same character from film to film. As DeCordova points out, serial films show an especially insistent version of this homology in that the serial character's identity is often conflated with the actor through naming, so that King Baggot plays a character named King in the IMP detective series, and Kathlyn Williams stars in *The Adventures of Kathlyn* (DeCordova 1990, 89). However, despite claims that the actor's real identity was an extension of her screen image, the picture personality was a "professional existence—a history of appearances in films and plays and a personality gleaned from those appearances," but did not reveal very much about the actor's private life (DeCordova 1990, 92).

The picture personality establishes the screen actor as a type defined by physical appearance and role. In the teens, "the private lives of players were constituted as a site of knowledge and truth," thus leading to the development of the star proper (DeCordova 1990, 98). As fan discourse shifts to the star's personal life—her marital status, homes, leisure, consumption, political views, etc.—the homology between actor and character is deepened. At the same time, the development of the star system alters the nature of studio stock companies so that they are more hierarchical. Rather than a company of versatiles that can be called upon to play any role, the star system creates a hierarchical system. In it, stars are cast as leads, and smaller parts are filled by a range of non-star types. The character actor develops in this period as a mid-level player, recognizable and associated with a particular line of business, but not "known" as a real or private person. In addition, there are bit players and extras, who may or may not ascend through the ranks to become stars or character actors. While stars and character actors are permanent members of stock companies, extras are freelance and hired through the Central Casting Corporation, formed in 1925.

Based on this hierarchical and ascending system of roles, the studio system therefore mirrors the earlier stock system, on the one hand; but, on the other hand, with the clear

hierarchy between stars and character actors, and the tendency for studios to loan headliners out for particular projects, Hollywood re-invents the combination system. Throughout the classical system, Hollywood studios have stock companies. In addition, certain directors and producers, like Preston Sturges, John Ford, and David Selznick, maintain their own stable of players within the studio. When actors become free agents in the 1960s, the official stock system breaks down, but continues in *de facto* stock companies such as the stable of players linked to Martin Scorsese, John Cassavetes, Spike Lee, the Coen Brothers, and Paul Thomas Anderson.

Emphasizing practical considerations, many actors' manuals recommend that the actor must be willing to be typecast in order to be more easily classified with agencies. For instance, one manual acknowledges, "There are stars, of course, who are remarkably versatile. But for a beginner it is wise to work out one especial type of thing, one sort of characterization, which will be particularly good, even though he should try to learn to play every sort of role. Then there is no difficulty in making classifications when one registers with a casting director or agent" (Klumph 1922, 72-74).⁸ An essay entitled "The Value of Specialization" suggests that an actor should not just adopt a broad specialization in comedy or drama, but should carve out a niche in small roles. The list of possible specialties includes butlers, smart city men, bookmakers, doctors, flunkeys, and judges for male actors; and cooks, maids, half-castes, aunts, nurses, and typists for actresses (Pickford, 6-12). This highly stratified division of labor is aimed at keeping the actor employed in a regular line of business when being a lead may not be a reality. Stuart Hemward puts it bluntly in his actor's manual:

The average feature picture usually has two "leads" which call for a good looking young girl and boy . . . but there is also the surrounding cast . . . older men and women, heavies, comedians, singers, dancers. Therefore in point of quantity there is a greater demand for the *homelier, standard types* than for the ingénue and leading man . . . Your face may be your fortune, but not exactly in the way you think. There are many types of comediennes who are not known as beauties, but who, nevertheless, have been successful . . . Therefore, first of all, type yourself (Hemward 1937, 9).

Interestingly, and in contrast to Stanislavski, early cinema discourse views typecasting not only as a practical strategy but also as key to naturalistic acting. Arguing against versatility in a how-to acting book, producer Kenelm Foss argues:

Acting, in the sense of impersonating a character foreign to the player's personality, does not exist. All actors deny this: all actors can play anything, given the chance, according to their own account . . . If an actor is not himself the part, or if his personality does not approximate to that of the part, he's not the man to play it . . . Types! That is what casting comes to, first and last—the selection of proper types (Pickford, 25-26).

Similarly, Hemward emphasizes that typing will produce more realistic performances: "You must know your type and then develop naturalness of acting within the characteristics of the personalities you desire to portray" (Hemward 1937, 13). In addition, typecasting is viewed as the result of the camera's "accuracy" which demands a particular kind of realism akin to typeage. Frances Agnew writes:

Oh, that word "type!" In days of yore, an artist was always an artist. By the aid of make-up and artistic temperament a young man or woman played a character many years his senior, or an older player was likewise considered capable of giving an artistic youthful characterization . . . To-day the cry of managers is for types; a child must be played by a child, sweet sixteen must be sweet sixteen, not only in years, but in appearance "offstage" as well as on; the stage mother, aunt, old maid, etc. must be played by actresses possessing the appearance in private life; the handsome hero, the gallant old gentleman—each must look the part to a certain extent when engaged (Agnew 1913, 59).

While the idea of typing oneself goes against the grain of most theories of naturalism, in Hollywood, typing oneself quickly became and continues to be a practical necessity, and has been institutionalized and formalized in casting practice through the production and distribution of casting directories and casting services.

Casting directories and services

Almost as soon as casting becomes rationalized through the development of dramatic agencies and in-house casting directors, casting directories that promote and categorize actors are published and circulated. These directories feature photographs of actors and actresses, sometimes listing their credits and/or studio affiliations, in alphabetical order and within certain categories. The earliest casting directories categorize actors using terminology that closely resembles the lines-of-business tradition.⁹ For instance, the undated *Directory of Artists Under Exclusive Management of the Edward Small Company*—which we can assume to be from the "picture personality" era, due to its epigraph, "Personality is a Commodity"—categorizes actors in descending order as either leading men, juveniles (including leads, characters and heavies), males (including second leads and heavies), or character men. Women are similarly categorized as leading women, ingénues, females (including second leads and heavies), and character women. In 1924, *The Screen Artist* breaks down its listings into feature men, feature comedians, leading men, juveniles, heavy men, and character men, with virtually the same groupings for women and a separate category for children. Reflecting the need for increased specialization, *The Standard Directory of Motion Picture Talent* from 1922 lists principals according to compressed lines-of-business—feature men, leading men, juveniles, character men, feature comedians—but also adds a section for "supporting cast," comprising those minor roles that would have been filled by the lower ranks in the lines-of-business tradition. This "supporting cast" includes an amazing array of specializations, defined by appearance or role, and including male roles as acrobats, bits and parts, character men (old) and character men (young), Chinamen, doctors, female impersonators, Jewish (old and young), Russian types, twins, underworld types, and well-dressed men (old and young). For women, supporting parts include not only character women and ingénues, but also cooks, dancers, grande dames, nuns, small town (old and young), tall women (old and young), and witch types.

Eventually, these specializations will disappear from primary casting directories and will be relegated to casting services dedicated to extras. For instance, in 1946 the classified groupings for the Central Casting Corporation include the following: American Indians; Arabians, able to handle camels; beards—dress and character; butlers; Chinese; cigarette

girls; clowns; cops; girls—sweet looking; Hindus, able to handle elephants; midgets; rough characters; strong men; and short men. These specializations also exist residually in studio files on contract players such as those of casting director William "Billy" Gordon. Gordon was casting director at MGM Studios from the 1930s to 1947, and then at 20th Century-Fox until 1960, and he became head of talent at Columbia for the 1960s and 1970s. Gordon's files on actors from his tenure at MGM consist of typed lists of actors placed in folders with headings such as the following for male actors: Anglo Saxons, Arab, bald, bartender, beards, character, collegiate, colored/Negro, cripples/midgets/freaks, fat, fencers, juveniles, nances, rubes, and underworld. For actresses, Gordon's files include: beautiful, blonde, characters (young), colored/Negro, exotic, fat, heavies, hookers, maids, old, old maids, prison matrons, showgirls, and singers.

As general utility and supernumerary specialties fall increasingly under the category of extras and bit parts, most casting directories are then focused on actors who can fill principal parts; and typical directories list lines-of-business and include information about whether an actor is under contract. There is some overlap among categories. For instance, in 1924's *The Screen Artist*, Francis X. Bushman is listed as both a leading man and a feature man, indicating a distinction between starring roles and other major roles. Similarly, in *The Players Inc. Screen Casting Directory* of 1928, Skeets Noyes is listed as both a heavy and a character. There is some mobility among the lines—an actor can ascend from juvenile or ingénue to lead—but the distinction between starring roles and roles as characters or comedians seems firm.

At this time, the actors listed are almost all white but race and ethnicity figure heavily in the category of "character," which seems to refer back to the categories of light comedy and eccentric business in traditional lines and generally includes actors who play distinct ethnic types, roles in uniform or other elaborate costumes, and roles in heavy make-up.¹⁰ For instance, in a June 1928 issue of *The Players, Inc.*, character actor William Vox Mong lists his specialties: "Chinamen, Frenchmen, Russians and Americans and am learning English, Roman and Eskimo."

By the 1930s, race becomes its own category as *The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences: Players Directory Bulletin* (generally referred to as *The Academy Players Directory*) includes separate sections labeled "Colored" and "Oriental," which list all African American and Asian actors and actresses, adults and children, together while it classifies white men (without identifying them as such) as leading men, younger leading men, characters and comedians; white women as leading women, ingénues, characters and comediennes; and white children as boys and girls. While African American and Asian actors and actresses exist outside the lines, as it were, with no indication of whether they are, for instance, characters or ingénues, white actors such as Bela Lugosi and Peter Lorre who play ethnic types are still listed in the main male categories as "characters." By 1945, possibly in response to NAACP calls for better representation in Hollywood, actors of color are included among the regular categories but are indexed separately. Initially, there seems to be an unwritten rule that an African American or Asian actor cannot be a lead. Lena Horne, for instance, is listed as a "character and comedienne" in the 1945 *Academy Players Directory*, despite her groundbreaking star contract. While actors of color were eventually included among leads, they were still indexed separately as, first, Colored, then Negro, and eventually as Black. Today, this practice continues with increasing attention to multiculturalism and political correctness, as actors and actresses are cross-indexed as not only Black Artists, but also as Artists with Disabilities (including the

specific nature of their disability, such as quadriplegic, amputee, etc.), Deaf and Hard of Hearing Artists, Little People, Asian Pacific Artists, Hispanic Artists, Native American Artists, and, oddly, Twins.¹¹

Ultimately, through the combined forces of increasing rationalization and the star system, Hollywood develops a complex and hierarchical ladder of types—some defined by lines, some by appearance, some by personality, some associated with certain stereotypes, and some with social types, some operating as stars and some as character actors. Over the years, the categories into which these types can be sorted changes according to changing tastes and mores. And, as the assumed homology between actor and role, and role and appearance gets increasingly rigid and increasingly politicized, types are diversified and increase exponentially but are still recognizable as types. For instance, a recent survey of casting calls in *Breakdown Services*, the leading print and web source in Hollywood for casting, found roles described largely in terms of types. These types ranged from stock characters such as "high school sweetheart" and "mother type" to racial categories and corresponding stereotypes ("African American, 20–35. Dance . . . Basketball skills required") to types defined by pre-existing actors and characters ("a young Jodie Foster or Queen Latifah, or Peppermint Patty from *Peanuts*" in a call for "real" and diverse girls).¹²

Thus, in a certain sense, the older lines-of-business practice was less traditional in its conception of casting—insofar as what enabled an actor to play a line was not strictly speaking his physical appearance but rather his costume and make-up, whereas in today's seeming diversity, the actor is defined increasingly by physical appearance, race, body type, age, gender, and sex. In the interests of upholding shifting conceptions of realism, Hollywood has proliferated rather than blurred the lines.¹³

Conclusion

To conclude, I would suggest that a consideration of casting helps deepen and expand our understanding of film acting. First, casting needs to be seen as an interpretive process. A consideration of casting could complicate current models of authorship and of stardom. Examining casting helps acknowledge not only the way roles are characterized but also the ideologies about identity they embody. In addition, a consideration of casting helps show changes in performance styles as only one part of what constitutes acting on screen. We need to more consciously relate performance styles to casting practices and take into account political, cultural, and labor issues at the time of performance. On a related note, just as the meaning of the word "type" has evolved, notions of "realism" have undergone a metamorphosis to reflect changing ideas about acting and identity; and, therefore, the discourse of realism which has dominated studies of classical cinema needs to be more specifically informed by an understanding of institutional practice and historical context. Finally, while recognizing the influence of embedded 18th-century theatrical traditions on contemporary casting may lead us to view typecasting as inevitable, it should also open a door to change. If, as Stanislavski suggests, performance style and institutional practice go hand in hand, then we need now to envision ways to break free from residual and perhaps outmoded casting traditions, to denaturalize naturalism and break free from modes of realism that simply reproduce our own everyday tendencies to typecast.

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Notes

- 1 For more on Non-Traditional Casting, see Gibbons 1991; Schechner 1989; and the website for the Non-Traditional Casting Project, www.ntcp.org
- 2 The *zanni* is the clownish underling or servant, an acrobatic mimic, a Harlequin.
- 3 The Australian larrikin is a young street rowdy, a delinquent. Though the term refers to minor criminals, it can also be used to name valued Australian characteristics such as irreverence, non-conformism, and impudence.
- 4 Typage tends toward representations of what Richard Dyer calls "member types." Member types "are linked to historically and culturally specific and determined social groups or classes and their praxes, which are almost bound to be outside the present cultural hegemony (in so far as it has so much invested in the notion of individuality)." Dyer values member types because they hold out the promise of collective identity, and therefore, political action, as opposed to social types and stereotypes which operate on an exclusionary basis. See Dyer 1980, 37.
- 5 On "expressive coherence" and theories of acting in Hollywood, see Naremore 1988, 68–82 and *passim*.
- 6 On the demise of the lines-of-business tradition, see Burge 1986, 212–213; McConachie 1992, 248–256; and McArthur 1984, 7–8.
- 7 See "Casting Efficiency," *Motion Picture World* 26, no. 11 (11 December 1915): 1985.
- 8 Similarly, in contrast to her own discomfort with typecasting, Mary Pickford advises actors to know their strengths and weaknesses and find types or roles they can play. She writes: "The producer will probably help you in your selection of the part. If he knows his work, as most producers do, he has divided humanity in sections—young men, old men, comedians, tragedians—and within a few minutes of your first appearance before him he will have allotted you to one of those sections, and more often than not his judgment will be the right one." Pickford, 29.
- 9 All casting directories listed here are available at the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.
- 10 This sense of the category of "character" parallels the use of the term "character" in dance, where, the "character dance" is invariably ethnic in nature and principally from the Russian or Slavic traditions, although there are Mediterranean character dances such as the Tarantella; and "character dancer" refers to those dancers who portray older or comical characters such as Dr. Coppelia in *Coppelia*, or the step mother in *Cinderella* (usually played by a male dancer.) I am indebted to Kevin Dreyer for his explanation of this terminology.

- 11 According to a February 2001 telephone interview with Keith Gonzalez, the current editor of the *Academy Players Directory*, actors and/or their agents decide whether to list themselves as leads, younger leads or ingénues, or characters and comedians, and they also decide whether or not to be cross-indexed. Gonzalez, like casting directors I interviewed, feels that actors are poor judges of their type and often mis-categorize themselves.
- 12 Breakdown Services, Ltd. Provides "breakdowns" or capsule descriptions of all roles needing to be cast for most Hollywood productions, including feature films, TV shows, commercials, student films, and industrials. The breakdowns are written by casting directors and/or in-house writers and breakdowns are sent to agents, managers, and other subscribers daily. See www.breakdownservices.com
- 13 An anecdote will indicate how traditional "non-traditional" casting can be. When I was doing research for this article, I had a conversation with a Chicago-based casting director who told me that if a director asked to fill a role for a Polish female bank teller (which she assumed would be played by a Polish female actress), she might suggest the role be played as black, gay, and male instead; but her conception of who could play black, gay, and male was limited to actors who were themselves black, gay, and male. Thus, her conception of "non-traditional" casting consisted of swapping one type for another and her conception of type was tied to the actor's individual "real" identity. I had similar conversations with casting directors in Los Angeles.

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