48 Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, London, Verso, 1983, p 19.
49 See Robert H Hethmon (ed), *Strasberg at the Actor's Studio* (tape-recorded sessions), London, Jonathan Cape, 1966, pp 383–395.
50 See also Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, p 56: 'The actor Chaplin, incidentally, would in many ways come closer to the epic than to the dramatic theatre's requirements.'
51 See Pam Cook, review of *Revolution*, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1986, vol 53 no 626, pp 67–68, and Richard Combs, op cit, pp 68–70.
52 Bertolt Brecht, in Willett (ed), op cit, p 95; and Walter Benjamin, op cit, p 11.

PART FOUR

CHARACTER AND TYPE

Introduction

Film actors have decried typecasting almost since the beginning of filmmaking. For instance, silent-film actress Louise Brooks viewed typecasting as a measure of Hollywood success but also as a limitation of the system: "I just didn't fit into the Hollywood scheme at all. I was never, neither a fluffy heroine, nor a wicked vamp, nor a woman of the world. I just didn't fit into any category . . . You see, I didn't interest them because I couldn't be typed" (Kobal 1986, 46). Where Brooks described type in terms of roles, classical British actor Eric Portman linked typing to stardom and the actor's personality. He wrote, "So, personality can make you a film star. Whether you are a film actor or not, will depend on your histrionic talent . . . Still, if you have only a little talent, and a lot of personality, you may succeed—as a type. This means you will always be cast for the same parts. Your film life will, then, not be a long one" (Cardullo *et al.* 1998, 97). Bringing home Portman's threat, silent-film star Mary Pickford, explaining why she left the screen, suggested the dangers of being successfully typecast:

> "I didn't want what happened to Chaplin to happen to me. When he discarded the little tramp, the little tramp turned around and killed him. The little girl made me. I wasn't waiting for the little girl to kill me. I'd already been pigeon-holed . . . I could have done more dramatic performances . . . but I was already typed."
>
> (Brownlow 1989, 135)

For these actors—and I could cite many more—typecasting represents commercial, mass-production instincts that are opposed to artistry and disenfranchise the actor who wishes to perform more complex roles.

However, while the assumption seems to be that typecasting is a sign of an actor's limitation, a concession to commercialism, and the antithesis of art and originality, we also expect actors to stick to type and often reject actors' efforts to play against type. As with typecasting, critics and audiences will frequently view an actor's efforts to play against type as evidence of the actor's lack of talent—because the actor is unconvincing in the new role—or as gross commercialism—insofar as the role is assigned to a money-making star rather than a better-suited but lesser-known actor. In line with this view, in the book *Starring John Wayne as Genghis Khan! Hollywood's*

All-time Worst Casting Blunders, author Damien Bona chastises Hollywood studios for casting actors against type and seems to view actors' desire to play against type as the worst kind of *hubris.* Bona's categories of miscasting include "ethnic impersonators," such as Marlon Brando in *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956), because they show a disregard for verisimilitude in favor of star power; "generation gap," including actors who refuse to age gracefully on screen or, alternately, are in too much of a hurry to grow old (think of an aged Mae West in *Sextette* (1978) or a youthful Barbra Streisand in *Hello, Dolly!* [1969]); "performers whose personas and modern sensibilities were completely out of place when they traveled to the past" (famous examples include John Wayne as Genghis Khan in *The Conqueror* [1956] and Tony Curtis in *Spartacus* [1960]); and, finally, a category called "out of their league," for "movie stars whose attempts at roles different from those they usually played were stymied" by a "too strongly established screen persona" (Bona 1996).

As these tangled and somewhat contradictory responses to typecasting suggest, typecasting in film is, to a large degree, inescapable. Insofar as film acting is part of the business of film, typecasting will be crucial to the institution, enabling brand-naming and marketing of star commodities. But it is not the case that typecasting is simply imposed on actors from above by studio publicity departments; rather, typecasting occurs at the level of performance, through casting, and through audience demand. Typecasting contributes to narrative economy, allowing audiences to quickly and easily recognize a character by associating him or her with an actor's previous roles. Further, types and typing play into our everyday notions about people and identities, and our tendency to read people in terms of their age, sex, race, gender, region, nationality, class, or other categories, whether insidiously in racial profiling or in less sinister but no less stereotypical ways of assessing persons. Types in film do not, however, simply duplicate social stereotypes, but may create new types, or even the seeming contradiction of a unique type; they may mirror stock types from literature or advance new stereotypes. Rather than something static, types change according to changing notions of identity, changing politics, changing conceptions of realism, and changing aesthetics.

Given all these complications, the essays in this section consider types, typecasting, and stereotypes from a variety of perspectives, considering typecasting as institutional practice, in relation to stereotyping and identity politics, and at the level of stardom as well as among character actors. They share in common a concern with the ideologies of identity embodied in notions of type and character and each, in different ways, proposes that the hierarchical institution of cinema should be modified to more realistically represent the lived experience of humanity.

In "Typecasting," Pamela Robertson Wojcik 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. Wojcik argues that the discourse of realism in most twentieth-century theories of acting deals with *performance style,* whereas typecasting reflects a complex web of *institutional practices.* She claims that, 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 that predates Stanislavskian realism. In particular, she links casting practices in Hollywood to the eighteenth-century lines-of-business tradition, which assigned an actor to a certain kind of role across his career. Ironically, Wojcik suggests that despite today's discourse of diversity, contemporary casting practices may be more rigid in their conception of identity than the earlier

theatrical traditions, as casting directors, operating under shifting conceptions of realism, increasingly delimit the actor's roles by tying them to her physical appearance, race, age, gender, and sex.

Donald Bogle's contribution examines three major African-American stars of the 1950s and asserts that these stars represented a shift in black representation from "mythic types" and stereotypes of earlier decades to "the emergence of distinct black personalities who, through their own idiosyncrasies" came to be true stars. Bogle focuses on Ethel Waters, Dorothy Dandridge and Sidney Poitier, characterizing each star in relation to his or her roles and public reception in the 1950s. In each case, Bogle finds traces of a more "mythic" type, but is interested in the way each star personalized that type within a contemporary context. For Bogle, Waters represents an Earth Mother figure, but one who no longer fits into an alienated society. He describes her as signifying "some noble part of our heritage that was quickly becoming extinct . . . the individualist foolish enough to assert herself yet strong enough to pay for the consequences." Dandridge portrays the classic tragic mulatto, though she was marketed as a more contemporary and daring figure. A socially significant figure—the first black actress ever to appear in the arms of a white actor on screen—Dandridge was also a tragic figure who seemed doomed to live out the sad plotline of her films. If Waters and Dandridge represented the revivification of classic black stereotypes, and ultimately suffered for it, Poitier seems to have created an original hero, perfectly in tune with his times. Bogle calls him a "hero for an integrationist age" and argues that he appealed to white liberals and middle-class African-Americans because he embodied middle-class ideals of education and refinement, and was the antithesis of the black buffoons of earlier decades. Despite his claim that Poitier was a throwback to the Uncle Toms and servants of the 1930s, Bogle still suggests that Poitier's integrationist message was a "beautiful dream," which is "what great movies and careers are all about."

Rather than stars, the remaining essays in this section examine the often overlooked role of character actors. Rudolf Arnheim and David Thomson each offer an ontological view of the character actor. For Arnheim, writing in 1931, the character actor can be differentiated from the lead actor because he represents a specific type, close to reality, whereas the lead actor represents a more general, idealized type. Arnheim recognizes a difference in modes of performance for character actors and leads and suggests that the character actor's ability to individualize a role, and especially to bring out its grittier qualities, needs to penetrate into the hero's territory. Thomson similarly suggests that character actors represent us, the unnamed throng, as opposed to idealized heroes. He queries whether character acting should only be viewed as "support," and argues that the "panorama of small lives" in ensemble acting may be closer to the experience of reality in which we all consider ourselves stars and not support.

Taking a different view of the character actor's role as "support," Patricia White asks "What is it that supporting characters are meant to 'support' if not the imbricated ideologies of heterosexual romance and white American hegemony permeating Hollywood cinema?" Examining the career of Agnes Moorehead, White suggests that it is no accident that character actors like Moorehead—or, we might add, Edward Everett Horton or Eric Blore—embody stereotypes of sexual difference, such as the lesbian, spinster, old maid (or, in the case of Horton or Blore, the pansy). Rather, she argues that Hollywood needs them, to define and uphold the conventional ideals represented by the lead actors. Thus, while it might be more realistic to bring the traits of character actors into the center, as Arnheim and Thomson suggest, White underlines how the center and the margin are ideologically defined and represent presumptions about norms and differences that are still difficult to overcome.

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Typecasting

PAMELA ROBERTSON WOJCIK

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 *demanded* 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.

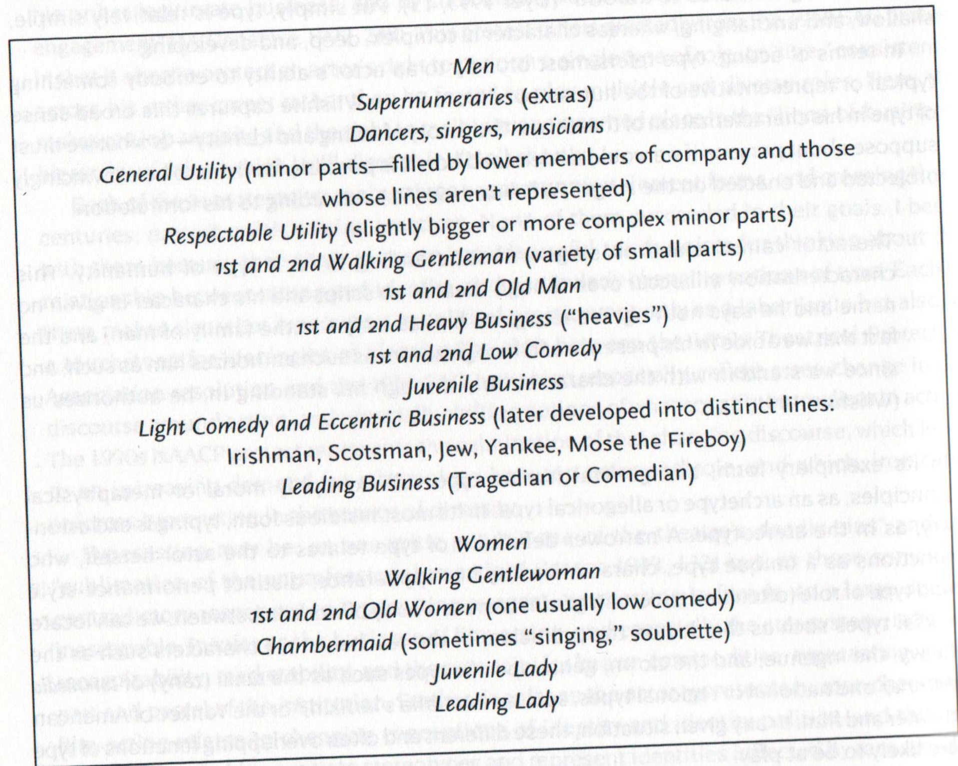
In terms of acting, type refers most broadly to an actor's ability to embody something typical or representative of the human condition. Bruce Wilshire captures this broad sense of type in his characterization of theater as "the theory of acting and identity—or what we must suppose about persons if we 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. Stanislavksi 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.


Men

Supernumeraries (extras)

Dancers, singers, musicians

General Utility (minor parts—filled by lower members of company and those whose lines aren't represented)

Respectable Utility (slightly bigger or more complex minor parts)

1st and 2nd Walking Gentleman (variety of small parts)

1st and 2nd Old Man

1st and 2nd Heavy Business ("heavies")

1st and 2nd Low Comedy

Juvenile Business

Light Comedy and Eccentric Business (later developed into distinct lines: Irishman, Scotsman, Jew, Yankee, Mose the Fireboy)

Leading Business (Tragedian or Comedian)

Women

Walking Gentlewoman

1st and 2nd Old Women (one usually low comedy)

Chambermaid (sometimes "singing," soubrette)

Juvenile Lady

Leading Lady

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).[1] 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 role; 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 (Stanislavksi 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 typage. 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 to1947, 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 specialities: "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 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. Coppelias 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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13

The 1950s

Black Stars

DONALD BOGLE

Ethel Waters sways her massive shoulders as she sings "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," and suddenly, becomes—for a new generation—its great earth-mother figure. . . . Dorothy Dandridge, first as Carmen, then as Margot, later as Bess, acts her heart out, wins her Oscar nomination, and emerges on screen and off as the living embodiment of the tragic mulatto. . . . Sidney Poitier enters the era shyly as a young unknown in *No Way Out*, only to close the decade as one of the most important leading men—black or white—in the movies. . . . Writer Richard Wright, baseball player Jackie Robinson, boxer Jersey Joe Walcott, tennis champ Althea Gibson, football player Woody Strode, trumpeter Louis Armstrong, crooner Nat "King" Cole, songstress Eartha Kitt, comedienne Pearl Bailey, jazz stylist Ella Fitzgerald, and calypso artist Harry Belafonte invade the movies and go "dramatic." . . . And problem pictures continue, alternately engaging and alienating their audiences.

It was the 1950s, an era to be remembered as apathetic and sleepy-eyed, vulgar and hypocritical, grandiose, spectacular, and tasteless. Yet the Eisenhower age was one of change and turbulence, a decade that encompassed an array of incongruities: McCarthy in the Senate, troops in Korea, a Nobel Peace Prize for Ralph Bunche in Sweden, the National Guard in Cicero and Chicago, the Supreme Court Decision of 1954, Marian Anderson at the Met, Emmett Till lynched in Mississippi, bus boycotts (later bombings) in Montgomery, the rise of Martin Luther King, sit-ins in Oklahoma, federal troops in Arkansas.

The 1950s' social-political whirl penetrated the motion-picture industry, which like the rest of the country, had to undergo change. Already the industry had lost some of its best talents because of blacklisting. Slowly, too, the look of the American feature film was altered, no longer stamped with the big-studio gloss but marked now by the individual signature of the independent director or producer. Television sets had come into homes across the nation and when box-office attendance, after its great boom in the war years, tapered off drastically the film industry offered the giant wide screens—Cinerama, CinemaScope, VistaVision, 3-D—as a desperate means of holding the audience. Likewise the industry picked up bold themes in part to lure the television audience away from home and in part as a realistic reflection of the growing chaos in the streets of America and in the psyches of its citizens. Gone almost entirely was the magical, romantic, bigger-than-life daydream quality of the old movies as

independent filmmakers brought to the public not only more problem pictures but "message" pictures, "serious" pictures, "thoughtful" pictures, "studious" pictures, and "controversial" pictures, all interchangeable but carrying different labels.

For black actors this era of silent change was important. The great gains of the late 1940s were continued in the 1950s with the emergence of distinct black personalities who, through their own idiosyncrasies, invigorated the Negro Lead Character and the Negro Theme. Almost immediately three diverse black personalities stood out prominently, and they were to remain so throughout the decade, making the greatest breakthrough for the black actor in American motion pictures. Sidney Poitier, Dorothy Dandridge, and Ethel Waters transformed the history of blacks in films from a study of pictures or parts or personalities to one of star dimensions.

As already seen, in the early days of moviemaking black actors were rigidly consigned to mythic types. Through the push and power of their personalities, some actors had created great pop figures. Everything in Hollywood was a game, they knew, and they did not expect to be taken very seriously. Movie audiences loved and laughed at these great comic strip characters. They left theaters having enjoyed themselves but with little reason to think twice about what they had seen. No one ever cared what Bill Robinson was really thinking as he danced up the staircases with Shirley Temple. Nor did anyone give a second thought to how Hattie McDaniel must have felt as she ripped the bandana from her head after a particularly humiliating scene.

Occasionally, with black actors such as Stepin Fetchit or Lena Horne or Paul Robeson, because their off-screen exploits paralleled their on-screen images and because they were publicized by their studios, audiences felt they had some insight into the person on celluloid. But still unlike the important white stars—such as Garbo and Gable—the old black actors were not monolithic figures. They did not symbolize disparate elements of their audience's personalities. They were not able to affect lives dramatically or touch on the mass imagination. Indeed, the moviegoing public was not yet prepared to be swept off its feet by the intrigues of a colored personality.

But in the 1950s Poitier, Dandridge, and Waters reached out and affected the imagination of the mass audience. Patrons believed in them. Often because of their private lives or because of a strongly rooted image, the trio overpowered the films in which they appeared. Moreover, in this strange psychoanalytic age when audiences started dissecting not only their own inner selves but those of their movies and movie stars as well, when patrons went to see black performers not for mere entertainment but for a comment on the black experience, these three performers became popular because of what they represented to moviegoers. Like all great stars, they were aesthetic beings in themselves. To contemplate Waters' humanity or Dandridge's beauty or Poitier's code of decency was worth the price of admission, and the three made a slight dent at the place Hollywood has traditionally cherished most: the box office.

Ethel Waters: earth mother for an alienated age

Ethel Waters was the first of the three to win mass audience approval. She had been around for a long time, and her life and career were a tale of disorder and much early sorrow. Growing up in Chester, Pennsylvania, she had stolen food to eat, run errands for whores, been a lookout

for pimps and underworld figures. At thirteen she was married. At fourteen she was separated. At fifteen she was a chambermaid and laundress at a Philadelphia hotel where she earned $4.75 a week. Then almost miraculously she rose from poverty to international acclaim, first in the cellars and cafés where she was billed as "Sweet Mama Stringbean" and later on the stage in such successful productions as *Africana*, *Blackbirds of 1930*, *Rhapsody in Black*, *As Thousands Cheer*, *At Home Abroad*, *Mamba's Daughters*, and *Cabin in the Sky*.

Ethel Waters later reached a whole new audience with her impressive film work. But suddenly her spiraling career fell flat in the mid-1940s. Overwork, exhaustion, exploitation, and personal unhappiness had made her "difficult" and chronically suspicious of everyone. Her outbursts on the set of *Cabin in the Sky* remain a part of Hollywood legend. Subsequently there was a six-year period of unemployment in the film capital, and by 1948, when Darryl Zanuck asked her to test for Granny in *Pinky*, Ethel Waters was almost at the point of begging for a role. Her Granny was an old typed vehicle but she got mileage out of it, and her career swung back into full gear. Today, because of her appearances in such films as *Cairo* (1942), *Tales of Manhattan*, *Cabin in the Sky*, *Stage Door Canteen* (1943), and *Pinky*, many still think of Ethel Waters as an exclusively 1940s figure. It was during this period that, singlehanded, she brought a new style and substance to the time-worn mammy. But as significant a figure as she was in the 1940s, it was in the Eisenhower era, in the film version of Carson McCullers' play *The Member of the Wedding*, that she scored her greatest screen triumph and an overwhelming personal victory.

The Member of the Wedding was more than simply a movie. It was in two very important respects a motion-picture event. Foremost, it marked the first time a black actress was used to carry a major-studio white production. Secondly, the movie was another comeback for Ethel Waters. Her autobiography *His Eye Is on the Sparrow* had recently been published and was a best seller. In it, she told all the lurid details of her life—the fights, the lovers, the marriages, the career troubles. Curiously, instead of alienating her audience, the turbulent events in the autobiography convinced patrons that Ethel Waters, who had always portrayed long-suffering women, was indeed the characters she played. Moreover, audiences knew Ethel Waters had truly suffered. Now patrons rooted for her to succeed—to triumph. When *The Member of the Wedding* finally opened, audiences got just that.

The Stanley Kramer–Fred Zinnemann feature was a serious, oddly structured film for 1952 American moviegoers. It starred the original Broadway cast. It had little plot, and focused instead on the interactions of three outcasts: Frankie Adams (played by Julie Harris), a twelve-year-old motherless girl entering adolescence and wanting desperately to belong; John-Henry (Brandon de Wilde), Frankie's six-year-old sickly cousin-playmate; and the weathered and beaten family cook, Berenice. In the course of the film, Berenice is revealed as the guiding spirit in the children's solitary lives. She is cook, housekeeper, protectress, reprimander, adviser, and confidante. "Come on. Let us play a three-hand game of bridge," says Berenice as she and the children sit in the kitchen. "Play the King, John-Henry," she tells the boy when he is about to cheat at their bridge game. "You know you got to play the rules of the game." In these quiet or sometimes turbulent moments among the three, author Carson McCullers' great lyricism was apparent as much as her theme of human loneliness and alienation. "We go round trying one thing. Then another. Yet we're still caught," Berenice tells young Frankie. At another time, in her most moving monologue, she explains to the two children the fragmented blind alleys of her life. "He was the first man I ever loved. Therefore I had to go and copy myself forever after and what I did was to marry off little pieces of Ludi whenever

I run across them. It was my misfortune that they all turned out to be the wrong pieces." She comforts the two and helps them grow from her experiences. She sings to them "His Eye Is on the Sparrow." The film is resolved with Frankie grown and over that aching period of adolescence. Berenice stands alone in the kitchen of the house. She is leaving to work elsewhere, and we understand that her talents as an earth mother, to nourish and comprehend, are needed in a new household.

The Member of the Wedding was a critical success, but reports of its strange plotlessness and unconventional characters scared off many viewers. Others found them baffling. But Ethel Waters, the actress and the human being, was praised by everyone, even by those who did not like the film. Berenice was a perfect role for her, and there were obvious parallels between the seamy, confused tragic life of the movie's heroine and the legends about the entertainer. In the film version of *The Member of the Wedding*, the role was so well written and the character so well etched that Waters at long last had the material for a bravura performance. In her hands, every line, even a seemingly unadorned statement, was delivered with a warmth and irony that went beyond the script. "Can't bid," she said during the card game. "Never have a hand these days." "All my life I been wanting things I ain't been getting," she uttered plaintively. Ultimately, because *The Member of the Wedding*, with its skinny tomboy heroine and its pint-sized bespectacled leading man, was so unlike the typical Saturday evening movie fare, audiences tended to accept Ethel Waters and her life rather than the lives portrayed in the film. She emerged now as more than just a representative of the long-suffering, strong black woman. She was a great "serious" popular myth come true. For black audiences, Ethel Waters was the personification of the black spirit they believed had prevailed during the hard times of slavery, and they felt she brought dignity and wisdom to the race. For the mass white audience, Ethel Waters spoke to an inner spirit of a paranoid and emotionally paralyzed generation that longed for some sign of heroism. Movie stardom itself has often been based on a thin line between actress and myth, and with this performance Ethel Waters became a genuine movie star. Her personality, rather than her character or her movie, had grasped the public imagination, and thus the history of the Negro in American films gained a new perspective.

But if Ethel Waters altered black film history, she was perhaps the last to know about it. For in spite of her impressive performance, she curiously became in the mid-1950s a victim of audience indifference. From *The Member of the Wedding* she went on to important Broadway appearances. There was also the successful television series "Beulah." Then new troubles arose: income-tax evasion and other debts. Finally, her debts and problems mounted so high that she was forced to make an excruciatingly painful appearance on the television quiz show "Break the $250,000 Bank." The great actress stood before millions in their homes trying to win money to pay her taxes. Surprisingly, audiences took her plight in stride. There was neither outrage nor great sadness. In a frightening way, Ethel Waters' public sorrow and humiliation were considered fitting for the tough endurable mythic figure who had always shown America that she could prevail, even under the most trying situations. When her next film, *The Sound and the Fury* (1959), was released, Twentieth Century-Fox's publicity department announced that "everybody's favorite," indeed "America's favorite," Ethel Waters, was back. As Dilsey, the "indomitable skeleton," the part Faulkner himself might have written for her, Waters again acted the strong black woman in grand style. The movie at first looked promising, with a cast that included Yul Brynner, Joanne Woodward, and Margaret Leighton. But the actors floundered in one mess of a script, and Waters fought to stay afloat. It was her last film of the decade.

The 1950s ended with Ethel Waters having appeared in but two motion pictures. But for this anemic, insecure age, one scared of its own shadow and terrified of taking risks, she was an echo of the past. Ethel Waters seemed to be some noble part of our heritage that was quickly becoming extinct. In a period of mass uniformity, she was the individualist foolish enough to assert herself yet strong enough to pay for the consequences. In the end, her image—the myth she lived out—loomed larger than life over the decade. Through the 1950s into the early 1970s, Waters made occasional television appearances on such programs as "Route 66," "The Great Adventure," and "Owen Marshall," again playing the strong matriarchal heroine. In her later years, she appeared with Billy Graham's Crusades. In 1977, Waters died at age 80.

Dorothy Dandridge: apotheosis of the mulatto

Dorothy Dandridge was the second of the black stars. Before the apathetic Eisenhower age ended, she had infused it with her great intensity and risen as its most successful black leading lady. For a period that prided itself on appearances, hers was a startling presence. She was a great beauty. Her eyes were dark and vibrant, her hair long and silky, her features sharply defined. And she had the rich golden skin tone that had always fascinated movie audiences, black and white. Moreover, she was a distinctive personality, schizophrenic, maddening, euphoric, and self-destructive. Before her Nina Mae McKinney had displayed uncontrolled raunchiness. Fredi Washington had symbolized intellectualized despair, and Lena Horne had acquired a large following through her reserve and middle-class aloofness. On occasion, Dorothy Dandridge exhibited all the characteristics of her screen predecessors, but most important to her appeal was her fragility and her desperate determination to survive. In a way never before demonstrated by a black personality, she used her own incongruities and self-contradictions to capture and extend the mass imagination. Her life and career were vigorously reported on by the white and black press. At times she seemed to bask in her own publicity, and it was obvious that she took pains to create an image, to package it, and then to market it for mass consumption.

The irony that overshadowed Dorothy Dandridge's career was that although the image she marketed appeared to be contemporary and daring, at heart it was based on an old and classic type, the tragic mulatto. In her important films Dorothy Dandridge portrayed doomed, unfulfilled women. Nervous and vulnerable, they always battled with the duality of their personalities. As such, they answered the demands of their times. Dorothy Dandridge's characters brought to a dispirited nuclear age a razor-sharp sense of desperation that cut through the bleak monotony of the day. Eventually—and here lay the final irony—she may have been forced to live out a screen image that destroyed her.

Dorothy Dandridge came to films after a lengthy and arduous career as a stage entertainer. The daughter of a Cleveland minister and a comedienne-actress named Ruby, she performed as a child with her older sister Vivian in a vaudeville act billed as "The Wonder Kids." At fifteen she and Vivian along with another black girl appeared as the Dandridge Sisters, touring the country with the Jimmy Lunceford band. At sixteen, Dorothy Dandridge performed at the Cotton Club, where she met Harold Nicholas of the dancing Nicholas Brothers. She married him and bore him a daughter. Later the pair divorced. Throughout the 1940s, she worked in nightclubs as well as in a string of films such as *Lady from Louisiana* (1941), *Bahama Passage* (1942), *Drums of the Congo* (1942), *Ebony Parade*, and *The Hit Parade of 1943*.

In the early 1950s, a trio of low-budget movies in which she played "good girl" roles served as springboards for Dorothy Dandridge's rise. The first, *Tarzan's Peril* (1951), was typical jungle fare with one twist. In a crucial episode, Dandridge, as a kidnaped African princess, was tied to the stakes by a warlike tribal leader. As she lay with legs sprawled apart, heaving and turning to break loose, it was apparent that never before had the black woman been so erotically and obviously used as a sex object. From the way Lex Barker's Tarzan eyed the sumptuous Dandridge, it was obvious, too, that for once Tarzan's mind was not on Jane or Boy or Cheetah!

In Columbia's *The Harlem Globetrotters* (1951), Dandridge was cast as a sympathetic young wife trying to keep a decent husband from going bad. She had little more to do than look lovely. MGM's 1953 all-black *Bright Road*, followed, giving Dorothy Dandridge her first starring role. As a grade-school teacher working to reach an unhappy wayward student, she was cast opposite child actor Philip Hepburn and a shy newcomer named Harry Belafonte. Here she revealed a soft, radiant, melancholic quality. "Her work in MGM's *See How They Run* [the title was changed upon release] projects sultry Dorothy Dandridge into the enviable role of Hollywood's No. 1 female star," wrote *Ebony*. *Life* magazine also ran a special article on the film, spotlighting its leading lady. Thus by 1953, the momentum for Dandridge's career was well under way. Had she continued playing such nice-girl roles, her career might have been entirely lackluster. But Dorothy Dandridge learned early that there were better things ahead on the other side of virtue.

Carmen Jones was the celebrated movie that established her as the definitive tragic mulatto. It also contains the definitive Dandridge mulatto performance. The legend of how director Otto Preminger first decided to cast Dandridge for the lead in his film reads like a press agent's dream tale, but it appears to be true. Initially, Preminger had thought her too sleek and sophisticated for the role of a whore. But he underestimated the talent and determination of the actress. When it appeared as if she had lost the role altogether, Dorothy Dandridge completely redid her appearance and style. She taught herself a Southern dialect. She mastered wildly uninhibited body movements. She shrewdly exploited her own nervous tension. With her new image perfected, she tossed her hair about her head, made up her eyes darkly, dressed herself in a sheer low-cut blouse and a long, tight skirt, and then audaciously strutted into Preminger's office. Vivacious, sportive, alluring yet somehow haunted and vulnerable, Dorothy Dandridge was the living embodiment of the director's Carmen. The role was given to her.

Carmen Jones, released in 1954, was the 1950s' most lavish, most publicized, and most successful all-black spectacle. If audiences truly yearned for relief from the tedium and routine of their lives, surely this was perfect pop entertainment. Based on Bizet's comic-strip opera *Carmen*, it cleverly transformed the opera's colorful Spanish cigarette girl into Carmen Jones, a sexy black factory worker in the South. Her foil is a Good Colored Boy, Joe, portrayed by Harry Belafonte. Carmen lures him into deserting the army, goes with him to a sleazy Chicago hotel where they evade the law, then deserts him for a prize fighter, and finally is strangled by him for her unfaithfulness.

The plot and the characters of *Carmen Jones* were pop creations, and the film relied on the stock situations: hair-pulling fights between black females, the inevitable barroom brawl, the exaggerated dialects, the animalistic passions and furies of the leads. Old-style *kitsch*, it was made impressive nonetheless by its director's exuberant style and its cast's great élan. Everyone seemed to be there to have a good time. Diahann Carroll had a small decorative

role as one of Carmen's good-time girl friends. Olga James portrayed the submissive Cindy Lou. Brock Peters snarled gloriously as the villainous Sergeant Brown. Joe Adams as prize fighter Husky Miller was such an overtly sexual performer that audiences could understand why he never went far in films. White audiences still found sexually assertive black males hard to accept. Pearl Bailey was an open delight as she belted out a rousing "Beat Out That Rhythm on a Drum." But Dandridge's Carmen dominated the production. On the one hand, cool, calculating, and perfectly confident, on the other, reckless and insecure, she is animalistic and elemental. When pursued by Belafonte, she kicks, she screams, she claws, she bites, and at one point, she crawls on all fours. Belafonte must tie her hands and feet to prevent her from escaping. Here again Dorothy Dandridge was the jungle queen tied to the stakes. But her performance was curiously detached. Certainly, audiences knew that here was a woman who was acting. But the sheer theatricality, the relish she poured into her role, made audiences forget the incongruities of the plot and instead delight in Preminger's black fairy tale and this extravagant, high-strung bumblebee. "Looka here, baby," she seemed to say, "it ain't real, but I am!"

"The range between the two parts [*Carmen Jones* and *Bright Road*] suggests that she is one of the outstanding dramatic actresses of the screen," wrote *Newsweek*. "Of all the divas of grand opera—from Emma Calvé of the 90s to Risë Stevens—who have decorated the title role of *Carmen* and have in turn been made famous by it, none was ever so decorative or will reach nationwide fame so quickly as the sultry young lady . . . on *Life*'s cover this week," wrote the editors of *Life* when Dorothy Dandridge became the first black ever to grace its cover.

Carmen Jones made Dandridge a star. Her performance earned her an Oscar nomination as best actress of the year. Although she lost the award to Grace Kelly, no black performer had ever before been nominated for a leading actor award. (Hattie McDaniel's award and Ethel Waters' nomination were for best supporting actress.) Afterward the first rushing whirl of publicity closed in on her. *Paris-Match* and *Ebony* ran cover stories on her. A score of other publications, from *Time* to *Confidential*, carried feature articles about her. Dorothy Dandridge was reported on, probed, studied, dissected, discussed, scrutinized, and surveyed. There were incredible rumors and stories about her that yet live on in Hollywood, tales about her retarded daughter, her "hidden" son, her white father, and, in keeping with the image gradually growing about her, of her white lovers. She was said to be involved with everyone in Hollywood from Tyrone Power to Otto Preminger to Peter Lawford to Michael Rennie to Abby Mann to Arthur Loew, Jr. What with the publicity and gossip, Dorothy Dandridge now seemed a star of the first magnitude.

But despite the great fanfare and recognition after her triumph in 1954, Dorothy Dandridge sadly discovered there was no place for her to go. Bigotry and bias still had their place in Hollywood. Very few film offers came her way. Those that did were little more than variations on Carmen. Always she was to be cast as exotic, self-destructive women.

Just such a character was Dandridge's Margot in Robert Rossen's *Island in the Sun* (1957). Here she was cast in the first of her interracial-love roles. Today some might think it totally unimportant that Dorothy Dandridge was the first black woman ever to be held in the arms of a white man in an American movie. Yet, because she was permitted to bring integrated love to the mass audience in an age about to erupt in chaos over the issue of integration, she remains a socially significant figure in this film. It was a testament to her importance as a star that Twentieth Century-Fox risked featuring her opposite white actor John Justin. But, significant as the move was, *Island in the Sun* was marred by compromises. Even its producer,

Darryl F. Zanuck, has admitted not liking the finished film because of them. Because of its theme of miscegenation, *Island in the Sun* was controversial even during the shooting. Before its release, some theater owners (mostly Southern) threatened to boycott it. The South Carolina legislature even considered passing a bill to fine any movie house that showed the film $5000. That bill was never passed, but the threats had their effect. Cautious steps were taken to avoid too much controversy. In the movie, Dandridge and Justin held hands and danced together, but little else happened. "The one scene I objected to seriously was the one in the summerhouse where John confesses his love for me," Dandridge later said. "We had to fight to say the word *love*." In the summerhouse scene, Dandridge's Margot seemed tense when asked about her background. Audiences associated that nervousness with the character rather than the actress. As patrons watched Dandridge and Justin dance together, surely they thought how lovely the pair looked and how happy they could have been if only the jittery beauty weren't *colored*. She had everything else going for her! Surprisingly as controversial as some thought the miscegenation theme to be, it attracted movie audiences. *Island in the Sun* was made for $2,250,000 and grossed $8 million.

That same audience reaction, however—pity for the poor racially "tainted" beauty on screen—seemed built into the subsequent Dandridge films *The Decks Ran Red* (1958), *Tamango* (1957), and *Malaga* (1960). The latter two were filmed abroad.

Like Paul Robeson, Dorothy Dandridge fled this country, hoping to find in Europe an opportunity to play diversified, untyped characters. But she too encountered only disillusionment and repeated compromises.

Tamango cast her a mulatto slave loved by a white ship captain (Curt Jurgens). Two versions, one French, the other English, of all the love scenes were filmed. Then because of the interracial love theme no major American company would distribute the picture, and it failed. *The Decks Ran Red* fared a little better. In this tempestuous tale of a ship mutiny, Dandridge was surrounded by a trio of handsome white actors, James Mason, Stuart Whitman, and Broderick Crawford. As all three furtively undressed her with their eyes, it was apparent that had she not been black she would have ended up in the arms of one or the other before the picture's conclusion. In *Malaga*, Edmund Purdom and Trevor Howard were her leading men. As a woman torn between two loves, Dandridge was peculiarly remote and melancholy. So immersed was she in despondency that her performance at times seemed separate from the rest of the movie. Here Dandridge was fully stripped of the fire and passion that dominated her Carmen. Instead she appeared at her most vulnerable. What weighed her down was not so much her character's dejection as her own. "No one knew what her nationality was to be in the picture," her manager, Earl Mills, later reported. "The problem as to whether Trevor Howard should kiss her on the screen was called ridiculous. This was Dorothy's most frustrating acting experience by far."

Curiously, the important aspect of these three European movies (as well as *Island in the Sun*) was that Dandridge was bringing her own personal disappointments and frustrations to her characters. Audiences responded to the sadness on screen as an outside force. Perhaps they told themselves that the reason Dorothy Dandridge—this exquisite black love goddess—was unfulfilled was because of that drop of Negro blood. It was wrecking her chances for fulfillment. And indeed, for Dorothy Dandridge, on screen and off, in the mass imagination, the tragic flaw was her color.

Dandridge's last important American film was *Porgy and Bess* in 1959. As Catfish Row's torrid Bess, she put her star qualities on brilliant display. Designer Irene Sharaff's long tight skirt and dark wide-brim hat made Dandridge a stunning creation. As she walked through the theatrical sets of the film, she was Dorothy Dandridge. Even star performers Pearl Bailey and Sammy Davis, Jr., failed to take the screen from her. Costar Sidney Poitier was literally dwarfed. Again Dandridge portrayed the woman at odds with society, again the Bad Black Girl trying to go right, again the tragic heroine who ends up leaving the good Porgy to wander up No'th to Harlem with Sportin' Life. Dandridge gave a highly unusual interpretation of Bess, a less obviously sexual woman (she refuses to play Bess as a whore), a far more haunting one. The performance won her a Foreign Press Golden Globe Award nomination as best actress in a musical.

The rest of Dorothy Dandridge's career was a sad story. She appeared in but two more pictures. Producers and directors seemed unable to think of her in any terms but that of the exotic, doomed mulatto, and already by the late 1950s and early 1960s the mulatto figure was dated. There was talk of starring her in *Cleopatra*, but the plans fell through. Off-screen she was beset by a number of personal conflicts. In many respects, she epitomized the confused, unsatisfied movie star dominated by the publicity and life style that informed her screen image. She was openly seen with white actors. And the stories circulated that she was attracted to white men only. On the set of one film in which she worked opposite a very dark black actor, she underwent a minor trauma, it was said, because she did not want his black hands to touch her. In the late 1950s her marriage to the silver-haired white restaurateur Jack Denison seemed to confirm suspicions that Dorothy Dandridge had fallen victim to acting out her screen life in private. In 1962 her troubles were heightened when after her divorce from Denison she found herself bankrupt. There were no movie jobs, few club offers, and only occasional television appearances. Dorothy Dandridge found herself a has-been, an anachronism unwanted in a new Hollywood. Slowly, it was rumored, she drifted into alcohol, pills, and self-destructive love affairs. Then in 1965, at the age of forty-two, Dorothy Dandridge was found dead, the victim of an overdose of anti-depression pills. In the end, Dorothy Dandridge lived out and apotheosized the role she was always best at, the doomed tragic mulatto, trapped, so the film industry believed, because of her color.

Sidney Poitier: hero for an integrationist age

Sidney Poitier was the 1950s' third black star. His career proved more substantial, professionally and personally, than those of his predecessors. Poitier came to the movies almost accidently. Born in Nassau in 1927, the youngest of eight children, he had lived in Miami before coming to New York in the 1940s. With no thought of a film career, he worked in New York at odd jobs as a dockhand, dishwasher, chicken plucker, and bus boy. One day while thumbing through the *The New York Times*, he stumbled on an ad for actors at the American Negro Theater. He auditioned—with disastrous results. But soon he became determined to be a successful actor. After minor stage roles and some road tours, Sidney Poitier came to films and just about took over.

Poitier's ascension to stardom in the mid-1950s was no accident. There were three important reasons why he succeeded and won an audience at a time when other black actors such as Hernandez and Edwards were losing out. Foremost was the fact that in this integrationist age Poitier was the model integrationist hero. In all his films he was educated and intelligent. He spoke proper English, dressed conservatively, and had the best of table

manners. For the mass white audience, Sidney Poitier was a black man who had met their standards. His characters were tame; never did they act impulsively, nor were they threats to the system. They were amenable and pliant. And finally they were non-funky, almost sexless and sterile. In short, they were the perfect dream for white liberals anxious to have a colored man in for lunch or dinner.

Poitier was also acceptable for black audiences. He was the paragon of black middle-class values and virtues. American Negroes were still migrating north and were gradually increasing their political power. The rising middle classes and the power (limited as it might have seemed) of their money supported Poitier. Black America was still trying to meet white standards and ape white manners, and he became a hero for their cause. He was neither crude nor loud, and, most important, he did not carry any ghetto cultural baggage with him. No dialect. No shuffling. No African cultural past. And he was almost totally devoid of rhythm. In short, he was the complete antithesis of all the black buffoons who had appeared before in American movies. This was one smart and refined young Negro, and middle-class America, both black and white, treasured him.

But the second reason for Poitier's ascension was that in many respects his characters were still the old type that America had always cherished. They were mild-mannered toms, throwbacks to the humanized Christian servants of the 1930s. When insulted or badgered, the Poitier character stood by and took it. He knew the white world meant him no real harm. He differed from the old servants only in that he was governed by a code of decency, duty, and moral intelligence. There were times in his films when he screamed out in rage at the injustices of a racist white society. But reason always dictated his actions, along with love for his fellow man. Most important, he did not use his goodness only as a means of saving a position. Past good Negroes in the movies, notably Bill Robinson, were usually concerned about pleasing the master in order not to be booted out of the Big House. But Poitier did not care about the Big House. Nor did his goodness issue from some blind spot of Christian faith (as with his screen "mother" Louise Beavers.) He acted as he did because an overriding intelligence demanded that his characters be humane.

Finally, Poitier became a star because of his talent. He may have played the old tom dressed up with modern intelligence and reason, but he dignified the figure. Always on display was the actor's sensitivity and strength. One can trace in all the Poitier features of the 1950s the qualities that made him a national favorite. Interestingly, the evolution of the Poitier screen personality was swift. In his first film, *No Way Out* (1950), audiences saw all the qualities that would make Poitier characters so "laudable" for the rest of the decade.

Joseph Mankiewicz's *No Way Out* launched not only Poitier's career but the cycle of problem pictures in the 1950s. Literate and sophisticated, the movie spotlighted the race riots that had broken out after World War II, at the same time presenting a sensitive portrait of the educated Negro. The plot centers on a young Negro doctor, Luther Brooks, at a large metropolitan hospital. When two white hoodlums are wounded during an attempted robbery, Brooks tends the pair. One of the men dies. The other then accuses Brooks of murder. Thereafter the young doctor is embroiled in controversy, and he fights to prove his innocence. When the remaining white hoodlum organizes a group of racist friends to attack the ghetto area, the city verges on a major race riot. By a lucky stroke of Hollywood imagination, Brooks proves his innocence through an autopsy, and equilibrium returns to the city.

With its crisp and quick-witted dialogue, *No Way Out* to some degree captured the mood of postwar America and summed up its repressed racial hostilities. Likewise its Negro

characters were walking exponents of the postwar black doctrines of racial integration and *overprove*. "You got 'em. All A's," the doctor's wife tells him. "No wonder you're tired. Even I'm a little tired. Cleaning up after parties. Eating leftovers. One day off a week to be with my husband. To be a woman. . . . We've been a long time getting here. We're tired, but we're here, honey. We can be happy. We've got a right to be."

No Way Out garnered critical praise. *The New York Times* called it "a harsh, outspoken picture with implications that will keep you thinking about it long after leaving the theater." But strong, original, and honestly stated as the movie was, it failed to win a large audience. The public was already weary of the Negro-struggle film, perhaps because the struggles of previous cinematic Negroes such as the mulattoes Pinky and Carter had been so hokey and superficial. From its advertising campaign, *No Way Out* must have seemed only one more in the lot.

What distinguished the picture was Sidney Poitier. As Brooks, he had the archetypal modern integrationist tom role. He was a brilliant young doctor whose achievements—the all A's, the correct diagnosis—summed up the equal-by-being-superior philosophy. He was handsome. He stood straight, spoke well, and never trod on anybody's toes. He was a man who could be reasoned with. He and his wife represented the average middle-class black aspirants trying to make it. But he never made a move against the dominant white culture. Instead he nourished it. In one scene, after having been shot by the white hoodlum, Poitier struggles to save that man's life. In a purely Christian way, he forgives his opponent, saying: "Don't you think I'd like to put the rest of these bullets through his head? I can't . . . because I've got to live too. . . . He's sick. . . . He's crazy . . . but I can't kill a man just because he hates me." What red-blooded all-American white audiences in this Eisenhower age of normalcy could not have liked this self-sacrificing, all-giving black man? What integrationist-aspiring black audience would not be proud of this model of black respectability? Poitier was clearly a man for all races.

When one thinks of how much of Luther Brooks was to remain with actor Poitier, he is tempted to ask if scriptwriters Mankiewicz and Lesser Samuels should not be credited with creating the most important black actor in the history of American motion pictures. Obviously, what they did create was the character, the screen persona that Poitier was to popularize and capitalize on. In the early days, Poitier no more molded his image than did Stepin Fetchit; he lived out Hollywood's fantasies of the American black man.

The actor's second film was Zoltan Korda's 1952 adaptation of Alan Paton's South African drama, *Cry, the Beloved Country*. The feature starred Canada Lee as an old village priest journeying to Johannesburg in search of a son gone astray. In the city, where he is saddened by the poverty and filth and bewildered by the racism, he is aided in his search by a young priest played by Poitier. The movie made an ultimate plea for racial harmony and conciliation. Canada Lee had the finest role of his career. Poitier was a supporting player, but he brought good humor and a relaxed gregariousness to his priest. Moreover, the young Poitier was there to help a battered old man no one else in Johannesburg had the time for, and the humanity of his character (in keeping with his heroic code) merely added to the momentum of his career.

His next two films, *Red Ball Express* (1952) with Jeff Chandler and *Go, Man, Go* (1953) with the Harlem Globetrotters, cast Poitier in conventional bland supporting roles. *Red Ball Express*, a military adventure tale, did provide audiences with glimpses of one of Poitier's great prerogatives as a postwar freed black man, the emotional explosion. "Look, *boy*, where I come from you don't give orders. You take 'em," a racist soldier shouts when Poitier asks for a cup

of coffee. But Poitier jumps upon him with passion and regains any lost dignity. Young black audiences loved him for it. Here at long last was a sane black man, free and strong enough to shout back to whitey.

Shouting back was very much a part of *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955). In this harrowing exposé of American high schools Poitier was costarred with Glenn Ford, Anne Francis, and Vic Morrow. He portrays Gregory Miller, an intelligent, complex student who fears that in the outside world there will be no place for a second-class citizen to take the lead. He hounds and torments white teacher Ford, who represents the oppressive system. He snarls, acts tough, and displays his virility more effectively than in any other film. "Come on! Go ahead! Hit me!" he yells to Ford. Here the disaffiliated young of the 1950s saw a man with a choice. He didn't have to take anything. Even before it was fashionable, he was bucking the corroding system. Yet at the same time, Poitier's Miller was an easily hurt, sensitive young man forced to live outside society. He was the classic loner of the 1950s, much like Marlon Brando and James Dean. And young audiences understood his loneliness, his confusion, and his entrapment because it was a comment on their own in the Eisenhower age. At *The Blackboard Jungle*'s conclusion, when he aids teacher Ford against a student with a switchblade, some of his earlier impact is diminished, but his code of decency is reaffirmed, and Poitier's Miller becomes a hero for young and old.

During the next four years Sidney Poitier worked in six motion pictures. In *Something of Value* (1957), with Rock Hudson, *Band of Angels* (1957), with Clark Gable and Yvonne De Carlo, and *The Mark of the Hawk* (1958) with Eartha Kitt and Juano Hernandez, he was an unlikely amalgam of *The Blackboard Jungle*'s Gregory Miller and *No Way Out*'s Luther Brooks. Sullen, angry, quick-tempered, and headstrong, he rebelled in many of these films, occasionally playing a modernized version of the black brute. (In the movies, most black men politically militant or merely politically motivated are simplified by the scenarists into the unreasonable, animalistic brutes of old.) But always, as if to save Poitier's image and the scriptwriter's white supremacist neck, the features concluded with Poitier's goodness and humanity reasserted, and once more audiences discovered him to be on the side of the angels. In this four-year period, the archetypal Poitier roles—the two that remain among the finest in his gallery of characters—were as Tommy Tyler in *Edge of the City* (1957) and as Noah Cullen in *The Defiant Ones* (1958).

The David Susskind–Martin Ritt production *Edge of the City* was an adaptation by Robert Alan Aurthur of his own television drama "A Man Is Ten Feet Tall," in which Poitier had already appeared. The story is about two men, a white and a black. In a true gesture of integrationist harmony, railroad worker Tommy Tyler befriends a wayward and confused army deserter (John Cassavetes). The story has a twist because for once it was the black man extending his hand to the white. Poitier helps the white man find a job, and then as his greatest manifestation of friendship invites him home to meet his wife (Ruby Dee) and have dinner. A Christlike figure, he stands for conscience and humaneness. But he is destroyed by his kindness and loyalty. During an argument with a fellow white worker in which Poitier defends Cassavetes, a fight breaks out. Poitier is winning. But he begs his white opponent to quit. When he turns to walk away, the white man stabs him in the back. Poitier dies in Cassavetes' arms.

Poitier's role won him great favor with the critics. *The New York Herald Tribune* called his black man one of deceptive simplicity. "With his quick smile and exhilarating talk," wrote the reviewer, "he can cajole the boy out of deep gloom. With a joke he can stop an ugly fight

before it begins. But underneath he is a man of serious faith and deep strength, and when it's time for him to listen sympathetically or to say something important, he is the finest kind of friend." After *Edge of the City*, no moviegoer in America had any doubts about Poitier's talents. Nor did any fail to see what he represented. He was fast becoming a national symbol of brotherly love.

Oddly, when viewed today, the incongruities and disparities ignored by the audience of 1957 are blatantly apparent. Poitier's character falls into the tradition of the dying slave content that he has well served the massa. His loyalty to the white Cassavetes destroys him just as much as the old slave's steadfastness kept him in shackles. In this case, writer Aurthur smooths over the black man's death by having the white Cassavetes hunt down the killer.

Curiously, *Edge of the City* also revealed Sidney Poitier as a colorless black. So immersed is he in white standards that there is little ethnic juice in his blood. The dinner scene between Poitier, his wife, and their white friends is not an interracial summit meeting because there are no cultural gaps. Nor are there any cultural bridges to cross. All four are decent American citizens. Poitier also seems sexless in this movie. In previous features, scriptwriters were sure to keep Poitier's sexuality well hidden. He seldom had a serious movie romance. In those films in which he was married, it was generally to a sweet homebody type who seemed devoid of sexual passion. Mildred Jones Smith played this part in *No Way Out*. In *Edge of the City* it was Ruby Dee. She now remains the model movie mate for Poitier. (They have appeared in five films together.) An intense and talented actress, Ruby Dee is known for deft performances as unfulfilled, timid, troubled women. Certainly in *Edge of the City*, as she smiles sweetly at Poitier or proves how understanding and sensitive she is, audiences must have found the two a well-scrubbed sexless pair. One can understand why later militant patrons would view them both as sterile products of a decadent, materialistic Western culture. It should be noted that in one of their next films together, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961), they effectively portrayed a couple with bedroom blues. Poitier's romantic apathy just about drives Dee up the wall in this film, and it is one reason why she wants to abort their expected child.

In the 1960s, Sidney Poitier's sexual neutralization became embarrassingly apparent, particularly when Hollywood provided romantic interest for him, albeit in a compromised manner. In *The Long Ships* (1964), when as a villainous Moor he kidnaps a beautiful white woman, he has been made to take a year's vow of celibacy. Therefore Poitier's sexual impulses remain safely suppressed. In *A Patch of Blue* (1965) he has a brief screen kiss with a blind white girl (Elizabeth Hartman). Everyone knows there is a romance developing between the two, but at the movie's end, rather than assert himself and bed the girl, he dutifully ships her off to a school for the blind. And in the notorious *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) he wins the hand of a white girl in marriage, but they are a peculiarly unromantic couple who are seen kissing but once in the film, and the audience views this passionate event through a cabdriver's rear-view mirror. Later, in *They Call Me MISTER Tibbs* (1970), Poitier was finally cast opposite a vibrant, overtly sexual black woman, Barbara McNair. But audiences were openly baffled at seeing this beauty made up (with hair neatly groomed and clothes nicely dull and "tasteful") to look like Ruby Dee! Poitier's sexuality was still a problem for Hollywood moviemakers, and the attempts to keep him cool were so obvious that he seemed ludicrous. In the 1950s, however, audiences accepted the neutrality and rather respected him for it.

The Defiant Ones was Sidney Poitier's most important film of the decade. In it he played Noah Cullen, a black convict handcuffed to a white (Tony Curtis) as the two escape the law. Neither man likes the other. But before the picture

developed. For, once they have been unchained, the good Poitier comes to the rescue of Curtis, not out of necessity but out of brotherly love. Again he sacrifices himself, this time not with his death but his freedom, all for the sake of his white friend. In this film, one of his biggest hits, Poitier alienated a certain segment of the audience. When he saved his honky brother, he was jeered at in ghetto theaters. Black audiences were consciously aware for the first time of the great tomism inherent in the Poitier character, indeed in the Poitier image. Stanley Kramer's drama had glossed over the real issues and bleached out its black hero. Yet to Poitier's credit, his power as an actor demanded that the role and the film be taken seriously, and the jeers were somewhat muffled when he received an Oscar nomination for best actor of the year.

Porgy and Bess was Poitier's last film of the 1950s. The movie portrayed blacks as the singing, dancing, clowning darkies of old. Poitier accepted the role of Porgy only after much pressuring, and, although his performance was engaging, he seemed out of place. Here it was 1959. There was Martin Luther King. There were sit-ins, demonstrations, and boycotts. And what was America's black idol doing? There he stood singing, "I got plenty of nothin', and nothin's plenty for me."

In retrospect, it can be said that all the Poitier films of the 1950s were important and significant. Because they were all made to please a mass white audience at a time when the main topic of conversation was school desegregation, today their messages may seem rigged or naïve. But they retain a certain raw-edged bite and vigor. Audiences still respond to the actor's sophistication and charm, to his range and distinctly heroic quality. In the 1960s, Hollywood belittled and dehumanized Poitier's great human spirit by making it vulgarly superhuman. He became SuperSidney the Superstar, and he was depicted as too faithful a servant, the famous Poitier code then a mask for bourgeois complacency and sterility. But in the 1950s his work shone brightly. For black and white Americans he was a marvelous reason for going to the movies. And whether an integrationist or a separatist age likes it or not, Sidney Poitier's movie characters in the 1950s singlehandedly made audiences believe things would work out, that they were worth working out. It was still just a beautiful dream, but often that's what great movies and careers are all about.

14 In Praise of Character Actors

RUDOLF ARNHEIM

The players in our films can be divided at first glance into two categories, as we would say in a German school composition: leading actors and character actors. The character actors' acting surrounds that of the heroes like a baroque frame surrounds a renaissance painting. The fat uncle with a monkey and travelling blanket, the skinny piano teacher with a bun and pince-nez, the decrepit mayor, the hunchbacked inventor, the Galician profiteer, the bloated ship's cook—these are the character actors. They lend spice to the film. Sweetness and beauty, though, we get from people of a different type and a higher pay scale: neatly combed and freshly washed, the lovers romp around the inner circle of the plot.

"Character," according to *Meyer's Universal Encyclopedia* is to be understood as an exaggerated and caricaturized element of art. On the contrary, we would like to propose that the character actor shows man as he is; the heroic actor shows man as he would like to be. The character actor is a special type, the heroic actor a general type. The character wears the individual aura of the genuine, and this starts with his clothing. From the iron cravat to the laced boots, from the coiled coiffure to the tooth on the watch fob, the character actor's costume offers up a complete, highly disparate collection of the curiosities of human apparel. The leading actor's garb presents us with schematic standard types: tuxedo and evening dress, bathing suit and pyjamas—flawless models that dare not bear the physiognomical imprint of their wearer's uniqueness. One spot on the vest, a lost button on the trousers—highly recognized means of distinguishing the character actor—would cause the hero to give the studio hairdresser a tongue-lashing and provoke the public to unseemly laughter. The character actor is by request unshaven, freckled, cross-eyed, has wrinkles on his neck, dirty fingernails, and missing teeth. Hero and heroine, on the other hand, are bathed in lily's milk, and a pimple on the chin can destroy entire days of shooting.

The acting displays the same differences as the make-up. The character actor swallows the wrong way or swallows his words, he scratches his head, he slips, he licks a stamp, he kisses someone on both cheeks with a smack. The lead actors fall into each other's arms like dancers, they glide up and down stairways, they turn their heads graciously from the *en face* view to the clear profile, they lift their shapely hands, they spread their arms, and their facial expressions show a charming symmetry even in intense pain.

Both stylize; otherwise, they wouldn't be actors. But the character actor's models exist in reality, the hero's only in the pictorial advertisements of the cosmetic industry. The hero is

the "man without qualities." Of necessity he possesses a sex and an age, but this exhausts his personal traits. One can confuse lead actors, never character actors. Whether a female lead role is played by Lilian Harvey, Marianne Winkelstern, Renate Mueller, Kaethe von Nagy, Mady Christians, Maria Paudler, or Liane Haid, whether the lover is played by Froehlich, Brausewetter, Liedtke, Stuewe, Verebes, Lederer, or Trevor, only the slightest nuances and the contracts which have been coincidentally drawn up differentiate them. How, though, could we ever confuse Gerron with Junkermann, Sandrock with Wangel, Bressart with Rasp, Puffy with Arno? This is not to belittle the acting talents of the leading players, but only the way in which they are used. The character actor's individuality is often emphasized to the point of unbearability, so that he bears more resemblance to a prehistoric amphibian than a respectable contemporary man with a right to vote and a five-room apartment—the leading player's uniqueness is filed down so forcibly that such different and unique actresses as Harvey and Sten cannot be told apart under the same ship officer's cap and after the same application of makeup.

Even average directors have the most charming notions so long as they're working with character actors. They cleverly use original props and work on the most effective mannerisms of facial expression, speech, and gesture. The leading player they mold into a mannequin, forbid him everything impulsive, everything new, everything mundane. His sorrow and his pain must submit to the conventional gymnastics, and, just as in court, nothing may be added and nothing withheld.

What must be demanded of practical directorial work is the penetration of the character actor's methods into the hero's territory. The great success of Hans Albers is due in significant part to the fact that he works in this manner. He plays the hero, the lover, but at the same time he acts like a normal person, like a character actor. He yawns, he makes faces, he doesn't behave himself. Not that we're recommending bad behavior for bon vivants here. But how much liveliness, how much direct contact to the public would be gained if we got away from the childish prejudice that lovers must be on their high horses just because their enlargements appear in the advertisements. The actors would breathe sighs of relief, they would be more interested in what they're doing, and they would have more opportunity to demonstrate their individuality. We should allow ourselves to let the lead player act, without pressure being put on him regarding his costume, make-up and acting—just as individually, just as mundanely, and inflicted with just as many tragic flaws as the character actors. We should let ourselves be convinced that wrinkled trousers are thoroughly reconcilable with a love scene, and that a young hero can blow his nose upon learning of his mother's death over the telephone. If we dare it, it will immediately be apparent what a wealth of untapped possibilities lie hidden here, and what charming warmth and naturalness remain to be drawn out of the simplest plot motif.

Let us dethrone the studios' values and take a look around outside, and we will be astonished to see that in this, our real world, there aren't any leading men to be seen, only characters!

15 The Lives of Supporting Players

DAVID THOMSON

Let us wonder for a moment whether we have a shared understanding of what a character actor is. A character actor plays someone who is not at the heart of a film, or, if at the center, not someone whose decisions are the crux of the drama? Thus, Walter Brennan is a character actor in *Red River*, the narrator (either on the page or on the sound track), its observer, but not a protagonist. Walter Brennan's Groot does very little in *Red River* except toss knives or feed lines into the plot when required. He is a fond witness, a model for us. Moreover, he lets the film make fun of his false teeth: stars are edgy about such scenes.

But a character actor is not obliged to appear all through a film. He or she may need only a few moments; perhaps one drop-dead scene will do. There is not a lot of Lee Strasberg's Hyman Roth in *The Godfather, Part* II, just a weary, fragile man watching the football game on TV in Miami, and the old fellow surprised and briefly delighted by being met at the airport.

When Oscar time comes round, these people are known as "supporting players." The edifice of a picture has stars for spires, and such as Walter Brennan, Thelma Ritter, M. Emmet Walsh and Stockard Channing are their loyal, sturdy and obedient buttresses. Aren't they? Except who ever met a supporting actor who didn't serve in the belief and expectation that they could and would, and also should, be a star? Every Harry Dean Stanton has his *Paris, Texas*, or deserves it. Just by virtue of their color, eccentricity, vivacity *and* fidelity, don't our most beloved character actors suggest a logic, or a passion, in which their characters are at least as important as any others on view?

May I ask a question? How many of you readers are, in life, merely the subsidiary/supports for others? How many of you, on the other hand, are the centers of your known world? You don't have to be as assertive as Buddy Love in *The Nutty Professor*. Tactful preeminence is in order. Still, aren't *we* the subject? And in those cases where, as yet, owing entirely to unruly circumstances, our centrality has not yet been fully acknowledged, how great is the need, the hurt, the anger and the energy that build because of obscurity?

Put it another way: in the horizon of life that surrounds *The Maltese Falcon*, does Sydney Greenstreet's Casper Gutman really believe that the morose, blunt Sam Spade is at the center of things? Doesn't Sam go back to bitter sleep when the story is over? Whereas Gutman has a mission, a calling, a veritable El Dorado—Oh yes, sir! you can hear him hiss. Despite his bulk he is a driven soul, burning with quest for the falcon, and exercising that unspent, coiled rapture in droll, serpentine conversation. As John Huston found, it was very hard to put

Gutman in a composition and not have him take the eye. He is, you see, the shining idealist in the film. He is full of hope, love, need and desire—and desire is always beautiful in the movies, for it reminds us of ourselves.

So, where are we in our definition? Character actors play roles of considerable importance in pictures, yet not the biggest. And just because the action seems to employ them in the service of the gods, they may sometimes thrive, flower and linger in our memories more than the stars. Is it just because they have character? But if they have the character, then what is left for those weightier actors, the alleged stars? What could there be beyond character, except some inane, ghostly glamour that we have come to worship? What does it say about our films, and ourselves, if we put anything so mysterious, so phantom, ahead of character?

There are many practical, professional differences between characters and stars that may help us appreciate the mixture of nature and myth in our movies. The matter of composition is no small matter. Stars live through close-ups; it is there that they exist, radiate and preside. Character actors do sometimes get close-ups, but only so that their characters may explain, lie, listen, threaten, make jokes, go mad or be the kind of small, vain fusspot not worthy to 'rule over films.' Stars sometimes just wait, reflect and dwell in themselves in close-ups. Character actors never get that time: they have to be busy; that engine once known as story has to earn their time and intimacy. (We may love character actors because their scenes tend to tell the story—as opposed to suffering from it.)

It follows that character actors do not get the same kind of light. They do not have stand-ins, and so their lighting is arranged quickly; it is done so that they may be visible, not emotional or atmospheric. More or less, for 50 years, character actors had the same lighting: it was on. Thus, they do not look as good as stars—but, the system says, they never did; that's why they are character actors, not stars, with fat, scars, lines and quirks to prove it. They are the system's conciliatory gesture to the unlovely masses; they are meant to be like us. So we should defend them and urge them to keep the faith with flaw and defect. Sydney Greenstreet would have been ill-advised to lose 150 pounds. Wasn't it dieting that killed Laird Cregar? If Thelma Ritter had woken up one morning looking like Gene Tierney she'd have been lost. For no one could ever have endured a Tierney who could think and talk, and who wasn't endlessly pliant to male dreams and wishes. (That still goes on: Rhea Perlman's Carla in *Cheers* utters the wisecracks of romantic dis-abuse.)

Character actors don't get script or direction in the way stars do. (I know I am begging the question whether either of these commodities is really current. But bear with me, entertain the fancy that they help a picture.) Character actors are hired to *be* Warren Oates or Spring Byington, Elisha Cook or Eve Arden. Casting is thought to settle an identity and remove further problems. Such tried-and-true players can turn up and deliver to order. If they only see a script a few days or hours before shooting, never mind, for they know what they do, and they know that's why you've hired them. They are automatic, axiomatic. So the director can give all his time to pry the star out of his trailer and out of a bad mood/bad high/bad omen cul-de-sac long enough to be glorious. Sometimes if there isn't any script, a character actor may be looked to as the person who knows best how Ben Johnson or Marie Windsor talks. So character actors are movie buffs.

They have to love the medium, for they are not paid on anything like the scale stars enjoy. Nor do character actors come in for residuals if their pictures turn into hits or classics. This

helps them, they are told, for, without security, they have to keep on working—and doesn't everyone know that an actor's craft needs to be honed every day, just the way Kirby Puckett likes four at-bats every day? It's only the stars who can get away with taking a year off. They're secure. From a tax point of view they may need to rest for the next ten months. And at $6 million a picture, who wants to work just for the sake of it and risk a dog that could drag their stock down? They don't have to hit, they only need to be the designated hitter.

Character actors must feel unusually isolated. They do not have an entourage, and their followings must be taken on trust. Even among the readers of a movie magazine, how many people today could put the right name to the face if the pictures were of John Mahoney, Dan Seymour, Richard Bright, Mercedes Ruehl, Tom Noonan, Charles Napier, Barbara Baxley, Verna Bloom, Margaret Wycherley, James Villiers? Just because they all set out hoping to be leads, they live with disappointment, draining struggle, and the lie that they are happy the way things worked out. Television is their best chance of fulfillment, for that is where natural character actors—from Ed Asner to Betty White, from Michael Tucker to Blair Brown—may get series, prominence, work and residuals. TV is certainly the arena in which the most interesting ensemble acting is to be seen in America. It is also the medium in which pressures of budget and schedule fight the last battle against the prevaricating whim and neurotic hesitation of stars.

Nor is there any evidence that America is suffering in its supply of character actors. *Hill Street Blues* and L.A. *Law* have been rich proving grounds, even if many of the Blues seem to have died with the series. In the selection that follows, there is ample evidence of quality and daring. Moreover, we still have a few so-called star actors who honor the attitudes embodied in character acting—I am thinking of Gene Hackman, Alec Guinness, Robert Duvall, Meryl Streep, Vanessa Redgrave, Susan Sarandon.

But the most important point that an introductory essay like this can make is to remind us of how often America's movie-making has excelled when it has been founded in something like a stock company, a group of actors for whom human and social character has seemed more interesting than clout.

Consider the work of Griffith, Lubitsch, Welles, Preston Sturges, Hawks, Ford, Coppola and Altman. Not that any of them have proved helpless or intransigent with stars and starry shows—so long as one remembers Welles' insinuating and Gutmanesque need to be that star himself, and Altman's preoccupied but casual urge to knock the shine off big-name actors. Griffith helped define stardom as a narrative device; Lubitsch cherished the vanity of all actors, especially the pomp of small men; Hawks made so rare an icon of Lauren Bacall that no other director could ever rediscover it. John Ford is largely responsible for what we think of as John Wayne; and Coppola has drawn extraordinary, dominating performances from Al Pacino, Gene Hackman and Marlon Brando.

But those starry triumphs cannot be detached from the aura of the group that pervades *The Godfather*, *Only Angels Have Wings*, *The Shop Around the Corner*, *The Magnificent Ambersons* or *Nashville*. In some of those cases, it may be argued that the community of actors has produced a sentimentality that hinders the action or the meaning of a film; there is a false clubbiness possible in such films. In John Ford, the rhetoric of team spirit can serve as a blithe cover for military obedience. There is so much more dispute, contradiction and everyone-talking-and-thinking-at-once in the groups of Howard Hawks. Further, in *The Godfather*, it is the very intensity of family feeling that leaves the behavior of the Corléones so ambiguous. We have such a good time watching the feeding interplay of Pacino, Duvall, James Caan, Richard

Castellano, Abe Vigoda and John Cazale, that we sometimes forget what it is the team does. The process of the movie reveals the beguiling Don in Coppola—yet there are those in his real extended family who have beheld not just a patriarch, but a loner, a user and a prince of darkness to match Michael Corleone. From Capra to Coppola, there are films that rhapsodize over community yet plot dictatorship.

There is a more challenging ideal in movie-making, which is to show us the group as a natural, helpless arrangement, not so much a unified team as the inevitable gathering together of lonely, suspicious, unhappy individuals who will occasionally rise to states of love, rapport and association, before slipping away from one another. This is a view of life that respects both solitariness and responsibility, and which sees how private lives and actions cannot help but affect public experience. It leads to a kind of film that spreads beyond the frame or a set storyline; it invokes a continuity and a crowded context that go on, seemingly, forever. Needless to say, it understands how far the common state of experience is that flux of farce and tragedy in which we would all like to be at the center of the wheel. But cannot be. Any objective observer sees a wheel, but subjectivity insists there are as many wheels as there are spokes. This is a way of seeing that confronts a factory of wheels; it is the cinema of Renoir and Mizoguchi—it is not entirely American.

For example, such a view does not fit well with tidy, conclusive and uplifting endings, or with any notion of some roles or lives being grander than others. The panorama of many small lives—of character actors—produces doubt, dismay and caution. Whereas so many American films want us to feel good.

Let me process three films which do pass this test with honors: *The Shop Around the Corner*, *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Nashville*. In the Lubitsch picture, the title signals how far the place is the subject, even if it is a Culver City Budapest: James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan are stars, and the discovered love between their characters is the destination of the story. Yet it is a movie about misunderstanding and off-setting context, of many different things going on at once, of chance revelation and unexpected benefit. And it is in the company of Frank Morgan, Joseph Schildkraut, Felix Bressart. Sara Haden and William Tracy that we see a collection of stories and a climate of confusion such that Stewart and Sullavan pass as equal characters, noble fools living in the same light as everyone else. In *Ambersons*, love and happiness cannot be achieved anywhere without some corresponding loss elsewhere: a kind of emotional bookkeeping is at work, and no accumulation of assets or sentimental credit is proof against failure. It is that rare American film in which every character fails—no wonder the system lacked the heart to finish it. *Nashville* is the apotheosis of this way of looking: it is a film about the crowd, maybe the first American film about us, the audience, that throng of unnamed character actors.

16 Supporting Character
The Queer Career of Agnes Moorehead

PATRICIA WHITE

The main character of Robert Aldrich's *The Killing of Sister George* is a role-playing lesbian in more than one sense. In "real life" June Buckridge (Beryl Reid) is "George," a bawdy, domineering) cigar-smoking butch, whose younger lover Childie keeps house and collects dolls. As the country nurse "Sister George" on a television soap opera, she is a character actress beloved by the public. Produced in 1968, on the verge of Stonewall and just in time to receive an X under the ratings system that finally replaced the Production Code, *The Killing of Sister George* is one of the first Hollywood films to represent lesbianism openly. But, in making its main character a character actress, the film suggests that lesbians may always have been present in popular culture, accepted and loved by audiences in genres that never admitted of the existence of homosexuality.

The film thematizes the continuity between the off-screen "masculine," tweed-suited dyke type and the on-screen "asexual," tweed-suited nurse type—thus George is able to appropriate her lesbian moniker from her television character—and demonstrates that the very construction of the "asexual" is, of course, a heterosexist one. At one point the drunken George makes a pass at a group of nuns in a taxicab—a scene that at once demonstrates her butch sexual courage and visibility and wittily restates the theme of covert and overt types. George ought to be able to recognize a sister when she sees one. In the film's lesbian bar scene, filmed on location and thus with extraordinary subcultural verisimilitude at London's Gateways Club—George and Childie dress up as Laurel and Hardy. This additional level of role-playing makes reference to a practice of comic typing that conceals homoerotic logic within a wildly popular mass cultural form.

When chic BBC executive Mercy Croft takes a fancy to Childie and has the Sister George character killed off the soap, following a familiar script of homophobic narrative exigency, the question of the actress's visibility as a lesbian is preempted. The supporting actress is offered instead the leading role in her very own series—as Clarabell the Cow. In Frank Marcus's play from which the film was adapted, Sister George was a character on a radio soap opera; the movie parallels the demotion from human to animal with the step down from on-camera ham to voice-over cow. Yet the role, however demeaning and misogynist, affords a certain finesse of George's disguise. At the end of the film, George, who had at first scornfully turned down the role of Clarabell, begins to practice her "moos." But even in her humiliation lies a certain triumph—her "unrepresentable" butch persona will still enter the homes of countless television viewers, her voice recognizable to her fans.

Agnes Moorehead was a familiar and popular television personality in the role of Endora on "Bewitched" when in one of the last of some sixty film roles she provided the voice of the goose in the animated feature *Charlotte's Web*. It was not a degrading part, as Clarabell Cow was meant to be—she co-starred with her "beloved friend" Debbie Reynolds, and Paul Lynde contributed to the barnyard fun. The role drew on her roots in radio—what one reviewer described as her trademark "crackling, snapping, sinister, paranoic, paralyzing voice."[1] And, before her stardom as television's preeminent witch, Moorehead reigned as one of the most widely recognized and highly regarded supporting actresses in Hollywood cinema. Like George, she played "types"; she was the silver screen's definitive spinster aunt. In accounting for the adaptability of her persona across a range of popular media, I believe that another element of Moorehead's star image must be considered. In an interview with Boze Hadleigh, "A Hollywood Square Comes Out," Lynde, a special guest star on "Bewitched" who played an "uncle" as aptly and as memorably as Moorehead played an "aunt," remarks, "Well, the whole world knows Agnes was a lesbian—I mean classy as hell, but one of the all-time Hollywood dykes."[2]

Regardless of whether the lady really was a lesbian, the characterization complements her persona. It represents a gendered node within what Eve Sedgwick has described as the modern Western "epistemology of the closet."[3] If the "whole world" knows about Agnes, the so-called general audience may exercise what Sedgwick calls "the privilege of unknowing"—after all, it's only entertainment. I would like to argue that it is no mere queer coincidence that Agnes Moorehead can be dubbed both one of the all-time Hollywood supporting actresses and one of the all-time Hollywood dykes. Moorehead is a prime candidate for gay hagiography. Her best known incarnation, Endora, is a camp icon; she passes even the cinephile test, having been featured in films by auteurs such as Welles, Sirk, Ray, and Aldrich. But, more important, Moorehead's ubiquity and longevity as a character actress are such that she can be identified with the very media in which she triumphed, with the regime of popular entertainment itself, and with the continuities and ruptures in gender and sexual ideology that can be read off from it. At once essential to classical realism and marginal to its narrative goals, the supporting character is a site for the encoding of the threat and the promise of female deviance. As New York lesbian performance artist Lisa Kron writes in a biographical note, reflecting on the animal and grandmother roles she was asked to play in college, "It begins to dawn on her that 'character actress' is really a code word for lesbian."[4] The negative valence of many of Moorehead's roles is marked—Endora herself is the butt of a constant barrage of mother-in-law jokes. Her persona is less "heartwarming" than many a golden age supporting actress—from Anne Revere to Mary Wickes to Marjorie Main. Although the ideological stake in subordinating female difference is apparent, this negativity may also be Moorehead's most subversive edge.

My discussion of Moorehead takes up three overlapping areas of inquiry: the narrative function of supporting characters in the heterosexual Hollywood regime (as well as the ideological weight that they carry in television's world of family values); the importance of typification in these roles and in lesbian recognizability more generally; and the understanding of star images as complex, contradictory signs, as exemplified in the work of gay film theorist Richard Dyer as well as in the reception practices of gay culture.

What is it that supporting characters are meant to "support" if not the imbricated ideologies of heterosexual romance and white American hegemony permeating Hollywood cinema? They prop up a very particular representational order. As Stephen Heath describes the operation of narrativity, "The film picks up . . . the notable elements (to be noted in and for the progress of the narrative which in return defines their notability) without for all that giving up what is thus left aside and which it seeks to retain—something of an available reserve of insignificant material—in order precisely to ring 'true,' true to *reality*." Retained to speak a social "truth," the supporting character represents "an available reserve of insignificant," if "realistic," types of women—workers, older women, nonwhite women. Lacking a love interest—Hollywood deems only one type of love of interest—she doesn't get "picked up" by the story: in the most basic narratological terms, she is the witch, not the princess. By film's end she has literally been left aside, just as she is compositionally marginal in the frame. For, as Heath economically puts it, "Narrative contains a film's multiple articulations as a single articulation, its images as a single image (the 'narrative image,' which is a film's presence, how it can be talked about, what it can be sold and bought on—in the production stills displayed outside a cinema, for example)."[5] Supporting characters are sacrificed to the narrative image of heterosexual closure; their names rarely appear in the television guide blurbs about old movies, nor are their photographs included on the videotape box that delivers a "picture" to a potential viewer.

Yet attention to the function of certain types of female characters can throw into relief the single-mindedness with which the Hollywood system re-presents heterosexuality. For example, the discourse of lesbian desire introduced by housekeeper Mrs. Danvers (Judith Anderson) in Hitchcock's *Rebecca* significantly undercuts the film's conventional romantic "resolution." And, while melodramatic pathos depends on Jane Wyman's long separation from Rock Hudson in Sirk's *Magnificent Obsession*, an alternative reading—or a different focus of spectatorial regard—might note that she spends this off-screen time in the company of her devoted nurse/companion, played by Agnes Moorehead, who offered Wyman support in four films besides. A film may be dismissive of a minor player, portray her fate as gratuitous, but it may take less time and care to assimilate her to its ideological project than it would in the case of the female protagonist. In Hedda Hopper's column "Bit Player Outshines the Stars," Moorehead remarks, "I sort of look at myself sideways on the screen."[6] While this comment indicates a failure of narcissistic identification, even, perhaps, a cringing at the conservatism to which her image is often harnessed, it also suggests an astute reading of her liminal, and at times disruptive, narrative function. It replicates, too, the oblique sightline traced on Hollywood cinema by many queer spectators.

Nurses, secretaries, career women, nuns, companions, and housekeepers connote, not lesbian identity, but a deviation from heterosexualized femininity. Gay male critics often register an affinity with such characters. Inasmuch as character actresses are enjoyed, admired, or pressed into camp service by a queer mode of reading, it is apparently character itself that is supported. Thelma Ritter, a great ironic interpreter of this type of role, was a particular favorite of gay film historian Vito Russo, for example. In his book on the gay sensibility, Michael Bronski singles out the woman friend that "many top female stars were paired off with . . . before they ended up getting the leading man" as a cinematic type with particular appeal. Portrayed by the likes of Joan Blondell and Eve Arden, "the sidekick's role was generally to act as a confidante and to give the audience a pungent analysis of the plot. Sidekicks were sarcastic, unromantic, and sensible. They were cleverly self-deprecating . . . but could also turn the wit on men. Too smart ever to get the man, sidekicks had to settle for being funnier than everybody else. For gay men who would never walk off into the sunset with a leading man, the sidekick was a dose of real life." Bronski attributes a sort of metacritical role

to confidante characters and a self-conscious reading practice to their fans, but he reads these images in relation only to male characters and spectators. He goes on to cite Russo's work on sissy roles and the actors who specialized in their portrayal in Hollywood films of the thirties and forties. Bronski asserts, "Woman sidekicks were never played as lesbians, just 'old maids,' but the non-romantic male was always implicitly gay."[7]

Given the virtual conceptual blank that is lesbianism in the culture at large, it is no accident that the social types standing in for lesbians in Hollywood cinema are misogynistically coded as "asexual." They are trivialized and rendered comical rather than threatening. Although sex and ideology certainly mark the stereotypes of sissy and old maid differently, in particular in relation to tropes of gender inversion, Bronski's statement limits the operation of the connotative in the female images and thus compounds the invisibility to which lesbians are already consigned.

In contrast, one lesbian writer confidently attributes sexuality to a much later incarnation of the "old maid" type. In a cover article for *Lesbian News* entitled "The Truth about Miss Hathaway," Marion Garbo Todd defends the spinster secretary character played by Nancy Kulp on the sixties American sitcom "The Beverly Hillbillies" from the following assessment in the fan magazine *Television Collector*: "Miss Jane Hathaway could have been the prototype for the term 'Plain Jane.' Tall and lanky, with an asexual manner, the epitome of a spinster." Todd retorts, "Where does this 'plain Jane' stuff come from? How can the word plain be used to describe the handsome Miss Hathaway? 'Tall and lanky' is not the right phrase for her body; 'long and sensuous' is much more accurate. Her long neck, aquiline nose, wavy hair, and large bright eyes made her very beautiful. She had smile lines to swoon over, and her voice was a delight. . . . In her tasteful skirt suit, short hairdo, and horn-rimmed glasses, she could have been the lead character in any lesbian pulp novel."[8]

Visual codes are recognized, enumerated, and deployed to cast Kulp in a leading role in a different genre. In her groundbreaking work on studio-era lesbian director Dorothy Arzner, Judith Mayne notes that, in her films, secondary women characters can be seen sporting the dapper dress and masculine manner that Arzner herself affected. Lesbianism is made visible within the text through ironic inflection of an "asexual" type.[9]

As Richard Dyer writes, in an essay on "typical" lesbian and gay representations, "A major fact about being gay is that it doesn't show. . . . There are signs of gayness, a repertoire of gestures, expressions, stances, clothing, and even environments that bespeak gayness, but these are cultural forms designed to show what the person's person alone does not show: that he or she is gay. Such a repertoire of signs, making visible the invisible, is the basis of any representation of gay people involving visual recognition, the requirement of recognizability in turn entailing that of typicality."[10] Thus, historically and culturally specific codes in lesbian and gay communities function similarly to the codes of recognition in popular cultural forms. In this light, the often-heard demand for nonstereotypical, "well-rounded" gay and lesbian characters in film may go against the very conditions of our visibility. Dyer detects the prevalence of the sexological discourse of "in-betweenism"—the notion that homosexuals betray characteristics of the opposite gender—in a range of typical visual representations, including self-representations, of effeminate men and mannish women. Citing *The Killing of Sister George*, he sees both George's tweeds and her rival Mercy Croft's chic and tailored predatory look as variations on this "dyke" type.[11] The vexed question of lesbian stereotyping can be related to the potentially subversive implications of more general practices of visual typing in female supporting characters.

The widespread apprehension of the Sister Georges or Miss Jane Hathaways as asexual or, worse, man starved—precisely invisible as lesbian—has to do, perhaps paradoxically, with the visual overdetermination of "woman" as sexual in film. The supporting character necessarily diverges from this ideal—not incidentally, a white one—of woman in film. The cinematic system of the look constructs the singular female star as image and guarantee of masculine desire and spectatorial fascination. As images of a different version of femininity than that of female stars, supporting characters may not ultimately be so supportive of the status quo, for they can inflect with female desire the image of woman embodied in the leading lady, with whom they are narratively paired and iconographically contrasted, often within the same frame.

One of the most consequential operations of Hollywood's containment and social enforcement of difference is the near-exclusive restriction of nonwhite and visually and audibly recognizable ethnic types precisely to supporting roles. Mary Ann Doane remarks that the "woman's film" genre is really the "white woman's film": "When black women are present, they are the ground rather than the figure; often they are made to merge with the diegesis. They inhabit the textual sidelines, primarily as servants."[12] The complexity, code crossing, and incoherence of racialized sexual and gender ideology is performed by the on-screen conjunction of, and contrast between, black and white women. The mammy stereotype, often denounced as "asexual," may be inflected as "lesbian" in its close articulation with the presentation of the white heroine's desire. Such a character, or a known performer such as Ethel Waters in a mammy role, might not merge altogether with the diegesis for African American, lesbian, and gay viewers.

A process of erotic doubling between a woman of color and the white star may also serve to figure lesbianism—for example, between Anna May Wong and Marlene Dietrich as traveling companions in *Shanghai Express*, in which the signifier *prostitution* sexualizes the contiguity of the two women. Or the racist projection of sexuality onto the "other woman" may indicate erotic tension between the stereotyped woman of color and the "repressed" and only presumptively heterosexual white heroine. Bette Davis's character performs two passionate acts in *The Letter*—she kills her lover in the opening sequence and goes into the night to meet her death at the hands of his Asian widow at the end. While the man in the triangle is never shown, the "other" woman's body is insistently present, bizarrely underscored by the excessive makeup and costuming used to transform white supporting actress Gale Sondergaard. This common casting practice foregrounds the way in which the representation of racial difference turns on the attributes of whiteness in the classical Hollywood cinema. In *Beyond the Forest*, the Davis character's long, center-parted black hair is uncannily mirrored in the background by that of her mocking Latina maid, played by Mexican actress Dona Drake. At a crucial point in the story, the heroine disguises herself in the jeans and flannel shirt worn by her servant. That the masquerade involves an element of gender transgression ironically makes visible the irreducible difference between women—race, class, and power—that appears to give such doubling its frisson.

Judith Mayne goes on to discuss how images of Dorothy Arzner—often twoshots of her looking at a conventionally feminine actress—have been used to illustrate feminist critical texts that emphatically do not mention her lesbianism. When these lesbian looks, these exchanges of the gaze between contrasting female types—generally between supporting and lead actresses—are echoed in Arzner's films, Mayne argues, they can be read as her authorial signature. In a two-shot from Raoul Walsh's *The Revolt of Mamie Stover*, the look of Agnes

Moorehead in her bathrobe prevents Jane Russell's sexuality from being perceived as intended for the male spectator alone. Yet the early feminist analysis of this film, too, ignored its lesbian visual economy. In another two-shot, Agnes Moorehead and Debbie Reynolds embody the visual relation between a supporting actress "type" and a bona fide female star. On-screen and off, the couple conforms to the stereotype of older, sapphic sophisticate who preys on innocent younger woman; in this case the singing nun.

While great Hollywood supporting actresses such as Thelma Ritter or Mercedes McCambridge could perhaps be read as working-class butch or fifties inbetweenist types, Agnes Moorehead's persona fits a more upper-class sapphic stereotype.[13] As a promotional item describes her, "Rated as one of the best dressed stars of screen and radio, her preference runs to tailored suits"—to recall Lynde's words, she was "classy as hell". On-screen, the spinster type refuses both the masculine signifiers that make lesbianism visible in heterosexual terms and the hyperbolization of the feminine that is the very definition of *womanliness*. The type is a product of a misogynist and heterosexist imagination—yet within it the spinster can at once "pass" as straight and be recognizable as lesbian.

It is impossible to unpack the ambivalent character of the narrative category of *support* and the negotiable aspects of visual typification apart from a consideration of the performer as text. Donald Bogle, in *Toms, Coons, Mulattoe, Mammies, and Bucks*, his influential book on African American stereotypes, presents the most sustained argument for how particular performers become visible in these roles and transform types. As he states in an interview, "There was another life and point of view that was being suggested to me by Hattie McDaniel's rather hostile edge."[14] It is Ritter's nurses, Arden's sidekicks, Franklin Pangborn's sissies, and McDaniel's maids that capture the imagination. The more roles an actress appears in, the more unforeseen the effects that are introduced in a particular text by her casting. Star texts are ongoing, modified by shifting ideological imperatives, shaped by audience response. On series television, the weekly appearance of the performer works like typecasting in studio films. It is in this sense that I want to speak of Moorehead's *queer career*.

In his work on stars, Dyer argues that, in narrative films, novelistic conceptions of character are articulated with stars as already signifying images—which essentially function within the same bourgeois ideology of the self-consistent individual. How might this approach apply to Moorehead, who, as a character actress, however familiar, is not strictly a "star"? As Dyer notes, "Type characters are acknowledged to have a place . . . but only to enable the proper elaboration of the central, individuated character(s). In this respect, no star could be just a type, since all stars play central characters."[15] Moorehead does not have a fully individuated star image (at least not before "Bewitched"), yet neither can her on-screen type be considered merely an extension of her off-screen "self" (which would reintroduce the category of the individual in another way). She has a subversive edge that does not get "rounded off." What was distinct was the fact of her acting, which allowed her to represent and to "quote" a type at the same time.

Agnes Moorehead's long career encompassed a gallery of types connoting female difference. Her early success was achieved on radio as, among other things, a stooge to male comics. After she went to Hollywood with Orson Welles and the Mercury Theater, she continued her radio work as an all-purpose female voice, impersonating Eleanor Roosevelt and scores of other women on the "March of Time." Outside the Hollywood regime of the gaze, it seems that a deviant version of femininity could represent the norm. On-screen, she never portrayed a central character, receiving top billing only in the posthumously released horror flick *Dear Dead Delilah*. Instead, she played second fiddle, variations on the unmarried

woman: nurses (*Magnificent Obsession*), nuns (*The Singing Nun*, *Scandal at Scourie*), governesses (*The Youngest Profession*, *The Untamed*), ladies' companions (*Mrs. Parkington*, *Her Highness and the Bellboy*), busybodies (*Since You Went Away*, *All That Heaven Allows*), hypochondriacs (*Pollyanna*), maids (*Hush, Hush, Sweet Charlotte*), and, of course, aunts.

In *The Magnificent Ambersons*, Jack Amberson rebukes his nephew for tormenting the Moorehead character: "You know George, just being an aunt isn't really the great career it may sometimes seem to be." But this, her second film, launched the actress on a trajectory that proved otherwise. Despite her fifth billing, she was named best actress by the New York Film Critics and went on to play aunts again in *Jane Eyre*, *Tomorrow the World*, *The Lost Moment*, *Summer Holiday*, *Johnny Belinda*, and *The Story of Three Loves*, and on Broadway in *Gigi* just before her death. For variety, she portrayed women in professions that lesbians might suitably pursue: a WAC commander (*Keep Your Powder Dry*), a prison superintendent (*Caged*), a literary agent (*From Main Street to Broadway*), a drama teacher (*Jeanne Eagels*), a mystery writer (*The Bat*), a judge (*Bachelor in Paradise*), and, in a blond wig, a "sort of school marm and madam rolled into one," offering firm support to Jane Russell's Mamie Stover.[16] When she played married women, she was generally a nagging wife, most notably in the radio play *Sorry, Wrong Number*, written expressly for her talents. Critics note the "waspish and neurotic," "mean-spirited, shrewish," "possessive, puritanical, and vitriolic," "bitter, nasty, frustrated," and "meddlesome" traits of her "old crones," "harridans, spinsters and bitches," "termagants and passionate viragos." Her many mother parts did not always evince maternal qualities. Besides Samantha, her screen offspring included Citizen Kane, Jesse James, and Genghis Khan. Her role in *The Story of Mankind* was a brief appearance as Queen Elizabeth I; she commissioned a portrait of herself costumed as the red-haired virgin queen.

The Agnes Moorehead of the "Bewitched" era (the show ran on ABC from 1964 to 1972) can aptly be described with the title of her one-woman show, in which she toured extensively in the fifties—"The Fabulous Redhead." On "Bewitched," she was a flippant, vividly costumed, outrageously madeup, impeccably coiffed, castrating witch with a mortal hatred for her daughter's husband, whose name she somehow could not recall. This is the Moorehead-as-"character" association that the contemporary viewer brings to her earlier film roles. Moorehead turned her Actress-with-a-capital-A stage image—regal bearing, exaggerated gestures and enunciation, and taste for high fashion—to high camp effect in her interpretation of Endora, flagrantly foregrounding "performance." Offscreen, she was nicknamed "Madame Mauve" because of her inordinate fondness for lavender, which she insisted on having everything "done" in—from her luggage and Thunderbird to her dressing room lightbulbs and maids' uniforms.[17]

Before the fifties stage and sixties television brought color to her roles, Agnes Moorehead was considered an actress of "character." Her Victorian-sounding name (her father was a minister), aristocratic profile, penchant for accents and other vocal trademarks, her manners, even manneredness, contributed to the public perception of Moorehead as a "serious" actress. As one critic notes, she is associated with "heavy dramatics on the grand scale. For many, Agnes's performances represent the near epitome of screen theatrics."[18] Although she was "typecast," versatility was regarded as part of her artistry.[19] A studio publicity item raved, "The accomplished character actress of stage, screen and radio is given here one of her rare opportunities to bid for romantic interest. The result is a revelation of a new facet of the versatile actress's many-sided repertory, strikingly effective."[20] The implication is that her ability to portray a heterosexual is a true sign of talent.

Moorehead was distinguished by four Academy Award nominations for best actress in a supporting role, although she never won the Oscar. As six-time loser Thelma Ritter cracked, "Always the bridesmaid and never the bride."[21] A profile in a nostalgia magazine muses about the fact that Moorehead never snagged the award: "It is an interesting speculation that one of the reasons she always lost was that she played neurotic aunts, stepmothers, spinsters who reflected the dark side of the human condition."[22] That the old maid should evoke such a grandiose conception as the dark side of the human condition attests to Moorehead's considerable achievement—she makes the spinster positively sinister. In an essay on the functions of feminist criticism, Tania Modleski chastises a male literary critic who, "casting about for an example of the trivial, strikes irresistibly upon the image of the spinster." "From a feminist point of view," Modleski argues, "nothing could be *more* 'historically and ideologically significant' than the existence of the single woman in patriarchy, her (frequently caricatured) representation in patriarchal art, and the relationship between the reality and the representation."[23] Moorehead's image captured some of this, perhaps lesbian, significance, if only in the mirror image of anxiety. The profile goes on to suggest how closely the spinster image was identified with the actress: "Never married, she, nevertheless, had an adopted son; a close friendship with Debbie Reynolds, with whom she co-starred in several of her last pictures; and a religious faith as a Methodist." This "nevertheless" means to blur over a logical relation between spinster and lesbian that the syntax sets up: "Never married, she had a close friendship with Debbie Reynolds." The statement is interesting for another reason: its blatant, symptomatic contradiction of fact, for Agnes Moorehead was married at least twice (Reynolds mentions three unions). I presume that the actress's much-vaunted privacy and cultivated "mystery" were not intended to conceal this facet of her "many-sided repertory."

Moorehead's image reconciles the serious with the trivial—having "character" with being "a character"—and thus occupies the domain of camp. As Susan Sontag notes, "Camp is the glorification of 'character.' . . . Character is understood as a state of continual incandescence—a person being one, very intense thing. . . . Wherever there is development of character, Camp is reduced."[24] Camp is a crucial and far from trivial dimension of Moorehead's reception, but, with its emphasis on style, it is an insufficient analytic category for a feminist consideration of what is at stake in the "content" of her image. Looking at how that image was articulated in and utilized by certain of her films can illuminate the contradiction that she embodies, as a figure simultaneously necessary to the Hollywood system and suppressed by it. She is taken seriously, featured in so many films as to seem ubiquitous. At the same time, her parts are marginal ones, the characters she portrays trivialized or vilified. If her roles as written often smack of misogyny, as performed they suggest a different negativity—a negativity that cannot be represented within the terms of classical cinema and that shares the semiotic field of lesbianism.

Fanny Minnafer in Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons* is the role that established at once Moorehead's reviled spinster image *and* the difficulty of reconciling that image with the Hollywood plot. Lacking economic independence, Aunt Fanny lives with the fading Amberson clan as an observer rather than as a participant. *The Magnificent Ambersons* is a self-conscious film, and her restlessness and discontent contribute greatly to its mood. She accuses her nephew George, "You wouldn't treat anybody in the world like this, except old Fanny. 'Old Fanny,' you say, 'it's nobody but old Fanny so I'll kick her. Nobody'll resent it. I'll kick her all I want to.'" But the film inscribes Fanny's position on the periphery—lurking in the shadows

to whisper her suspicions to George, looking on from the edge of the frame or the background of the composition—as a vantage point for the spectator. She actually prevents the formation of two heterosexual couples by her interference. In material excised from the film's release version, Fanny is shown at the end among a veritable colony of spinsters at the boarding house. Her discourse pervades the film, even if she triumphs only as the representative of its themes of frustration and barrenness.

One commentator characterizes the challenge for Moorehead as an actress, "to channel her tremendous energy so that it would emerge in accord with the film rather than as an intriguing distraction."[25] Elements of her tour-de-force characterization of Aunt Fanny erupt as fascinating "distractions" in such later roles as Mrs. Reed in *Jane Eyre* and Countess Fosco in *The Woman in White*. The question of Moorehead's discordant difference and of her relation to the fulfillment of the romance plot is marked in another literary film, *The Lost Moment* (1947). In this adaptation of Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*, Moorehead plays the elderly aunt who in her youth was the recipient of love letters from a famous poet. A mere octogenarian in the novella becomes a hideously madeup 105-year-old in the film. It is as if the plausibility of Moorehead's participation in such a romance even in the past demands extremes of disguise.

Moorehead thoroughly embraced that inexplicable quality of her characters that prompted others to react with dislike, even phobia. In *Since You Went Away* (directed by John Cromwell, 1944), David O. Selznick's sentimental story of women on the homefront during World War II, Agnes portrays a local busybody, a character who embodies a displaced anxiety about the unheroic activities in which women might become involved while the menfolk are away at war. Joseph Cotten's character repeatedly insults her, joking that the sound of her voice grates on him even when he's far away from her. The penetrating, persecuting female voice signifies here not only as a quality of Moorehead's character, Emily Hawkins, but as Moorehead as an actress, who often worked with Cotten. Ultimately, the disparate desires of the women in the film are rallied into patriotic solidarity when they castigate the Moorehead character for petty war profiteering. The film scapegoats her to consolidate both nationalist and gender ideology, a project that could be seen as operating across the forties, the period in which Moorehead's image was established.

In *Good Dames*, his book on five female "character stars" (supporting actresses rarely receive individual biographies), James Robert Parish comments on Moorehead's performance in this film:

> The role itself was a variation of the cinema type portrayed throughout the 1940s by the very adept Eve Arden. The difference in these two actresses' approach to such a part is that whenever Agnes is required to make a flip remark on the screen, it comes across in total seriousness as a reflection of her character's basic, unregenerate meanness. Her piercing eyes and overall body movements provide the viewer with no other interpretation. In contrast, Arden can toss off the most devastating remark, and it emerges as a pert observation, juicy and smart, but essentially nonvicious.[26]

Although Moorehead did play essentially nonvicious roles, she was more convincing—and less recuperable—in her moments of unregenerate meanness. The subversiveness of the best character stars, such as Arden and Ritter, can be neutralized by their being enthusiastically adopted as cuddly curmudgeons. Moorehead's unlikableness, on the razor-thin

edge of misogynist dismissal, contravenes this tendency. It is hard to embrace Moorehead without being spattered with acid.

Madge Rapf in the Bogart/Bacall vehicle *Dark Passage* (1947), directed by Delmar Daves, is a curious sort of femme fatale, whose fate is a telling example of the retribution that the Moorehead character could bring down. Moorehead's being cast against character in a "sexual" role is in part responsible for the film's surreal effects.[27] As Dana Polan comments in an important analysis, "The narrative of *Dark Passage* is one in which dramatic coincidences occur so often as to break down any question of plausibility."[28] When Madge happens to knock at the door of the apartment where, through an unlikely chain of circumstances, escaped convict Vincent Parry (Bogart) is hiding, he instantly recognizes the voice of his nemesis. Madge had testified against him at his murder trial. As he observes, "She's the type that comes back, and back again." This not only indicates how she functions in the film as the return of the repressed but is a fitting comment on Moorehead's career.

Madge's character is attributed with the evil, inconsistency, and unintelligibility of motive of an ordinary femme fatale, without the movie conceding that sexuality is her tool for leading men to destruction. Instead, her fatal quality seems to be the simple fact of her existence, rendered as "interference" through Moorehead's "nagging" connotations. As Vincent describes her, "Madge knows everybody, pesters everybody." Her ex-fiancé, Bob, snaps at her, "You're not satisfied unless you're bothering people. I'm annoyed whenever I see you." Responding to her concern that Parry will try to kill her, Bob remarks, with an extraordinary mixture of outright malignance and contemptuous dismissal, "You're the last person he wants to see, let alone kill. . . . You're not the type that makes people hate." Her insignificance is thus marked in rather significant terms. It is as if the other characters recognize the difficulty of integrating her in the plot. Vincent muses, "Maybe she'll get run over or something." And his wish is granted.

In this profoundly illogical film, the logic of misogyny works with classic simplicity; it can be placated only by Madge's abjection, by the spectacle of her death. When Vincent comes to her apartment to accuse *her* of murdering his wife, she defies him to prove it. At her crowning moment of Moorehead histrionics, she "accidently" and quite improbably falls through a picture window, with a flounce of floor-length drapes. The camera dwells on her body's descent, a markedly excessive cinematic flourish. Polan has commented on the ambiguity and threat embodied in domestic space in forties films: "Significantly, in several films, murder, suicide, and accidental death through windows blur (and not only for the characters but also for the spectator), thereby suggesting the ambivalence of sense." He captures something of the spectator's bewilderment in this instance: "In *Dark Passage*, for example, it is never clear (even with motion analyzing equipment and freeze-framing) how Madge manages to fall through her apartment window to her death."[29]

Dark Passage plays out the film noir's generic fear of feminine difference. The hero is vindicated, and woman is both criminal and victim. However, here it is not the alluring but the annoying woman who is punished, an extreme case of the anxiety that the Moorehead character could provoke. Madge, as a "bad," superfluous woman, is marked for death from the beginning. But for all that it is an almost mundane exigency of plot, her killing seems to require a supernatural force, thereby foregrounding the ideology that demands it. And Madge's fall doesn't immediately benefit the hero; it has something of the quality of a self-willed disappearance. Madge threatens, "You will never be able to prove anything because I won't be there."

Here, I would like to quote the late, legendary underground gay filmmaker and Hollywood camp tastemaker Jack Smith:

> I'm being haunted now by a performance in a movie. It was in *Dark Passage*. Agnes Moorehead plays this pest. . . . In a huge close-up you see the twitch of her little purse of a mouth. [Movies] can reveal a certain personality type—a certain kind of pest or what have you—and then you have something to remember when you see a person in life. . . . That happened to me just recently. This raging pest from the Gay Men's Health Crisis just called and said she'd be right over. . . . The poor creature, her life was so empty that she had to join the Gay movement to pester AIDS victims in order to have a social life. Right away I looked at her and thought of Madge in *Dark Passage*."[30]

Smith relates the star and the practice of cinematic typification to real life and to a gay context, using her quality of "intensity" to make sense of some aspect of the tragically implausible but all too real and very dark passage that is living with AIDS.

John Cromwell's *Caged* (1950) features Moorehead as Mrs. Benton, the efficient and smartly tailored head of a woman's prison, but here her philanthropic impulse is benevolent and welcome. In such an environment, among female deviates, Moorehead's persona is not pitted against other women but appears at its most benign. This is also the most overtly lesbian of her films—it establishes a genuine genre—and Moorehead receives second billing. Like *The Killing of Sister George* or the lesbian classic *Maedchen in Uniform* with its conflict between stern headmistress and compassionate teacher, this feminist drama opposes two "dyke" types in a struggle for control over the young heroine (Eleanor Parker). The sympathetic, reform-minded prison superintendent tries to protect innocent Marie Allen from the corruptions of life inside. "You'll find all kinds of women in here, just as you would outside," Benton promises. Hope Emerson portrays Evelyn Harper, the sadistic matron in uniform who provides small comforts for her girls in exchange for payment. Of this remarkable six-foot, two-inch, 230-pound character actress (who, incidentally, provided the voice of Elsie the Borden cow), gay porn editor and film critic Boyd MacDonald writes, "Perhaps only members of a sexual elite—that is, outlaws—can instinctively appreciate the grandeur of an Emerson."[31] In one scene, Harper, grotesquely dressed up for her night off, describes in detail her upcoming "date" in order to taunt the imprisoned women. This attribution of heterosexuality, like the photograph of a "husband" displayed on Moorehead's desk, can easily be read as an out-and-out charade.

When Benton attempts to fire Harper, the latter leaks a scandalous tale to the press: "Matron charges immorality," headlines blare. "Blames superintendent." The article is accompanied by a singularly apt sketch of Benton/Moorehead's face encircled by a huge question mark. The unspoken questions dogging Moorehead's persona are here explicitly tied to a story full of "filthy lies" that euphemistically signify lesbianism.

In this classic struggle between good and evil, Harper is finally stabbed by a prisoner. But, in the meantime, Marie has gone bad—the beginning of her defiance marked when her kitten is crushed in a riot provoked by Harper's attempt to snatch Fluff away from her. Marie finally accepts the attentions of the vice queen Kitty, who arranges for her parole. Forced to relinquish her wedding ring when she went to prison, Marie tosses it away when it is returned on her release. Benton tells her devoted secretary to keep Marie's file active: "She'll be back." Ultimately, different tropes of lesbian seduction—nurturance and dominance—represented

by different types of character actresses, Moorehead and Emerson, work in consort to keep the female community intact. In *Caged*, Moorehead's character can represent the film's moral center because here she presides over a homosocial world and, fittingly, over an extraordinarily talented female supporting cast.

While the pleasures of reading Moorehead's ornery forties persona are obviously augmented by her syndication canonization in "Bewitched," both her situation and its comedy on that show are made possible by the character of her prior Hollywood career. Writing on the popularization of camp taste in the sixties and on *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* in particular, Andrew Ross claims, "The camp effect . . . is created . . . when the products (stars, in this case) of a much earlier mode of production, which has lost its power to dominate cultural meanings, become available . . . for redefinition to contemporary codes of taste."[32] Of Robert Aldrich's follow-up to *Baby Jane*, *Hush, Hush Sweet Charlotte*, produced the year "Bewitched" debuted, Bosley Crowther ranted, "Agnes Moorehead as [Bette Davis's] weird and crone like servant is allowed to get away with some of the broadest mugging and snarling ever done by a respectable actress on the screen. If she gets an Academy Award for this performance . . . the Academy should close up shop!"[33] The slatternly Velma Cruther significantly reverses an important element of Moorehead's image—her fastidiousness. In a cycle in which the biggest female stars travestied their former images, it is appropriate for one of the great supporting actresses to play a classic supporting role, the loyal servant, in a spectacularly unsupportive manner—to indulge in upstaging and scenery chewing that puts Davis herself to shame. Velma may be killed off for her snooping by a fall nearly as dramatic as that in *Dark Passage*, but icons never die.

One of Moorehead's last films, scripted by Henry Farrell, who wrote *Baby Jane*, continues this self-conscious exploitation of her image. Set in the thirties, *What's the Matter with Helen?* (directed by Curtis Harrington, 1971) features Debbie Reynolds and Shelley Winters as the mothers of two convicted thrill killers in the Leopold and Loeb mode, who move to Hollywood to escape their past. Reynolds, intrigued by the story, which was originally titled *Best of Friends*, persuaded her friend Agnes Moorehead to play powerful radio evangelist Sister Alma. The "matter" with Helen concerns not only her psychopathic murderous tendencies but her fanatical devotion to the evangelist's message and, surprise, her lesbian love for her best friend. The role and the project thus summed up a number of strong components of the Moorehead persona: radio, religion, the famous personality, lesbianism, the relationship with Reynolds.

Endora represents the culmination of Moorehead meddlesomeness. In the premiere episode of "Bewitched," she repeatedly evicts Samantha's husband from the honeymoon suite, and she literally casts a dark shadow over heterosexual relations each week when her credit "and Agnes Moorehead as Endora" appears on a black cloud of smoke blotting out "Derwood" and Samantha's embrace. What's-his-name's anxiety about his wife's powers are well founded: she belongs to a matriarchal order of superior beings. "Bewitched" supported a veritable gay subculture among its "funny" witch and warlock character actors. A recent "Bewitched"-kitsch revival attests to the show's influence on the queer nation generation. In a recent interview with the Los Angeles lesbian and gay newsweekly the *Advocate*, star Elizabeth Montgomery even agreed that the show's premise was "the ultimate closet story."[34]

If Moorehead's earlier characters were outside the central action, Endora is transcendently ex-centric. As Pat Mellencamp writes, in the situation comedy, "expectation of pleasurable performance . . . rather than narrative suspense [is the] currency of audience exchange."[35]

Endora has an enunciative role in the series. Casting spells on small-minded mortals, she disrupts the couple's petty suburban lives and generates the weekly plot. She appears and disappears with a flutter of the wrist—her ability to materialize when least expected or to drop out of the picture altogether is almost a commentary on the disappearing act that "incidental" characters performed in countless Hollywood films.

From stern spinster to fabulous redhead to silly goose, Agnes Moorehead's queer career attests to the ideological, narratological, and iconographic congruence among old maid, witch, and lesbian. Her star image also appeals to lesbian and gay audiences because it connotes acting itself—artifice, impersonation, and exaggeration. I do not wish to suggest that the characters that Moorehead portrayed "really were" lesbians, nor to imply that lesbians can simply recover our presence in Hollywood cinema by identifying actresses who really were lesbians, although gossip in its many forms is a legitimate text to be read. Rather, the peculiarities of Moorehead's image and the enthusiasms that it has generated illustrate how supporting characters were essential but also potentially disruptive to the construction of sexual difference in classical cinema. They were the types who were meant to remain invisible so that the codes of Hollywood's heterosexual contract would also remain invisible. By resituating such performers in patriarchal domesticity, American television often ended up broadcasting forms of queer performativity. Gay criticism and culture have been alert to the pleasures and resistances embodied in star signs. Feminist film theory has explicated the patriarchal construction of woman *as* image—and demonstrated the difficulty of articulating female desire and difference in relation to that construction. An exploration of the paradoxical conditions of lesbian representability in popular culture might fruitfully draw on both approaches. Whether playing it straight or camping it up, Agnes Moorehead is quite a character, "the type that comes back, and back again," as an insistent reminder of the price of heterosexual presumption.

Postscript

The television "personality" remains a privileged locus of lesbian and gay iconic signification, as a recent, metatextual example shows. On the top-rated ABC sitcom "Roseanne," Nancy, a supporting character played by Sandra Bernhard—a notorious real-life, role-playing queer—declared that she is a lesbian. Yet, in puffing forward an overt lesbian characterization, in this age of outing and the representational politics of acting up, the show draws on a covert one. At first surprised by her friend's announcement, Roseanne then recalls a code in which the coming-out message is intelligible: "Nancy always did like that Miss Jane Hathaway on 'The Beverly Hillbillies.' That about says it all."

Notes

For Montana Silkwood. Thanks to Lisa Cohen and Cynthia Schneider for their helpful comments.

1 Quoted in Warren Sherk, *Agnes Moorehead: A Very Private Person* (Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1976), 73.

2 While filming *How Sweet It Is* on an ocean liner, Lynde recounts, "At night, we'd sit around and dish. [Director] Jerry [Paris] told me those rumors that everybody's heard about Debbie [Reynolds] and her *close friend* Agnes Moorehead. . . . I'd heard those rumors, but Jerry filled in some details that. . . . Oh, I'd better not, I'm not even sure if the story's really true" (*Outlook* 6 [Fall 1989]: 26). Hadleigh claims that Reynolds threatened to sue Eddie Fisher if he included the story in his autobiography.

Reynolds herself reports the "innuendo" that she and Moorehead were lovers without explicitly denying it (see Debbie Reynolds with David Patrick Columbia, *My Life* [New York: Pocket, 1988], 388). Moorehead repeatedly discussed "why I adore Debbie Reynolds" (interview with Sidney Skolsky, *New York Post*, 2 August 1964), avowing, "It's really the loneliest sort of life. . . . I did become good friends with Debbie Reynolds" (*New York Post*, 11 January 1969). The friendship is generally considered a salient fact about Moorehead. The two women "became close friends, in a mother–daughter type relationship" (James Robert Parish, *Good Dames* [New Brunswick, N.J.: Barnes, 1974], 122).

As corroboration goes, there is no more than ample documentation of the *rumor* in the gay press: "Hollywood knew her as its reigning lesbian, queen of Sapphic love. ('Who was Carrie Fisher's mother?' the old joke went. 'Debbie Reynolds. Who was her father? Agnes Moorehead')" (NYQ, 22 December 1991, 41). Dick Sargent, the second actor to play Samantha's mortal husband on "Bewitched," who recently came out in *People* and on "Entertainment Tonight" as well as in the gay press, was unable to confirm the tales about Moorehead's lesbianism. The knowledge that Darrin, the show's representative of put-upon normalcy, was played by a gay actor literalizes what the *Advocate* calls the "gay allegory" of "Bewitched" (30 July 1992, 69). In a gracious interview with the lesbian and gay news weekly on the occasion of her serving with Sargent as grand marshall of the Los Angeles lesbian and gay pride parade, star Elizabeth Montgomery notes, "Don't think that didn't enter our minds at the time. We talked about it on the set . . . that this was about people not being allowed to be what they really are . . . and all the frustration and trouble it can cause. It was a neat message to get across" (ibid., 69). Asked about Moorehead's lesbianism, Montgomery replies, "I've heard the rumors, but I never talked with her about them. . . . It was never anything she felt free enough to talk to me about. I wish . . . that Agnes felt she could trust me. . . . We were very fond of one another, but it never got personal." In characteristically grande dame fashion, Moorehead herself wrote, "I have played so many authoritative and strong characters that some people are nervous at the prospect of meeting me. . . . There is a certain amount of aloofness on my part at times, because an actor can so easily be hurt by unfair criticism. I think an artist should be kept separated to maintain glamour and a kind of mystery. . . . I don't believe in the girl-nextdoor image. What the actor has to sell to the public is fantasy, a magic kind of ingredient that should not be analyzed" (quoted in the *New York Times* obituary, 1 May 1974, 48).

Outside of gay publications, what often appears in place of any remarks about Moorehead's sexuality is an emphasis on her religious beliefs (see Herbie J. Pilato, *The Bewitched Book* [New York: Delta, 1992], 24–26). That Moorehead was devout is not in question. But religion seems to appear as a defense against a homosexual reading, as the very emblem and safeguard of spinsterishness. Ann B. Davis, who played Alice, the housekeeper who resembled a physical education teacher, on "The Brady Bunch" (and before portrayed Schultzy on "The Bob Cummings Show"), has also enjoyed a surge in

appreciation. In a recent update, she is reported as having shared a home since 1976 with an Episcopal bishop and his wife. "The three are dedicated to prayer and Bible study." She "never married" and admits, "I basically don't do that well with children, although my sister [identical twin Harriet] says I'm a great aunt" (*People*, 1 June 1992, 86).

Material on Moorehead cited throughout this essay was found in clippings files at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and the Museum of Modern Art Film Study Center.

3 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

4 Lisa Kron, *Program*, "101 Humiliating Stories," performed at P.S. 122, New York City, January 7–31, 1993.

5 Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 131, 321.

6 Agnes Moorehead clippings file, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

7 Michael Bronski, *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility* (Boston: South End, 1984), 101. See also chapter 1, "Who's a Sissy?" of Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

8 Marion Garbo Todd, "The Truth about Miss Hathaway: The Fascination of Television's Perennial Spinster," *Lesbian News* 16, no. 10 (May 1991): 40.

9 See Sarah Halprin, "Writing in the Margins" (review of E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*), *Jump Cut* 29 (February 1984): 32, cited in Judith Mayne, "Lesbian Looks: Dorothy Arzner and Female Authorship," in *How Do I Look?* ed. Bad Object Choices (Seattle: Bay, 1991), 115. Mayne's argument about Arzner also appears in chapter 3, "Female Authorship Reconsidered," of her book *Woman at the Keyhole* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

10 Richard Dyer, "Seen to Be Believed: Some Problems in the Representation of Gay People as Typical," *Visual Communication* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1983): 2. See also his "Stereotyping" in *Gays in Film*, ed. Richard Dyer (London: BFI, 1978; rev., 1984), 27–39, and T. E. Perkins, "Rethinking Stereotypes," in *Ideology and Cultural Production*, ed. Michèle Barrett et al. (New York: St. Martin's, 1979), 135–59.

11 Dyer, "Seen to Be Believed," 8.

12 Mary Ann Doane, "Dark Continents: Epistemologies of Racial and Sexual Difference in Psychoanalysis and the Cinema," in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 233.

13 Ritter was a member of the early lesbian community on Fire Island documented in Esther Newton's study *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town* (Boston: Beacon, 1993). McCambridge's career encompasses a series of telling roles: the unforgettable Emma Small in *Johnny Guitar*, an uncredited bit in Welles's *Touch of Evil* as a leather-jacketed onlooker at Janet Leigh's rape, a guest spot as mom to an effeminate warlock on "Bewitched," another as the woman who wanted to marry Dr. Smith on "Lost in Space," and the voice of the devil in *The Exorcist*.

That Ritter and McCambridge were radio performers like Moorehead suggests an interesting dialectic between lesbian representability and literal visibility.

14 Lisa Jones, "The Defiant Ones: A Talk with Film Historian Donald Bogle," *Village Voice* (June 1991): 69. See Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (1973; New York: Continuum, 1992).

15 Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979), 117; see also 109–10.

16 The comment that character actors are a "brassiere for the star, literally holding him or her up," is difficult to resist quoting in this case (Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* [New York: Little, Brown, 1950], 206, quoted in Barry King, "Articulating Stardom," in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill [New York: Routledge, 1991], 179).

17 See Sherk, *Agnes Moorehead*, 70. In Charles Laughton's bio of Moorehead for *Don Juan in Hell*, in which they toured extensively in the early fifties, he writes about her days as a drama student in New York: "She was kind of mad around this time, not because she had to pull in her belt notches, but because she hadn't enough money to buy mauve lace, and mauve taffeta and mauve velvet and mauve feathers and geegaws which are a necessity to Agnes Moorehead's breathing."

18 James Robert Parish, *Good Dames*, 78.

19 The Agnes Moorehead fan club's publication was originally entitled "Versatility," as noted in an issue of "Moorehead Memos," a later incarnation of the club's newsletter.

20 Unidentified clipping, Agnes Moorehead Clipping File, Museum of Modern Art Film Study Center, n.p.

21 Quoted in Mason Wiley and Damien Bona, *Inside Oscar* (New York: Ballantine, 1986), 241.

22 *Classic Images* 136 (October 1986): 18.

23 Tania Modleski, *Feminism without Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 50.

24 Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1975), 283.

25 James Robert Parish, *Good Dames*, 84.

26 James Robert Parish, *Good Dames*, 90.

27 In another revealing comparison, Parish notes that *Dark Passage* gave Moorehead an "opportunity to portray . . . a woman close to her own age without disguising costumes, makeup or foreign accents. . . . Here was a jealous, sex-starved characterization that the electric Dame Judith Anderson would have been proud to play in her heyday" (ibid., 94). Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg acknowledge that "Agnes Moorehead's prying, vicious Madge Rapf is a definitive portrait of bitchery" (*Hollywood in the Forties* [New York: Barnes, 1968], 39).

28 Dana Polan, *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 195.

29 Ibid., 274.

30 Jack Smith, "Remarks on Art and the Theatre," in *Jack Smith*, ed. Ira Cohen, Historical Treasures no. 33 (New York: Haumann, 1993), 133–35.

31 Boyd MacDonald, *Cruising the Movies: A Sexual Guide to Oldies on TV* (New York: Gay Press, 1988), 21.

32 Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 139.

33 Bosley Crowther, *The New York Times*, 4 March 1965, section 1, 36.

34 *Advocate*, no. 608 (30 July 1990): 69.

35 Patricia Mellencamp, "Situation Comedy, Feminism, and Freud: Discourses of Gracie and Lucy," in *Studies in Entertainment*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 91.

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