‘PAINTING WITH FACES’: THE CASTING DIRECTOR IN AMERICAN THEATRE, CINEMA, AND TELEVISION

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

In Casting By (2012), HBO’s documentary on the casting director, Martin Scorsese praises his close working relationship with his casting director. “More than 90% of directing” he asserts, “is the right casting.” Taking as its starting point that the casting director is, as Scorsese’s enthusiasm reveals, a vital but often unrecognized part of the production team, “‘Painting with Faces’: The Casting Director in American Theatre, Cinema, and Television” offers the first extended scholarly analysis of the profession. This comparative history broadens the concept of what constitutes a decision-maker in three major culture industries by arguing that casting directors, often devalued as feminized clerical labor, exercise more control over the creative and economic aspects of production than we usually acknowledge.

Chapter one, “The Pre-Professional Casting Director,” offers a pre-history of the theatrical casting processes to explain how and why the professions of casting director and talent scout emerged in the twentieth century. Examining how casting operated throughout different epochs and in diverse production practices (particularly the medieval cycle plays, the English early modern theatres, and the American stock companies), I contend that those who took on the functions of proto-casting director were, contrary to today’s perception of the casting director as “below-the-line” labor, usually the production’s most important creative personnel.

Turning to the twentieth century, chapter two, “The Company Casting Director,” argues that in-house casting employees working during the golden age of Broadway, classical Hollywood, and early television eras exerted more creative influence within their respective companies than industrial scholarship allows. Seen as what one film historian calls “low-level decision-makers,” casting directors rarely figure in industry studies because these analyses typically focus on directors or producers. Archival documents such as memoirs, memos, and casting idea lists indicate, however, that casting personnel were not simply clerical workers, but,
rather, by contributing to hiring decisions, among those who helped shape their respective companies’ aesthetic vision.

My project’s third chapter, “The Independent Casting Director,” brings women into the historical record by explaining the rise of the female casting director and the concomitant gendering of the profession. The chapter’s first half argues that examining the major entertainment industries concurrently reveals that media scholars have profoundly misunderstood the rise of female labor in entertainment occupations such as casting. By focusing on Los Angeles and the classical Hollywood studio system, critics ignored the more permeable divisions of labor that existed in New York-based theatre and early television. The looser organizational structure of these two industries allowed women to pursue entertainment careers and produce culture on the east coast in ways they could not on the west.

Also concentrating on gender, the latter half of this chapter contends that the disproportionate number of women who entered casting in the 1960s-70s led scholars, journalists, and industry professionals to devalue the profession by associating it with stereotypically feminine traits. Arlie Russell Hochschild’s theories of “emotional labor” and Vicki Mayer’s media scholarship on “nurturing,” accommodating feminized workers apply to common observations about casting directors. Whether or not casting is a service profession, certainly casting directors (male and female) perceive it as such and often use feminized language to describe what they do. Yet casting requires skills typically seen as masculine, which many industry studies theorists argue the role of decision-maker demands. For example, with production funding increasingly scarce in today’s weak economic climate, casting directors often serve as de facto producers by attaching talent to theatre and film projects to secure the necessary financing. The funding for the Oscar-winning Crash (Haggis, 2004) was cast-contingent, and
that movie’s casting directors, Sarah Halley Finn and Randi Hiller, received credit for getting the film made.

Chapter four, “The Digital-Age Casting Director,” explores the digital revolution’s impact on today’s casting practices. As I trace casting offices’ increased use of digital media to locate and audition actors, I argue that digital devices give casting directors more control over the decision-making process. Digital cameras and video-sharing websites, for example, allow casting directors to edit most auditions and regulate the content upon which many hiring decisions are now based.

My work on casting culminates by examining the digital era’s implications for casting’s future. I contend that even those digital special effects such as avatars that could potentially limit the casting director’s creative input are unlikely to do so as most CG-manipulated characters are still modeled on live performers.
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INTRODUCTION

“More than 90% of directing…is the right casting.” Martin Scorsese, director

“‘Every job I’ve had became mine because of secretarial training.’” Shirley Rich, casting director

In 1985, when the Casting Society of America (CSA) instituted its annual awards for outstanding achievement in casting, the guild named its prize the Artios: “perfectly fitted” in ancient Greek. This “perfect fit” refers to the match not only between actor and role, but also the actor and other cast members; together, they build imaginary worlds. Fittingly, casting directors and those who write on casting invoke art-inspired metaphors to describe this process, including “creating a canvas” and “executing the whole general scheme of the mosaic.” For casting directors, actors function as iconographic artistic tools equal to the composer’s notes and the costume designer’s drawings. Casting directors “paint with faces,” sculpt with bodies, and draw with voices as cinematographers do with light.

The first dissertation on casting, “‘Painting with Faces’: The Casting Director in American Theatre, Cinema, and Television,” argues for the casting director’s status as an important decision-maker in three major culture industries. By focusing on the predominantly

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1 Casting By, directed by Tom Donahue (HBO, 2013).
2 Shirley Rich Papers, Iowa Women’s Archives, Iowa City, IA.
4 See, respectively, Cassie Carpenter, “Painting with Faces,” Back Stage East 48, no. 1 (January 4, 2007), Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed March 5, 2014); and Barrett C. Kiesling, Talking Pictures: How They are Made, How to Appreciate Them (New York: Johnson Publishing Company, 1937), 128.
5 Ellen Lewis, who works with Martin Scorsese, compares the art of casting to “painting a really big picture with faces.” See Carpenter, “Painting with Faces.”
6 With “culture industry,” I follow Richard E. Caves’s definition of the more specific “creative industry:” “in which the product or service contains a substantial element of artistic or creative endeavor.” See Richard E. Caves, Creative Industries: Contracts between Art and Commerce (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), vii. Note that casting for regional theatres, soap operas, commercials, reality television, industrials, music videos, webisodes, and any production not originating in the United States are beyond the scope of this project.
female casting director’s evolution, my goals are three-fold. First, this comparative industry study analyzes how an entertainment profession develops and adapts to diverse production practices and labor conditions over time. Second, I illuminate the historical role of women’s work in what are still male-dominated businesses. Finally, and most significantly, I broaden the concept of what constitutes a “decision-maker” by arguing that a production team member often dismissed as clerical makes substantial creative contributions. As anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker explains, decision-makers “influence the creative aspects of movie production and leave their imprint on the movies.” While this term is usually reserved for more powerful industry professionals such as directors and producers, I contend that casting directors should receive credit for more authority over culture production than we generally acknowledge.

I first became interested in casting in 1989 when I was employed at New York’s Lincoln Center Theater as a receptionist to earn extra money while attending graduate school. The casting director, Billy Hopkins, who also worked for Oliver Stone, hired me to assist him. Seven years later, after casting numerous theatre and film projects for him and independently, I moved to Los Angeles. There, I worked on primarily movies and television until 2006, when I returned to graduate school.

During the seventeen years that I was in casting, the profession waged two major campaigns. The first and one that is on-going attempted to attain Oscar- and Tony-award status. Currently, casting directors are the only creative members of the production team ineligible, though they do qualify for Emmys. Second was the struggle to unionize; non-union casting offices were unique among production personnel. After a decades-long battle during which

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several unions, including the Directors Guild of America (DGA) and the location scouts, refused them admittance, they affiliated with Local 817 (NY) and Local 399 (LA), the theatrical, and film and television teamsters, respectively.

Thus, I began this project with this research question: Why have the Academy of Motion Pictures, Arts, and Sciences (AMPAS) and the American Theatre Wing, regulators of, respectively, the Oscars and Tonys, steadfastly refused to recognize casting directors? More broadly, what is it about casting that makes it the exception among other above-the-line production jobs? If directors, writers, cinematographers, designers, choreographers, and composers are awards-worthy, why are casting directors deemed not? My findings reveal that the long-standing debate over casting as either creative or clerical informs the answers to this question.

I. Previous Work

While casting is essential to theatre and media production, little scholarship exists on either the practice or its practitioner, with the exceptions of Donald R. D’Aries, Erin Hill, Foster Hirsch, Charlene Widener, and Pamela Robertson Wojcik. Journalists often write on casting (usually interviews with casting directors who offer career advice to hopeful young actors) and a

handful of casting directors have published their own books, but relevant critical works concentrate on either star studies or non-traditional casting. These focus on a small number of actors; ignore the actual casting process; and often overlook casting personnel’s impact on production, performance, reception, and representation. In addition, as film scholar John O. Thompson remarks, although more research on casting would reveal the ideologies behind contemporary representation practices, casting directors rarely figure in industry studies.


Instead, these monographs typically attend to more traditionally defined decision-makers: directors, producers, writers, and studio heads.

Because little criticism specifically includes the casting director, my claims engage with two disciplines’ decades-long approaches to professionalization and labor: sociology and media industry studies. The first can be divided into two subfields: the sociology of occupations/professions and industrial/organizational sociology (the subfields are not always discrete and often overlap). The former (Andrew Abbott, Eliot Freidson, Magalie Sarfatti Larson, and Keith M. Macdonald) study how and why professions such as law and medicine evolve; their functions, responsibilities, and working conditions; and the knowledge, training, and credentials they demand.12 The latter (Andy B. Anderson, Michael B. Arthur, Susan Christopherson, Paul DiMaggio, Robert R. Faulkner, Paul M. Hirsch, Denise M. Rousseau, and Michael Storper) analyze how labor is organized and operates throughout different industries, eras, and models (for example, the Fordist and post-Fordist periods).13 When the literature of either subfield concentrates on cultural production, it is often termed the sociology of art.

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Similarly, in the last decade, media industries and production studies scholars (Sarah Baker, Miranda Banks, Andrew Beck, John T. Caldwell, David Hesmondhalgh, Hill, Michele Hilmes, Jennifer Holt, Vicki Mayer, Alissa Perren, and Jeremy Tunstall\textsuperscript{14}) have applied sociological theories of work (particularly on industrial labor divisions) to ethnographies of entertainment production that Powdermaker and Leo Rosten pioneered.\textsuperscript{15} They especially analyze production personnel not among Powdermaker’s “decision-makers,” such as stuntpeople or reality series’ talent scouts. This scholarship combines critiques of concepts of who is deemed an “influence [on] the creative aspects…of production” and why with Mayer’s notion of the


“producer,” defined as those in a position to manage their own creative work.\textsuperscript{16} Hence, Mayer and other scholars look not only at workers’ contributions to an artistic product, but also examine the conditions of those who seemingly have little control over either their labor or, as below-the-line, impermanent employees in a competitive market, their career trajectories. These critics, according to Holt and Perren, “foreground the role of individual agents within larger media structures [challenging] notions of monolithic industry, past or present.”\textsuperscript{17} They concentrate on, among other issues, hierarchies of labor, how workers’ gender and ethnicity affect perceptions of their craft, and the strategies wage earners use to make themselves relevant within their respective, “monolithic” culture industries. Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell’s observation that their field “place[s] the researcher in dialogue with subjects usually charged with representing us” seems especially apt for casting personnel.\textsuperscript{18}

Most scholarly literature in this vein focuses solely on media; theatre historians rarely study work. Only James Burge, Bruce A. McConachie, and Douglas McDermott, in their research on lines of business casting; David George Schaal, in his history of American rehearsal and production practices; and Tracy C. Davis, who assesses the socioeconomic conditions of the Victorian theatre, extensively analyze how theatre’s industrial organization affects stage labor.\textsuperscript{19} Thus, in considering theatre alongside film and television, I argue that media scholars have


\textsuperscript{17} Holt and Perren, “Does the World,” 8.

\textsuperscript{18} Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell, \textit{Production Studies}, 3-4.

profundely misunderstood certain key entertainment industry developments such as the
gendering of some creative professions such as casting.

Media studies’ critical turn to issues of labor arises from four relatively recent and
possibly interrelated developments in cultural production and cultural theory. Some critics
(Banks, Caldwell, Mayer) apply real-world business trends to their work by, for example,
examining film and television’s use of free-lance labor – an increasingly common corporate
hiring practice in today’s uncertain economy. Others (Hilmes, and film scholars Paul
McDonald and Thomas Schatz) seek to challenge the auteur theory, a legacy of the French new
wave that has underpinned most film scholarship in the United States since the discipline
surfaced in the 1960s. They contend that claims for single authorship privilege the text,
contradict the collaborative nature of entertainment, and neglect the socioeconomic institutions
through which film is produced, distributed, and exhibited. In addition, as McDonald points out,
the more recent and less auteur-driven field of television studies also influences those who seek
cinematic analyses beyond authorship debates.

Finally, in arguing that, as Schatz notes, “certain individuals besides the director are vital
creative contributors,” scholars in both camps analyze workers’ subjectivity, and the power
relationships and hierarchies within institutions through the framework of cultural studies.
They particularly apply the concept of political economy, defined by McDonald as “address[ing]
the industrial conditions of mass communication…around the themes of ownership,

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20 For information on the rise of free-lance labor, see Arthur and Rousseau, *Boundaryless Career*.
since the 1990s several scholars have worked “across both film and television,” though he cites only Tino Balio’s
*Hollywood in the Age of Television* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1990) and Janet Wasko, *Hollywood in the
Information Age: Beyond the Silver Screen* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994). I have come across no transindustrial media
studies that include theatre.
concentration, media integration, and the international division of labor.” Digital media scholarship, which argues that the electronics industries (computers, video games, cell phones, etc.) benefit from the labor of an often under-paid and uncredited global workforce, also contributes to this bottom-up theoretical approach.

My own methodology concentrates on how creative labor develops a professional identity and operates within industry structures, particularly gendered divisions of labor, and is not primarily ethnographic, but the ethnographic approaches of Caldwell, Hill, and Mayer strongly influence mine. Caldwell and Mayer’s analyses of how the production workers they interviewed talk about what they do particularly shapes the section in my third chapter that critiques casting directors’ depiction of their work as mystical. I will delineate Hill’s framework, the only scholar to trace casting’s evolution, more closely in that chapter.

Whatever his or her methodology, however, most of these scholars examine creative labor within a contemporary setting; only Hill provides an historical rationale for current working conditions. By tracing how the casting profession developed through the centuries, I provide an historical dimension to, in particular, the gendered debates surrounding casting directors today.

II. Non-Traditional Casting

Before I describe my individual chapters, I want to briefly address non-traditional casting, the one area of casting that has received scholarly attention. In 1978, communications professor Joseph Turow investigated why the smaller roles in many television series were stereotypically cast according to ethnicity and gender. Interviewing several casting directors

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23 McDonald, “Introduction,” 145.
about their attitudes towards performers’ age, gender, and ethnicity, he discovered that they applied the principle of what he called “creditability” when choosing actors for these roles. Turow defined this term as “a caster’s perception of what most people think someone in a particular occupation or role looks like.” Thus, in the late 1970s, “most people” envisioned police officers as male and white. He concluded his study by observing that several casting personnel admitted that notions of what is acceptable were unstable. If they cast an “unusual-looking actor” – here defined as a performer who does not fit popular perceptions of his or her role – and audiences accept that actor in the part, then concepts of plausibility shift and broaden.  

Encouraging “emerging notions of credibility” inspires what is commonly known as non-traditional casting. It and its corollary, ethnically accurate (or ethnically appropriate) casting, are arguably the most significant shifts in late-twentieth century casting practices. Addressing issues of representation, they have important implications for gender, ethnic, post-colonial, and disability studies; hence, non-traditional casting is the only aspect of casting for which a body of scholarly work exists (although criticism focuses on the politics of representation and reception rather than the casting process and the casting director).

Non-traditional casting was introduced primarily for economic reasons. Actors’ Equity founded the Non-Traditional Casting Project in 1986 to increase the number of roles available to minority, female, and disabled actors, who were disproportionately underrepresented on professional stages across the United States.\(^{27}\) (Although the policy targeted theatre, efforts were also made to address disparities in film and television casting.) The Project defines non-traditional casting as the use “of ethnic, female or disabled actors in roles where race, ethnicity, gender or physical capability are not necessary to the characters’ or play’s development.”\(^{28}\) Non-traditional casting is divided into four types: societal (ethnic and female actors appear in roles such as doctors and lawyers to represent a cross-section of society; the most common


occurrences; cross-cultural (a well-known production migrates from one culture to another, as in the Federal Theatre Project’s 1936 production of *Voodoo Macbeth*); conceptual (an actor is cast non-traditionally for thematic reasons); and colorblind (the best actor is chosen for the role regardless of biological factors; this occurs thus far only in theatre).

Non-traditional casting is contextual (Shakespeare’s stage cast boys as women, an accepted practice in his day); thus, Canada Lee’s performance as Caliban – a role hitherto played by white actors – in Margaret Webster’s 1945 production of *The Tempest* is one of the earliest instances of non-traditional casting on Broadway. Joseph Papp, the founder and artistic director of the New York Shakespeare Festival, was the first to adopt non-traditional casting as an institutional practice when, in 1956, he cast Roscoe Lee Browne in *Julius Caesar* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Since the 1980s, largely due to Equity’s efforts, Broadway and most regional theatres now implement some form of non-traditional casting. Most recently, the Tony-award winning 2013 Broadway revival of *Pippin* cast actress Patina Miller (who also won a Tony) in the role Ben Vereen originated in 1972.

The three seminal events in the history of non-traditional casting are: the Non-Traditional Casting Symposium of 1986, the first devoted to the underemployment of female and ethnic performers; the 1990 *Miss Saigon* controversy, in which white actor Jonathan Pryce played the half-Vietnamese Engineer; and playwright August Wilson and director Robert Brustein’s 1997

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debate over the role of race and ethnicity in the American stage.\(^{33}\) These events captivated scholarly and popular writers who emphasized – to varying degrees – four major issues that debates over non-traditional casting typically engender: economic (while women over forty constitute approximately forty-five percent of the United States’ population, they appear on screen in less than twenty-eight percent of all roles, and receive lower salaries, fewer residuals, and less access to union membership and health care than their male colleagues enjoy\(^{34}\)); sociopolitical (as scholar Ella Shohat argues, “[t]he denial of aesthetic representation to the subaltern has historically formed a corollary to the literal denial of…political representation”\(^{35}\)); aesthetic (non-traditional casting’s perceived effects on the play’s meaning and authorial intent); and reception (how audiences interpret this casting praxis).\(^{36}\)

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Non-traditional casting is, in many ways, diametrically opposed to the other significant recent casting trend: casting actors in roles with which they share similar ethnic identities – what scholar Angela Pao calls “biologically appropriate casting.” Although these two casting practices grew out of the same socioeconomic impulses (to provide women and minorities with more parts), they are, despite Pao’s collapsing the distinction between them, disparate. Non-traditional casting often challenges conventions of realism. The choice of African American actor Laurence Fishburne to play the English monarch Henry II opposite white actress Stockard Channing as Eleanor of Aquitaine in the 1999 Roundabout revival of James Goldman’s *The Lion in Winter*, for instance, is not historically accurate in terms of the play’s time and place.

Biologically appropriate casting, on the other hand, emphasizes authenticity, which film and television increasingly privilege in all casting decisions. As music scholar Peter Kivy argues, “‘[a]authentic’…has become or is close to becoming a synonym for ‘good’,” a sentiment that many contemporary directors and producers appear to share. He offers different definitions of authenticity relevant to music (authorial intention, performance practice, etc.); in casting, “authentic” refers to the actor who shares the same gender, ethnic make-up, and possibly even background and skills as the character he or she portrays. Thus, a role that provides a minority

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actor with a part might be non-traditional, but not biologically appropriate if she plays a character with an ethnicity different from her own, as the Chinese Zhang Ziyi, Michele Yeoh, and Gong Li did in *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Spielberg, 2005).\(^{40}\) In contrast, arguably the most representative example of authentic casting (other than those actors playing themselves) is Haing S. Ngor, who portrayed Dith Pran in *The Killing Fields* (Joffé, 1984), and was, like his alter ego, Cambodian and a survivor of the Khmer Rouge.\(^{41}\)

While casting directors, particularly those who work in theatre, employ non-traditional casting practices, they had little to do with its adoption: this policy was primarily set by artistic directors, directors, and producers. Casting directors, however, contribute significantly to the upsurge in ethnically accurate casting by going to great lengths to locate choices for these roles – their task complicated by the fact that most finds are not professional actors. For Joel and Ethan Coen’s *A Serious Man* (2009), set in a Jewish community in Minnesota, casting director Rachel Tenner, "‘[hung] out in the back of synagogues and [knocked] on the doors of Hebrew schools in Minneapolis” to locate several members of the supporting cast. And Hopkins searched high schools, community colleges, and fast food restaurants before settling on Gabourey Sidibe, the

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star of *Precious* (Daniels, 2009). Theirs and other casting directors’ efforts facilitate more employment for actors of color and greater on-screen representations of diverse ethnicities.

While it is indisputable that white actors play the majority of roles and ethnic actors are disproportionately underrepresented, biologically appropriate casting can be problematic. As scholar Isabel Molina-Guzman argues, contradicting Shohat, “commitment to authenticity in casting…reinforces stereotypical notions of ethnicity and race often grounded in biology and skin color.” She primarily concerns herself with the rising number of actors who self-identify as mixed-race and find that they do not fit neatly into the ethnic “boxes” provided them. Ironically, “stereotypical notions of ethnicity” have increasingly materialized as interest in authenticity has grown to include socioeconomic categories. Casting directors in search of “urban authenticity,” for example, often contact the Suspect Agency, which represents Latino/a ex-gang members. As Manny Jimenez, who founded the agency in 2003, explains, his clients view these roles ambivalently for they are often cast as “the bad guys.” His example bears out Molina-Guzman’s assertion that authenticity in casting, however laudable, risks reinforcing negative stereotypes and racist representations.

III. ‘Painting with Faces’

Each chapter in “Painting with Faces” examines how the casting director (or protocasting director) negotiated major transitions in production practices and/or entertainment industry labor organization over time. Although I focus on the twentieth and twenty-first

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centuries, Chapter I, “The Pre-Professional Casting Director,” sets the stage by identifying how theatre practitioners (Shakespeare, Garrick) working within diverse labor and production models (the medieval cycle plays, the American combination companies) found, hired, trained, and assigned actors before the casting director emerged as a distinct role. Chronicling casting and its shifts over nearly four centuries, I provide a hitherto unwritten history of the casting process by exploring when casting first appeared in the historical record, its textual life, and its earliest practices.

Turning to the first half of the twentieth century, Chapter II, “The Company Casting Director,” argues that newly professionalized casting directors and talent scouts had more impact on golden-age Broadway, classical Hollywood, and early television production than previously recognized, despite operating within hierarchical divisions of labor. While Hollywood studios, in particular, employed a top-down management style, I provide specific examples of in-house casting staff’s ability to, as Holt and Perren argue, exercise “relative power and autonomy [and] express divergent…creative visions…within larger institutional structures.”

My third chapter, “The Independent Casting Director,” concentrates on the emergence of the female casting director, the largest demographic in the profession today. This fact allows me to explore “everyday issues of female labor,” which – as media critics Annette Kuhn, Lauren Rabinovitz, and Lynn Spigel note – production studies often omit. I maintain that casting directors found their status as decision-makers challenged when, in the 1960s, after the studio system’s demise, a disproportionate number of women entered the profession. These women, who usually began their careers as secretaries, experienced contradictions between their positions

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as creative industry professionals and the work, often treated as menial. This ambiguity allows me to ask two important questions about the profession: Is casting creative work and, if so, how can we judge it? Certainly, many casting directors describe their process – particularly their ability to evaluate talent – in otherworldly terms. Avy Kaufman, a film casting director, speaks of her “intuition;” television casting director Allison Jones mentions her “instinct.” While I conclude that casting is creative, I also contend that emphasizing romantic concepts of “intuition” often diminish casting’s claim to expertise; therefore, I identify the concrete skills, experience, and artistic acumen that demystify this process. Ultimately, I complicate Allen J. Scott’s assertion that “the overwhelming majority of those [in Hollywood] who make decisions about matching creative talent to commercial projects are men...”

Chapter four, “The Digital Age Casting Director,” and my conclusion look at how a culture profession adapts to technological change. Most media scholars analyze the digital revolution’s effects on production (animation, cinematography, special effects) and post-production (colorization, editing), yet few examine how pre-production labor use new technology in their work. Here, I argue, somewhat counter-intuitively, that digital innovations

47 For example, casting directors receive above-the-line billing and Emmy consideration, yet they affiliate with below-the-line labor unions.
provide casting directors with more control over hiring decisions. While YouTube, actors’ websites, and computerized auditions may appear to bypass the casting director by circumventing the live audition process, casting directors regulate editing and dissemination procedures. My conclusion further explores digital advances’ effect on the casting process by hypothesizing how the CGI-generated actor might shape casting’s future.

IV. The Archive

Finally, I wish to say a few words about my sources. My primary research relies on an extensive review of the literature on casting for theatre, film, and television. This includes theatre, film, and television archives located at Indiana University, the University of Iowa, several branches of the New York Public Library, and the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison; trade journals (Variety and The Hollywood Reporter, among others); fan magazines (Photoplay, for example); contemporary newspaper articles (including The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times); and practitioner interviews I conducted myself. These subjects include one feature film casting director currently on staff at a major studio, one who worked primarily in television; and one who does theatre (previously in New York and now in Los Angeles).

My secondary sources encompass theatre, film, and television theoretical studies. By bridging these three fields, my interdisciplinary project offers a transindustrial strategy of research. With this comparative approach, I seek to broaden our understanding of the relationships among these fields, too often separated in scholarship.

Finally, while my conclusions are not anecdotal, first-hand experience informs my analyses of all evidence and gives me unique insights that a purely theoretical scholar lacks. This project advocates for a profession whose significance I witnessed and experienced.
CHAPTER I: THE PRE-PROFESSIONAL CASTING DIRECTOR, C. 1585-1915

“He gave to each comedian a part which he thought was in the compass of his power to hit off with skill.” biographer Thomas Davies on actor-manager David Garrick.⁵¹

“I made the Play for her part, and her part has made the Play for me…” playwright Thomas Southerne on actress Elizabeth Barry⁵²

Arguably casting’s earliest appearance in the historical record occurs in The Second Part of The Return from Parnassus (Anonymous, 1605). This satire, likely authored by university students, features as characters famous Shakespearean tragedian Richard Burbage and clown Will Kemp auditioning Cambridge graduates in a manner that anticipates today’s audition process. The actors hand the young men, Studioso and Philomusus, a piece of text – what today’s casting personnel would call “sides” – to speak aloud. As “Burbage” explains to the younger men, he and “Kemp” “may see what will fit you best” (IV.iv.1804) – that is, judge if the part suits them.⁵³ Like today’s casting directors, Burbage coaches Studioso throughout his audition, expressing encouragement and approval when he believes the latter recites particularly well. In one significant departure from modern-day casting practices, however, he provides line-by-line readings of the role, commanding the younger man to listen carefully so that he can “imitate” Burbage’s performance – the method by which aspiring actors of the time learned their craft. Studioso repeats the words to Burbage’s satisfaction; as the era’s greatest actor – the first to play Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth – exits the stage, he assures Studioso that he shows “potential.” Dismissive of actors, Studioso and Philomusus decide against stage careers. The real-life men

who auditioned successfully for Burbage or Kemp or any of the other great Shakespearean stars presumably chose differently and made their lives in the theatre.

Traveling from early-modern England to twentieth-century America, this chapter provides a compact history of how the theatrical casting process operated before function-specific labor divisions fully developed and the particular professions I analyze – the casting director and talent scout – arose. Who fulfilled these professions’ functions and responsibilities in past centuries? Who discovered Shakespeare’s players, the first English actresses, the earliest American stars? And how much agency and artistic input did these de facto casting personnel possess?

I must first define how I will use “casting” throughout this chapter by offering a brief etymology. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines “to cast” as “the assignment of the parts in a play to the several actors; the part assigned to any actor…the set of actors to whom the parts of a particular play are assigned.” In the early modern era, however, “cast” was used primarily to mean a cast of fictional characters, not until the early 1700s do sources refer to a cast of actors appointed to their parts.54 However, because the early modern figures I discuss discharged some of the duties associated with allotting roles – such as scouting – I use “proto-casting director” to describe them despite the slightly anachronistic use of the term.

I begin in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England for three reasons. First, these eras contain the earliest (Western) instance of what we define as professional theatre. Second, thanks to the printed texts of the era and recent archival scholarship by David Kathman and others, we know a great deal about how contemporary theatre makers devised actor-scouting, -recruitment, and -training methods, many of which anticipate ours. For example, although the above scene contains the only evidence we have that auditions occurred in the early-modern theatre,

Parnassus allows us to speculate on casting practices more assuredly than we can about those in previous eras.\(^{55}\) Finally, British theatrical practices heavily influenced those of the United States, the focus of my study.\(^{56}\)

This pre-history of casting traces events that led to the casting director’s appearance in the twentieth century; in the process, I lay the groundwork for two of my project’s major themes. First, I identify how shifts in casting practices both informed and were informed by changing industrial factors, specifically, the organization of theatrical labor and models of production. The theatrical eras I address here operated according to a company structure in which most of the theatrical workforce was permanent (or semi-permanent), contracted, and local; plays were performed in repertory; and “lines of business” was the predominant, concomitant casting

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\(^{56}\) Of course, some Spanish, French (court masques), and Italian (commedia dell’arte) theatrical practices inspired England’s, but these are beyond the scope of my study.
method. When in-house acting companies went out of fashion in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, company actors became free agents, the long run and the tour emerged as the preferred methods of production, and lines of business diminished. These transitions in labor organization and production processes produced the conditions that engendered the first professional casting directors. Second, I contend that those who took on the role of proto-casting director were, contrary to today’s debates surrounding perceptions of the casting director as clerical, usually the production’s most important creative decision-makers, indicating that casting’s roots are primarily artistic.

I. Shakespearean Stars

Scholars generally consider the sixteenth-century London theatre companies as the earliest examples of what we call professional theatre. Certainly, prior to this period, some professional actors did exist. They appeared either as solo entertainers (performing at court and country estates) or in small theatre troupes traveling under the royal family’s patronage. These troupes cast their productions – usually morality plays – as they saw fit, and most members performed multiple roles. Performers learned their trade “on the job” and by observing the other players with whom they appeared.

Itinerant players continued into Elizabethan times, but the rise of the professional theatre introduced alternative, more complex, and wider-reaching casting methods than in the previous era. The permanent theatre buildings, identifiable playwrights, in-house playing
companies, and regular repertory seasons produced a stable theatre institution and what we recognize as a professional actor culture. We know the names of individual actors; printed plays contained original cast lists; and many performers, including Kemp (fl. 1585-1602), enjoyed fan followings. The theatre’s new professional status was also enhanced by the era’s recognition of other emerging professions such as law (the Inns of Courts) and medicine (personified by the Queen’s court physician).

We know that two important members of the early-modern theatrical production team assumed casting duties: the playwright and the principal actors, both major shareholders in the playing companies. They scouted, hired, trained, and cast all the actors who appeared on the London stages. While we have considerable evidence for how the shareholders discharged the first three responsibilities, we do not know (apart from the evidence for auditions that Parnassus suggests) how they assigned roles. Several scholars of this period argue that the playwright made this decision by crafting roles for high-profile company members. David Wiles believes, for instance, that Shakespeare created some of his most famous clowns, including Falstaff, for Kemp. In arguing that plays were often tailored to a particular actor’s talents, Wiles offers as


62 While most theory on professionalization concentrates on the Industrial Age and beyond, Edward Gieskes argues that professionalization first appeared in the early-modern era. He points to the rise of the legal, writing, and theatre professions as evidence. See Edward Gieskes, Representing the Professions: Administration, Law, and Theater in Early Modern England (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2006).

evidence Kemp’s and Falstaff’s similarity in physical stature, and the actor’s facility with his alter ego’s long monologues (Kemp often performed solo pieces in other venues). Similarly, Tiffany Stern holds that dramatists created roles defined by specific personality traits and body types easily filled by the company actors who possessed similar characteristics, so that, for example, “fat jolly men had fat jolly parts.” Given the brevity of the early-modern theatre rehearsal period, Stern argues that casting actors as characters close to their own physicality and temperament saved valuable pre-production time.

Stern’s and Wiles’s concept of early-modern casting are based on the first documented instances of typecasting in theatrical history. In succeeding eras (and mediums), typecasting and its close cousin, lines of business, became the modus operandi for assigning roles, and I address this development more fully later in this chapter and the next. For the purposes of this section, however, I offer four limitations to these scholars’ typecasting theories. First, we know too little about what early-modern performers looked like or what kind of people they were to conclude that they essentially played themselves. In addition, these speculations overlook actors’ ability, talent, and imagination to embody characters different from their own. Indeed, Stern notes that the era’s greatest stars – Burbage (1569-1619) and Edward Alleyn (1566-1626) – played a wider variety of parts. Third, early-modern actors – even shareholders, who, presumably, possessed the larger parts – performed multiple roles. While some actors may have doubled in similar roles (the two children in Shakespeare’s Winter’s Tale, for instance), others may have doubled in

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64 See Wiles, Shakespeare’s Clown, 116-35.
65 Stern, Making, 63-64.
66 Stern notes that early-modern theatre companies had little time for rehearsal, given that they performed almost forty plays a year in repertory; see Stern, Making, 63.
67 See Stern, Shakespeare, 44-45.
dissimilar ones (Cordelia and the Fool). We can only speculate on doubling scenarios and, therefore, cannot conclude that performers always took on multiple comparable parts.\textsuperscript{69}

Finally, some actors deemed very different “types” performed the same roles. Stern herself offers the example of two Lord Chamberlain’s Company members who appeared as Shakespeare’s clowns. Kemp often played clowns she terms “ridiculous” or foolish, such as \textit{The Merchant of Venice}’s Launcelot Gobbo, who speaks in malapropisms.\textsuperscript{70} Stern quotes selections from Archie Armstrong’s \textit{A Banquet of Jeasts} (c. 1641) to support her theory that the actor shared real-life attributes with this type of clown. Given that this book was published almost forty years after Kemp’s death, however, the author may have heard these stories second-hand; evidence regarding Kemp’s true nature is not conclusive. Conversely, Shakespeare’s succeeding clown, Robert Armin (d. 1615), was known for his intellect: a painting depicts Armin with an inkhorn, a symbol of learning. He played the “wise fool,” such as the Fool in \textit{King Lear}, who often implies that his master acts imprudently. Yet, in noting that the more intellectual Armin inherited many of Kemp’s broader, less cerebral roles, Stern contradicts her earlier assertion that actors played specific types – especially as, presumably, Armin performed the clowns as Kemp had, given that actors of the era were expected to imitate the role’s originator.\textsuperscript{71}

John H. Astington disagrees with Wiles, Stern, and other like-minded scholars, arguing that Shakespeare and his contemporaries did not write for specific actors because in the early

\textsuperscript{69} See Stern, \textit{Shakespeare}, 50-53. Alan C. Dessen offers evidence that some casting may have been conceptual, particularly in doubling practices. Using what he admits is a problematic cast list from \textit{A Fair Maid of the Exchange} (some doubled characters would have to appear onstage simultaneously), he notes that the plays’ three pairs of antagonists are portrayed by the same two actors. While it is more likely that most casting decisions were made for reasons either economic (the crowd-pleasing stars in the most popular roles; a familiar actor in a role that parodies his \textit{oeuvre}) or exigent (the actor with the most time between scenes is doubled accordingly), we cannot rule out the possibility that the shareholders considered theme when assigning some parts. For information, see Alan C. Dessen, “Conceptual Casting in the Age of Shakespeare,” \textit{Shakespeare Quarterly} 43, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 67-70, \url{http://www.jstor.org/stable/2870904} (accessed September 20, 2013).

\textsuperscript{70} For example, when taking leave of Jessica, his employer’s daughter, Gobbo assures her that his “[t]ears exhibit my tongue” (II.iii.110) when he means “inhibit my tongue.” See William Shakespeare, \textit{The Merchant of Venice}, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press Publications, 1992).

modern era “dramatic character was not conceived with much particular individuality.” He does not theorize how the larger roles may have been assigned. While we cannot know with any certainty how carefully playwrights molded roles to particular actors, Astington’s view of early-modern “dramatic character” (itself debatable) does not preclude authors’ consideration of specific performers’ physicality, energy, vocal patterns, and performance strengths (an actor’s comic timing or singing ability, for example) when drafting their characters. And, certainly, profit-minded shareholder-playwrights would showcase the most popular – and lucrative – members of their companies in parts commensurate with their talents. The best-known actor-shareholders, such as Burbage, performed the largest or showiest parts and often excelled in generic roles (the tragic hero).

Although little concrete evidence exists for how roles were apportioned, we do know how actors, particularly the boys commonly believed to have played most female roles, were scouted. We also know where the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century performers David Grote calls “the best actors in the world” – who created Lear, Tamburlaine, and Volpone – originated. And we can identify who spotted, enlisted, and trained them – and how. As Astington demonstrates, early-modern theatre company shareholders doubled as talent scouts and drama teachers by locating and coaching potential actors. They recruited labor through professional, regional, and/or familial ties.

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72 See Astington, Actors, 28-9.
73 Armin, for example, was a singer; see Streitberger, “Personnel,” 354.
74 See Grote, Best Actors, 228-51.
75 Brett William Gamboa argues that the boy actor is largely myth: economics and the need for versatility would have encouraged theatre companies to hire young men (aged twenty-one to thirty) who could play men’s as well as women’s parts. For more discussion, see Brett William Gamboa, “Shakespeare in 3D: The Depth, Dimensionality and Doubling of Shakespeare's Actors,” order no. 3414725, Harvard University, 2010, http://search.proquest.com/docview/612812249?accountid=14553. Scholars’ debates over the boy actor rest largely on what ages constituted boyhood in early-modern England; Gamboa argues, for example, that young men over twenty-one might still be termed “boys.”
76 See Astington, Actors, 104-05 and 183-84.
including Burbage and Alleyn (known for his Marlovian anti-heroes). Burbage’s father, James (c. 1530-97), was an actor before he built one of the earliest permanent English theatre buildings. And Alleyn’s brother, John (c. 1555-96), and step-father-in-law, Rose Theatre manager Philip Henslowe (d. 1616), also performed. Charles Hart (1625-1683), one of the few to act before and after the Restoration, appeared with the King’s Men beside his father, William (d. 1650).

While performers born to theatre families were the most visible, other prospects surfaced via geographical proximity: Burbage, Lord Chamberlain’s Men member Christopher Beeston (c. 1580-1638), and boy actors Richard Robinson (b. 1598) and Richard Sharpe (1601-32) all lived in the St. Leonard Shoreditch parish. Not all boy actors came from London, however: Elizabethan-era theatre companies discovered some talented children when they toured the provinces.

Company shareholders also enlisted many young performers through the formers’ positions in liveries or guilds. Apprenticed to the shareholders to learn a manual trade, boys who showed acting promise received theatrical training instead. No theatre guilds existed, but because guilds did not require members to train their apprentices in a specific craft, actors who maintained their guild status sometimes accepted apprentices as goldsmiths, for instance, and then groomed any talented young man for the stage. Goldsmith Andrew Cane (1589?-1658), who was also a member of Palgrave’s Men, taught at least two apprentices who became boy actors: Arthur Saville (1617-after 1639) and John Wright (c. 1615-c. 1656). And King’s Men shareholder John Heminges (b. 1566), of the Grocers’ Company, coached many boys, including

Sharpe, best-known for portraying John Webster’s Duchess of Malfi. Not all apprentices transitioned successfully into adult roles, but some did, among them, Sharpe and Nicholas Tooley (d. 1623), members of the King’s Men.  

Established actors who did not belong to a guild or livery still took on boy actors as apprentices. In London, any householder (or property-owner) over a certain age who practiced a trade could teach apprentices. Actors who were not members of guilds, like Alleyn and Augustine Phillips (d. 1605), recruited boy actors either through covenant servant contracts (which required shorter term limits than apprenticeships) or parish apprenticeships (served by destitute boys dependent upon their local parishes and forced into unpaid servitude until adulthood).  

In addition to discovering young actors through family connections, parish ties, and apprenticeships, shareholders frequently found boys through schools. As Stern mentions, boys and young men regularly acted and sang in grammar school and university productions as part of their education in rhetoric; some Cambridge colleges, for example, required their students to appear in several plays a year to hone their physical and vocal skills. Theatre company members may have attended Eton and Westminster productions to recruit the most talented boys or may have seen them perform when the grammar school troupes entertained at court.


Choir schools also served as good resources for potential actors; theatre shareholders and directors of the famous children’s companies scouted these locations frequently. The Children of Paul’s drew many young performers from the Cathedral choir school. And Kathman offers evidence that some choirboy-actors were found through Christ’s Hospital, an orphanage known for its song school. It apprenticed its most promising children to Richard Farrant (1525-80), a composer who managed the Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars. Shareholders in the adult acting troupes doubtless attended the boy companies’ performances to recruit talent. Some talented choirboys moved into adult roles, including King’s Men Company actors William Ostler (d.1614), later Heminges’s son-in-law, and John Underwood (c.1588-1624), both originally with the Children of the Queen’s Revels.

While shareholders and boy apprentices took the leading male and female roles, respectively, hired men (weekly wage-earners who did not share in the profits) filled the smaller parts, which rarely contained more than a few lines and were usually doublecast. The established Elizabethan theatre troupes could afford to hire extra personnel to fill out their casts and benefitted from London’s relatively large talent pool. Stern speculates that prompters may have cast the minor characters – a practice that continued after the Restoration.

Companies engaged hired men and boys in several ways – often by simply accosting them on the street. As a boy, dramatist and theatre manager Thomas Killigrew (1612-83) recalled

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84 For background on how the children’s companies acquired boys, see Astington, Acting, 38-75; Lucy Munro, Children of the Queen’s Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13-54; and Michael Shapiro, “Boy Companies and Private Theaters,” in A Companion to Renaissance Drama, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 314-25. Munro and Shapiro note that contemporary court cases reveal that some children were kidnapped from the cathedral choir schools and forced to perform in the theatre companies.


86 See Munro, Children, 24-25 and 182-84; and Grote, Best Actors, 186-87.

87 See Stern, Rehearsal, 80-81 and 179; she notes that contemporary prompt-books often feature the names of actors suggested for the smaller roles.
spotting a man – presumably a company member or employee – outside the Red Bull Theatre asking passersby if they wished to take walk-on roles in crowd scenes. Eager to see the play, Killigrew volunteered.88 As Robert Barrie points out, London attracted many people desperate for work, and theatre companies likely cast some of their smaller roles with these unemployed.89 Some doubled in other theatrical capacities – musicians, wardrobe keepers, or gate keepers – while appearing in minor roles.90 These performers occasionally advanced to the rank of shareholder: among the King’s Men and Queen Henrietta’s Men companies, fourteen hired men attained shareholder status in either these or other troupes.91

II. Enter the Actress

When the British theatres reopened eighteen years after Oliver Cromwell shut them down, they were again organized according to the company model of theatrical labor, and Restoration-era theatre makers revived some of their early-modern predecessors’ scouting and casting practices. The most vital members of the production team continued to make casting decisions. Playwrights, for example, often created roles for specific actors, at times casting the play before finishing the script.92 Dramatists’ autobiographies, actors’ memoirs, contemporary criticism, and individual play prefaces and dedications all attest to this fact.93 For instance,

89 See Barrie, “Elizabethan,” 251.
90 See Bentley, *Profession*, 66.
91 See Bentley, *Profession*, 69. For more information on hired men, see Astington *Actors*, 126 and 188-224; Bentley, *Profession*, 64-112; Bevington, *Mankind*, 101-03; and Streitberger, “Personnel,” 349.
93 See, for example, Southerne’s prefaces to *The Fatal Marriage* and *Sir Anthony Love*, in *The Works of Thomas Southerne*, vol. 1 (London: J. Tonson [etc.], 1721), Hathi Trust Digital Library (accessed October 5, 2013); and John Dennis, “Reflections Critical and Satyrical, Upon A Late Rhapsody, Call’d, An Essay Upon Criticism (1711),”
playwright-actor-manager Colley Cibber (1671-1757), who originally intended *Woman’s Wit* (1697) for the players at Lincoln Inn’s Field, “was then forc’d…to confine the Business of my Persons to the Capacity of different people” when he left that company for the Theatre Royale.\(^9^4\)

Writers paid particular attention to the era’s new actresses. Because, as Jean Marsden explains, actresses attracted the sizeable – and well-off – heterosexual male audience, dramatists created strong, increasingly prominent roles for the most sought-after actresses in their popular comedies and tragedies.\(^9^5\)

Talent-spotting in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries involved the same kind of familial and geographical networks as in earlier eras. Children from stage families, for instance, continued to act, as the careers of Charlotte Charke (Cibber) (1712-60), Theophilus Cibber (1703-58), and Susannah Cibber (d. 1766) – children and daughter-in-law, respectively, of Colley – illustrate. The wife and brother of acclaimed Restoration actor Thomas Betterton (d. 1710) also performed.\(^9^6\)

In other ways, however, the new theatrical period brought significant departures from Shakespearean-era scouting, training, and casting methods. Role assignments, for instance, rested increasingly not with the company’s shareholders, but in the hands of the theatre manager. Manager-actor-playwright David Garrick (1717-79) cast most of the actors at Drury Lane.\(^9^7\)

While casting in this period remained a top-down process undertaken by the production team’s most powerful decision-makers, casting duties and decisions now fell to a single person and was no longer the shared responsibility of many (the shareholders). This development arose, in part,

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\(^9^7\) See Davies, *Dramatic*, 64-69; see also Stern, *Rehearsal*, 210-11.
because many managers – including Garrick and Cibber – doubled as actors and playwrights for their respective companies. Indeed, many theatrical duties, in direct contrast to later modern divisions of production labor, consolidated in the Restoration- and eighteenth-century eras.

The period’s proto-casting directors also found new venues for spotting talent. Some up-and-coming eighteenth-century actors were recruited in popular theatre haunts, particularly the spouters’ clubs (London taverns that hosted “open-mic nights”). These budding performers, or “spouters,” worked in other trades by day; at night, they regaled audiences with renditions of dramatic and comedic speeches, often aping the delivery – and capturing the attention – of the star performers who frequented these public houses. While many spouters never rose above the level of amateur, a few advanced to professional status: John Edwin’s (1749-90) ability to mimic famous contemporary comedians earned him a position with Manchester’s summer theatre, launching his illustrious career.98 Most spouters were men, but some women attracted notice. Dramatist George Farquhar discovered Anne Oldfield (1683-1730), one of the era’s most famous actresses, when she gave a dramatic reading at her aunt’s tavern. Indeed, amateur theatricals often drew talent scouts (as they would in subsequent eras). Mary Porter (d. 1765), who studied with Betterton, caught his eye while working in the theatre booth at Bartholomew Fair.99

Some managers found new actors by agreeing to meet select applicants, who wrote for appointments in advance. After two or three interviews during which, as playwright-biographer James Boaden (1762-1839) describes, the aspiring actress gave the manager a “taste of her quality” (that is, recited a dramatic monologue), the successful candidate was engaged on a trial

basis for a single play.\textsuperscript{100} The young Elizabeth Inchbald (later a famous novelist and playwright) met with several managers in this fashion before making her stage debut more expediently opposite her new actor-husband.\textsuperscript{101}

Young Restoration actors were not trained within an apprenticeship model, as their Jacobean predecessors had been, in part because many were now female. Instead, recruits studied their craft in “nurseries:” unofficial acting schools that the theatre companies operated between approximately 1667-82.\textsuperscript{102} Training methods, however, were similar: novice actors received one-on-one instruction and learned to emulate more established performers, especially when playing parts the latter originated. Betterton’s acting partner, the great Elizabeth Barry (1658-1713), trained Porter, who inherited many of her signature roles, in her technique.\textsuperscript{103} If the actor who created the role could not provide coaching, another familiar with his or her performance might step in. Charles Dibdin (1745-1814), a British actor and composer, recalled that Theatre Royal manager John Rich (1692-1761) offered to teach him all of singer-actor’s Richard Leveridge’s (d. 1758) roles “and where to lay the emphasis – for which last purpose he had marked the part…for me in his own hand.”\textsuperscript{104}

As these training methods reveal, this era marks the first recorded instances of the terms “lines of business” or “possession of parts,” the primary method of casting until the end of the nineteenth century. Burge, one of the few scholars to write on casting practices in the American theatre, defines lines of business as “the systematic distribution of parts within the given

\textsuperscript{100} See James Boaden, ed., \textit{The Life of Mrs. Jordan} (London: Edward Bull, Holles Street, 1831), 25.
\textsuperscript{101} See James Boaden, ed., \textit{Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald} (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1833), 8-9. Inchbald, Porter, and Oldfield represent the many actresses who, forced to earn their own living, turned to the stage, one of the few careers open to women; for more information, see Kathryn Shevelow, \textit{Charlotte} (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 40.
\textsuperscript{104} Charles Dibdin, \textit{The Professional Life of Mr. Dibdin}, vol. 1 (London, 1803), 25.
reertoires of …a stock company.”

“Possession of parts” meant that actors usually played either the same roles (Hamlet, Congreve’s heroines) and/or type of role (leading lady, juvenile, low comedian) throughout their careers. This centuries-old practice, he argues, began in early-modern England (recall Stern’s description of “fat jolly parts”) and crossed the ocean in the mid-1700s when touring British theatre troupes brought the tradition to America. It ended around 1890 with the demise of melodrama – a genre dependent upon recognizable character types – and the rise of realism, the ensemble cast, and the modern-day conception of the director.

Thus, Betterton, Barry, and other actors “owned” the roles that they played in the sense that no other actor could perform them as long as the originating actors remained with the company.

While lines of business were, in part, restrictive, they also allowed actors to memorize their parts quickly at a time when repertory limited rehearsal periods (I discuss lines of business further below).

III. The Victorians and Beyond

The nineteenth-century theatre retained some of the previous eras’ casting, scouting, and training practices. Casting decisions remained concentrated in the hands of the actor-manager, who ran the stock companies that continued to dominate the British theatre. He found many performers through the same familial and geographical connections popular since Shakespeare’s

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105 Burge, Lines, 3.
Many ambitious young actors frequented watering-holes popular with theatrical personnel (in particular, the taverns in Drury Lane). However, proto-talent scouts now located prospective actors over greater geographical distances and proximity to London decreased in importance. The invention of the steam engine made traveling easier and touring more prevalent in this era; thus, those who hired actors could “cast a wider net,” anticipating the globalized talent searches that casting directors engage in today (I discuss this development in chapter four).

Many actors continued to come from theatrical families, including Edmund Kean (c. 1787-1833) and son Charles (1811-68). Michael Baker argues that melodrama, the nineteenth century’s most popular genre, particularly encouraged whole families to enter the acting profession as the ages of the plays’ characters parallel those of the extended relatives’ (child, parent, grandparent). Consequently, actor-managers frequently engaged families to perform in their plays; several hired their own. Ben Webster (1797-1882), who managed the Haymarket from 1837-53, used his siblings, nephew, and son as performers and stage personnel.

School and amateur theatricals continued to offer young performers entry to the professional stage, among them were two future knights, Felix Aylmer (1889-1979) and Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1853-1917). Some Victorian-era actors, including Ellen Terry’s husband, Charles Kelly (1839-85), came to the profession through the military, a common venue for

110 Not all actor-managers were male. Among the more prominent female managers in Great Britain and the United States were Lucia Elizabeth Vestris (1797-1856); Laura Keene (c. 1820-73); and Mrs. John Drew (1820-97), grandmother to Lionel, Ethel, and John Barrymore. For information, see Davis, Economics, 273-306.
111 For a discussion of the railroad’s effect on touring, see McArthur, Actors, 9-10.
113 See Baker, Rise, 65. Alternatively, if we recall the early-modern playwrights’ tendency to craft roles for specific actors, we might conclude that some Victorian-era writers may have created melodramas with casts tailored to families.
114 See Baker, Rise, 66.
amateur theatricals; the Windsor Strollers (est. 1860) and the Simla Amateur Dramatic Club (est. 1876) were two popular military theatre groups.\textsuperscript{116} Of course, public schools and the military gave male actors training and access denied their female counterparts, but some actresses from middle-class families, including Irene Vanbrugh (1872-1949) and Sybil Thorndike (1882-1976), either attended girls’ schools or received private tutoring in singing, dancing, music, and elocution.\textsuperscript{117} In addition, several actresses turned their success as dancers and singers in the popular music halls into careers in the legitimate theatre.\textsuperscript{118}

In the early years of the twentieth century, with the demise of lines of business casting and its attendant training methods, theatre schools and drama programs became the main training ground and conduit to the professional stage for young actors – a practice still true in Great Britain today.\textsuperscript{119} The London Academy of Music (now the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art or LAMDA) was founded in 1861, offering elocution lessons to singers and non-singers alike. Among its alumnae are Brian Cox (1946-) and Chiwetel Ejiofor (1977-).

Beerbohm Tree opened his Academy of Dramatic Art in 1904 – after 1920, better-known as the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). Oscar-winner Glenda Jackson (1936-) attended. Laurence Olivier (1907-89) and Judi Dench (1934-) matriculated at the Central School of Speech and Drama, founded in 1906 by Elsie Fogerty. More recently, the National Youth Theatre, begun in the 1950s, has trained Helen Mirren (1945-) and Derek Jacobi (1938-). In addition, several actors who performed in college theatre productions while enrolled at Oxford or Cambridge have found success, including Emma Thompson (1959-) and Hugh Laurie (1959-).

\textsuperscript{116} See Baker, \textit{Rise}, 87.
\textsuperscript{117} See Davis, \textit{Actresses}, 12-14.
\textsuperscript{118} See Baker, \textit{Rise}, 106.
\textsuperscript{119} Some theatre companies also operated acting schools. The most famous belonged to Sarah Thorne, who ran the Theatre Royal in the seaside town of Margate. From 1885-99 she trained an enormous number of future stars, including George Arliss (1868-1946), who won an Oscar for his portrait of Disraeli (Green, 1929). For information, see Sanderson, \textit{Irving}, 34.
And, of course, as in previous eras, many contemporary talented performers belong to acting families, including the Redgraves, Cusacks, and Fiennes.

As I illustrated, company, or in-house, theatrical labor and lines of business casting methods dominated the early-modern and Victorian theatre, but, over the course of nearly four centuries, casting duties and decisions (indeed, most creative decisions) increasingly consolidated themselves into the hands of the most powerful member of the production team: the actor-manager, the precursor to the director. I now turn to the United States, where my purpose is two-fold. First, I detail how the British model of theatrical production and its casting practices heavily influenced those of its American cousin. Second, I contend that nineteenth-century shifts in theatrical labor organization and production practices produced the first professional casting directors.

IV. In America

The British theatrical system shaped the American theatre’s casting practices in two significant ways. First, the earliest American productions featured well-known British actors as their stars. These actors, including George Frederick Cooke (1755-1812), Edmund Kean, William Charles Macready (1793-1873), and Fanny Kemble (1809-93), performed Shakespeare and the popular Restoration playwrights in tours throughout the major east coast cities.¹²⁰ By the early 1800s, however, the United States began to produce its own stars, and American-born actors played the majority of roles. Edwin Forrest (1806-72), his generation’s most famous tragedian, became the box-office draw that Cooke had been. Then, as now, audiences responded to certain physical and vocal qualities that embodied contemporary values. Forrest, for example, who often portrayed the rugged man-of-the-people, was Jacksonian America’s most famous

performer. In an era that prized the self-made man and heroic individual, Forrest’s athletic ability and larger-than-life presence won audiences across the country.  

Second, most professional United States theatres at this time replicated the production practices and organizational structure of those in Britain. The two aspects most relevant to casting are the lines of business casting method and the stock company theatre system. Theatres throughout the country organized themselves into stock companies: comparatively stable groups of actors who signed exclusive, seasonal or multi-seasonal contracts to perform a set repertory of plays. Like those in Britain, the theatre managers, such as William B. Wood (1779-1861) of Philadelphia’s Chestnut Street Theatre, became de facto casting directors by locating and hiring the company’s actors. At times, managers also acted as nascent agents by hiring out their more popular stars to other theatres and charging a fee for their services. Ethelbert A. Marshall, who managed several successful East Coast theatres in the mid-nineteenth century, earned money by lending his more valuable actors to theatre owners in the south and Midwest.

As in Britain, actors were employed according to the lines of business. This method gave performers a structure in which to work and advance in the profession. Actors began their careers in non-speaking parts before moving into utility roles (bit parts). The more accomplished graduated to character roles and the most talented or popular to leads. Burge points out that while today’s actors might find this system constraining because players were confined to a limited spectrum of roles, lines of business actually protected actors from capricious hiring practices. No longer shareholders in theatre companies (as they had been in early modern England), actors now depended on others to hire them. Performers could, theoretically, be cast in

121 McConachie, *Melodramatic*, 82-90. Forrest and other famous actors sometimes commissioned plays for themselves that showcased their most bankable qualities; see McConachie, *Melodramatic*, 76-77; and Whitman, “Forrest,” 545.
122 See McConachie, *Melodramatic*, 82.
any part, no matter how small or unsuitable – particularly difficult for established or older performers who had worked long and hard to attain a certain status. An actor’s possession of parts, however, prevented a manager from casting performers arbitrarily, assigning them roles incommensurate with their experience, or summarily firing the more expensive ones in order to hire their cheaper (usually younger) competition.\textsuperscript{124} Thus, lines of business gave performers some control over their careers and provided workplace protections – a sort of “incipient trade unionism” – that Burge argues safeguarded actors in the years before Actors Equity.\textsuperscript{125} When some managers attempted to suspend this method of casting in the 1860s, several actors formed the Theatrical Protective Association, an early actors’ union, to protect their interests.\textsuperscript{126} Many players clearly valued the lines of business, believing that their ability to inhabit a specific character “type” provided them with a durable, bankable skill that made them attractive to buyers (managers) and increased their value in a competitive marketplace.

What Burge sees as a casting system that safeguarded a vulnerable workforce at the mercy of greedy employers (a melodramatic plot come to life), McConachie describes as artistically counterproductive. Lines of business, he argues, prevented talented younger actors from playing larger, more challenging parts and over-taxed audiences forced to accept performers in roles long after they were too old for them, simply because they had either originated or inherited the parts.\textsuperscript{127} Indeed, while this manner of casting protected several, usually older, actors’ interests, it often served neither the play nor many performers by encouraging miscasting. As contemporary theatre actor James A. Herne (1839-1901)

\begin{footnotes}
\item[124] See Burge, \textit{Lines}, 77-81.
\item[125] See Burge, \textit{Lines}, 6. Managers who hired actors to play roles or types that already belonged to another member of the company could be sued; see Burge, \textit{Lines}, 160.
\item[126] See McConachie, \textit{Melodramatic}, 248-51.
\item[127] See McConachie, \textit{Melodramatic}, 18; and Burge, \textit{Lines}, 215.
\end{footnotes}
complained, actors frequently played roles for which they displayed little suitability, appropriateness, and talent:

the part of the leading lady might call for a slender, willowy figure, but the first lady might be as stout and rubicund as one of the Merry Wives of Windsor. I have seen leading roles, which called for a man tall and of graceful carriage, enacted by a veritable Falstaff in build...Men and women who...were in every way immeasurably inferior to some other members of the company for the impersonation of certain roles, demanded these parts because, according to precedent, the leading man or lady, or the first juvenile, or the heavy man had had the role when the play had been first produced.128

Herne admitted, however, that lines of business casting provided actors with some measure of job security, pointing out that many stock companies hired performers as, for instance, either the leading man or first juvenile for a relatively lengthy forty-two week season. McConachie also mentions the abuses that Burge mentions, as actors often suffered without the protection of the lines of business. Managers eager to fire an undesirable actress could cast her in a role she was not trained to play (that is, one outside her possession of parts); if she refused, the manager could use her “obstinacy” as an excuse to dismiss her from the company.129

McDermott concurs with McConachie and Herne, adding that the lines of business was an outmoded theatrical casting practice that reproduced British hierarchical class divisions (low comedian, leading lady) antithetical to American notions of egalitarianism and free market

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129 See McConachie, Melodramatic, 250.
He argues that the touring combination companies – which featured stars who appeared in a single play and were supported by cheaper, less famous performers – that replaced the semi-permanent, in-house stock company as the primary model of theatrical production in the mid-to-late 1800s offered actors less constrained employment opportunities. Of course, combination companies reliant on stars were no more democratic than the stock companies, but McDermott rightly points out that this new production paradigm allowed ambitious, highly talented actors to break away from a restrictive casting system that often prevented them from realizing their full potential.

Critics disagree on why the lines of business casting practice faded in the late 1800s. Burge concentrates on aesthetic and industrial causes. For obvious reasons, lines of business casting suited melodrama, a genre dependent upon broad, distinct types (the villain, the ingénue) that demonstrate little character development. Realism, which appeared in the 1870s and deliberately eschewed well-known stock roles, weakened the effectiveness of this casting system. In addition, directors, who, Burge argues, replaced the performer as the “preeminently creative element in the theatre” at this time, exercised more control over their productions than they had in previous decades. These new directors preferred to cast performers they thought

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best for the role rather than those who insisted upon playing certain parts simply because they always had.132

McDermott and McConachie, on the other hand, focus on economic reasons. As they point out, the stock theatre companies fell victim to the Panics of 1873 and 1893. Theatres, faced with falling revenues, were forced to let their resident actors go; several local playhouses closed. As combination touring companies overtook the stock companies as the primary method of production and organization of theatrical labor, professional actors spent more time “on the road” – usually with production teams unknown to them – rather than in a single location among co-stars and employers familiar with their body of work.133 Actors became free agents out of necessity, and lines of business casting suffered accordingly.

As performers thus became “job actors” hired less often for full repertory seasons and more frequently for the run of a single play (anticipating the short-term, project-based hiring practices of the twentieth century, which I discuss in chapter three), casting practices and casting personnel adapted accordingly.134 To secure employment, many actors left their local theatres and flocked to New York, where most combination companies booked their tours. As U.S. theatre increasingly consolidated itself in New York City, the combination touring system allocated casting responsibilities to new personnel.135 While headliners appeared in the starring parts, often repeatedly in the same role (Joseph Jefferson, for instance, frequently performed Rip Van Winkle), someone had to cast the supporting players. These actors were usually employed

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132 See Burge, Lines, 226.
134 See McConachie, Melodramatic, 247.
The combination companies that used locally hired performers to fill out their supporting casts engaged, for example, Philadelphia-based stock companies or other local talent for the nights they played in that city. A regional theatre manager usually hired and assigned the actors in these cases. Because audiences paid to see stars and some prominent actors preferred not to compete with talented newcomers, little thought was given to the smaller roles: they were often cast haphazardly and the quality of the acting was uneven.\footnote{See Wood, \textit{Personal Recollections}. James O’Neill (1847-1920), for example, toured successfully for decades as the lead in \textit{The Count of Monte Cristo} despite reviews that panned or ignored the rest of the cast. For representative reviews, see “Amusements,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, December 21, 1887, \url{http://search.proquest.com/docview/163370240?accountid=14553} (accessed September 18, 2013); and “Amusements,” \textit{The Washington Post}, October 20, 1895, \url{http://search.proquest.com/docview/137933722?accountid=14553} (accessed September 18, 2013).}

Usually, however, stars toured with their own companies, chosen either by the star or a New York-based theatre manager, frequently with the assistance of a theatrical agent who took on many of today’s casting directors’ functions.\footnote{See McConachie, \textit{Melodramatic}, 256; see also McArthur, \textit{Actors}, 16-18. Some stars and managers advertised for actors to fill out their companies. The \textit{New York Clipper}, a precursor to \textit{Variety}, was a popular advertising venue; see, for example, \textit{Clipper} (May 1903), \textit{Internet Archive}, \url{http://archive.org} (accessed February 6, 2014).} As indicated above, until the emergence of the agent (around 1860), casting was an in-house process, overseen by a member of the permanent or semi-permanent creative production team (playwrights, actors, managers). Agents, however, worked free-lance – anticipating today’s largely self-employed entertainment workforce – and were not part of the production team. As they do now, agents served as go-betweens for managers (what we now call “producers”) and actors: supplying the former with the talent they required and the latter with the employment opportunities they needed.

Given that impresarios had neither the time nor the inclination to familiarize themselves with the city’s burgeoning actor pool, performers increasingly depended on agents to find them
work. Aspiring actors now “made the rounds” of the agents’ offices, registering with each by filling out questionnaires detailing their general skills (singing, dancing), physical appearance, and past experience. Agents organized and filed these questionnaires by category (gender, age range, dialect, etc.). Theatre managers turned to these agencies for help in casting their latest tours by describing the types of actors needed, indicating that certain aspects of lines of business did not completely disappear. The agents, referring to the questionnaires, recommended suitable possibilities. (These documents illustrate how nascent casting personnel categorized information on actors for hiring purposes; Broadway, classical Hollywood, and today’s casting directors employ similar methods. I trace this method of organizing casting information further in chapters three and four.) If an actress an agent had suggested got the role, she sent a portion of her first week’s salary to him as commission.¹³⁹

Actors regularly visited agents and managers until shortly after World War I; Katharine Cornell (1893-1974) recalls doing so early in her career in 1918.¹⁴⁰ The introduction of the professional casting director and legislation designed to curb agency abuses soon ended the agent’s role as de facto casting director. In 1910 and 1928, addressing performers’ complaints that many agents exploited and over-charged them, states required agencies to apply for licenses and set industry standard commissions – rulings still in use today.¹⁴¹ Subsequent regulations forbidding those who hired actors from also collecting commissions effectively severed the agent and casting professions.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ For information on agencies, see McArthur, Actors, 16-18; and McConachie, Melodramatic, 256.
¹⁴² Actors also accused theatre managers of exploiting them; these contract disputes frequently ended up in court; see McArthur, Actors, 20-22.
While agents assisted in filling the speaking roles, supernumeraries – typically either chorus girls or nonspeaking actors who filled out the crowd scenes in melodramas – were supplied by what Benjamin McArthur calls “super brokers.” Precursors to film and television extras casting directors, super brokers assembled large groups of people willing (or desperate) to work for a few nights. If the production did not employ a super broker, the super captain responsible for overseeing the supernumeraries found the additional bodies, often through advertisements placed in local newspapers.143 Although supernumeraries rarely rose above the theatrical equivalent of glorified extra, some of the nineteenth and twentieth century’s most famous entertainers, including Lillian Russell (1861-1922), Marie Dressler (1869-1934), and Fanny Brice (1891-1951), started in the chorus.144

The demise of the stock company system affected not only casting and hiring processes, but also the way that actors were trained. Prior to the early 1900s, most actors learned their craft from other actors or by working their way up through the stock companies’ lines of business. Many actors, including Wood, who was also a theatre manager, approved of this training method, believing that it gave young performers time to hone their craft.145

Once actors no longer belonged to these companies, however, they acquired their skills in alternate ways.146 In her work on the professional relationships between three famous nineteenth-century impresarios and their star actresses, Kim Marra notes that the latter often received training from the former. David Belasco (1854-1931), for example, worked closely with Mrs. Leslie Carter before her New York debut, giving her daily lessons in vocal and breath control, prescribing calisthenics to increase her stamina and ability to move on stage, and drilling her in

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144 For information on nonspeaking roles, see McArthur, *Actors*, 15-16.
scenes from select plays he felt suited her talents.\textsuperscript{147} Other actors took elocution lessons, dance classes, and/or studied with private acting coaches, usually established actors willing to teach for a fee.\textsuperscript{148} In addition, as in Great Britain, the first American drama schools emerged at this time. Former Harvard University speech professor Franklin Haven Sargent (1856-1923) founded the oldest, the Lyceum Theatre School for Acting, in New York in 1884 – today, better known as the American Academy of Dramatic Arts.\textsuperscript{149} Other conservatories soon sprang up in Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Classes included voice, movement, dialects, fencing, and character analysis. By the 1920s, many universities, including Yale, began to offer courses in acting.\textsuperscript{150}

These schools effectively ended the practice of having company actors and managers double as proto-casting directors and acting teachers. Indeed, casting and training duties diverged until the classical Hollywood era when studios operated closely-affiliated casting and talent departments; I discuss this development in the following chapter.

While the shift in theatrical organization from stock to combination companies affected hiring and training practices, other areas of casting, such as talent scouting, remained the same.

American actors came to managers’ and agents’ attention through networks similar to their British counterparts’. McArthur estimates that approximately twenty-five percent of the leading male actors who performed between 1880 and 1920 had relatives who worked on the stage,

including the Jefferson, Barrymore, and Booth dynasties.\textsuperscript{151} Other aspiring actors had friends in
the theatre; the more prominent ones, such as Minnie Maddern Fiske (1864-1932), wrote letters
on their behalf. And some famous theatre personages, including Belasco, granted personal
interviews to young actors who requested them.\textsuperscript{152}

Ultimately, the transition from the stock to the combination company system provided
actors with mixed opportunities. On one hand, it allowed actors to play diverse roles in more
venues. Because actors were no longer tied to the lines of business, a particular theatre, or
specific region, the more versatile and talented actors made better money as free agents in a free
market than they had as members of an in-house company.\textsuperscript{153} Denied the job security of an entire
stock company season (or seasons), other actors, however, did less well financially and
artistically.\textsuperscript{154} These actors, like Wood, believed that combination companies reduced the
working actor from vital team member to little more than a prop for the star – “servants upon
some principal performer” – and bemoaned actors’ subsequent loss of creative purpose.\textsuperscript{155}

V. Conclusion

While the stock company’s slow demise affected actors ambivalently, the development of
the casting profession depended on it. Theatre’s need for full-time casting directors arose only
after actors could no longer rely on localized, relatively stable employment and were forced to
become itinerant free agents. When regional stock company theatres closed, many performers
went to New York to seek engagements from producers unfamiliar with their work. Producers, in
turn, overwhelmed by the new talent pool’s sheer volume, turned to others (agents) to assist them

\textsuperscript{151} See McArthur, \textit{Actors}, 31-32; and James H. McTeague, \textit{Before Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting
\textsuperscript{152} See McArthur, \textit{Actors}, 40.
\textsuperscript{153} See McConachie, \textit{Melodramatic}, 27; and “Editorial in Support of the Combination Companies,” 181-82.
\textsuperscript{154} See McConachie, \textit{Melodramatic}, 247.
with the casting tasks that their counterparts in the past (actor-managers) could accomplish largely without help. Consequently, a few decades later, the professional casting director made his/her first appearance – a position that the acting profession’s growing instability made necessary. Ironically, actors’ transition from engaging in what Burge describes as “a highly specialized division of theatrical acting labor” (the lines of business) to more versatile free-enterprise agents who were cast “against line” largely created the specialization of the casting director.156

This chapter offered a brief survey of who took on the labor of casting and how casting decisions were made in the theatre before the casting director emerged in the twentieth century. Between the early-modern era and the end of the nineteenth century, the power to make casting decisions alternated among different production team members before increasingly consolidating itself into fewer hands: the stock company actor-manager made the choices that Shakespeare’s shareholders once had. Moreover, while the production team’s most powerful – and artistic – decision-makers once shouldered all casting responsibilities, by the end of the nineteenth century, agents, who were not vital decision-makers, members of the production team, or engaged in what Beck describes as traditionally defined creative work, helped allocate roles as an ever-expanding talent pool offered producers more options than they could process without outside assistance.157 As actors transitioned from an in-house workforce to free agents largely unknown to their employers, casting practices moved from localized, top-down approaches to ones more widespread, specialized, and delegated in nature.

157 Beck notes that cultural work is often depicted in mystical terms. His description fits our established notion of the spiritual artist rather than our conception of the business-minded agent; see Beck, *Art World*, 3. For my discussion of his theory, see my analysis of casting’s mystical language in chapter three.
Some of these nineteenth-century developments continued into the twentieth as the agent gave way to the casting director, today the professional most responsible for finding and hiring actors. The casting director took over many of the nineteenth-century agent’s functions, but, unlike the agent, he (later, also she) operated as a member of the production team, engendering debates over whether casting is a creative or clerical profession (I discuss this issue further in chapter three). Even lines of business casting – though weakened – reappeared in the classical Hollywood era as permanent entertainment structures (the studios) once again housed contracted actors identified, as in the nineteenth century, as “stock company actors.” Indeed, twentieth-century production models followed a trajectory similar to the preceding century’s as, once again, economic forces dismantled a stock company system (the dissolution of the studio system in the 1960s), transforming actors into free agents and modifying how performers are located and hired.

In the next chapter, “The Company Casting Director,” I discuss the first half of the twentieth century, its emphasis on highly-organized, function-specific labor divisions, and the historical appearance of the professional casting director as a distinct specialty. I now turn to the golden age of Broadway, the classical Hollywood studio system, and the early years of television – all structured, to some degree, according to an in-house, contractual system of labor similar to the stock companies’ – and the new casting directors, who, possessing neither the power nor the decision rights of the shareholders and the actor-managers, attempted to maintain some autonomy and creative control within these increasingly monolithic culture industries.
CHAPTER II: THE COMPANY CASTING DIRECTOR, 1915-60

“The all-important casting director…is employed for the purpose of translating an author’s footnote into an animated Technicolor character.”158 First National Studio Executive, 1930

“If you can find someone that looks the part, be grateful. If you can find somebody that can act the part, be very grateful. If you can find somebody that can both look the part and act the part, get down on your knees and thank heaven.”159 Clark Thomas, casting director, Thomas H. Ince, 1921

For centuries, those responsible for casting mimetic worlds took on other occupations within the theatre as author, actor, or agent. Around World War I, however, casting duties consolidated under the sole authority of the newly titled casting director and talent scout when theatre (later, also film and television) adapted to an industrial model of specialized labor divisions that began in the mid-nineteenth century and expanded in the twentieth. Three factors in particular contributed to this shift towards specialization: the emergence of the director, technological innovations (the invention of electric lighting gave rise to the lighting designer), and industries’ growing demand for skilled workers.160 These highly trained employees often struggled to retain some independence in increasingly Fordist workplaces designed to churn out mass-produced products quickly and efficiently. The classical Hollywood workforce, for example, encountered particular challenges in a corporate environment that scholars often describe rather harshly in mechanical terms as an “assembly line,” a “star machine,” and a

160 See Burge, Lines, and McDermott, Theatre. For scholarship on shifts toward professionalization as evolving industries increasingly hired workers proficient in a single area, see Abbott, System, 3 and 324; Freidson, Professionalism: The Third Logic, 2; Sarfatti Larson, Rise, 5-6; and Janet Staiger, “Dividing Labor for Production Control: Thomas Ince and the Rise of the Studio System,” Cinema Journal 18, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 16-25, http://search.proquest.com/docview/1298002813?accountid=14553 (accessed February 8, 2013). Culture industries other than film and theatre followed this trend in specialization: baseball, for example, separated field and general managers; see Melvin Adelman, retired professor of sports history at Ohio State University, e-mail message to author, October 31, 2013.
“factory-oriented mass-production operation.” While aspects of Hollywood resist the Fordist label – movies, for example, are more differentiated than cars in that no one could mistake Hitchcock for Ford or Gable for Astaire – the separation and specialization of labor is one way in which Hollywood films resemble Ford’s factories.

This chapter continues to trace casting’s professional development, its adaptations to diverse organizations of labor and production practices, and its oft-debated decision-making status. Using sociologist Abbott and media scholar Mayer’s theories of professionalization, I first concentrate on casting as an evolving profession; the kinds of knowledge and preparation the new profession demanded; and its functions, duties, and working circumstances. I then examine how the casting director operated within the confines of the Fordist management practices that characterized the early-to-mid-twentieth-century entertainment complex. While several media critics study industry practices, few analyze how media workers – often more skilled and psychologically invested in their work than those who labored on Ford’s assembly lines – balanced their desires for creative autonomy with their roles as members of a production team turning out mass-produced products. The casting director, viewed as simultaneously creative and clerical, faced particular challenges as he (and, occasionally, she) attempted to exert some artistic control within what we may view as limited spheres of influence.

I. Theories of Professionalization

Many media journalists did not treat the profession seriously in its earliest years, partly because casting, still in its infancy, had not yet achieved an industry standard. Until World War I,


162 Some exceptions include Mayer, Below the Line; and Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell, Production Studies.
those who cast were anomalous figures, their duties flexible and variable. In addition, disparate members of the production team and other entertainment professionals had undertaken these tasks previously. After the position of casting director emerged, however, it became, like many other occupations, increasingly professionalized. This process, as Mayer argues in her study of below-the-line television labor, “stresses the homogenous community of uniformly trained members who share a common knowledge and goals.”

By the mid-1930s, casting directors – either working within the classical Hollywood studio system or on Broadway – operated as the kind of “community” she describes. They embraced many of the criteria with which Mayer and those who study the sociology of occupations define professionalization, including exclusivity or monopolization, training practices, specialized knowledge, and “codified occupational ethics.”

For example, casting duties are administered solely by casting directors (exclusivity); casting directors follow a clear trajectory from talent scout or casting assistant to casting director (training); take as their object of inquiry actors (specialized knowledge); and abide by Actors Equity (Equity), Screen Actors Guild (SAG), and American Federation of Television and Radio (AFTRA) contracts (codified occupational ethics).

In his study of the ways professions evolve, Abbott evokes several measures that Mayer and other scholars use, but he stresses a different kind of knowledge – “abstract” rather than “specialized” – in his definition of professionalization. For Abbott, “abstract knowledge”

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163 See Mayer, “Guys,” 98.
164 Sarfatti Larson argues that professionalization is “the process by which producers of special services sought to constitute and control a market for their expertise.” Certainly, casting directors took over duties previously fulfilled by others: actor-managers, producers, and talent scouts; see Sarfatti Larson, Rise, xvi.
166 When casting directors unionized in 2006, they incorporated another criterion that Mayer mentions: “mandatory membership organization.”
167 See Abbott, System, 8.
is a “system [that] can redefine [a profession’s] problems and tasks, defend them from
interlopers, and seize new problems.” Abbott thus distinguishes between work that applies
abstract or innovative knowledge (e.g., medicine, the law) and labor that requires informational
knowledge (e.g., beauticians, auto mechanics). The former he defines as professions, the latter as
occupations. While professions and occupations both involve skill, training, and licensing or
accreditation, his taxonomy differentiates the two in terms of the ability to apply knowledge in
inventive, original ways.

While Abbott does not include the arts in his study, his distinction between types of
knowledge is useful when analyzing casting directors through the lens of the industry divide
between creative and clerical labor. Entertainment separates its workforce into two general
categories: above-the-line (in film and television, employees whose names appear in the main
title credits; in theatre, those names printed on the front page of the program) and below-the-line
(production workers displayed in the final crawl – or end-title – credits). Above-the-line
represents decision-makers with creative input and control: actor, director,
screenwriter/playwright, designer and/or cinematographer, editor, producer, and composer.
Below-the-line labor encompasses all other production employees: either clerical (accountant,
production assistant, script supervisor) or manual (dresser, gaffer, location scout, camera
operator). According to Abbott’s theories, jobs in the latter category require knowledge and
aptitude, but do not demand the leaps or connections in thinking that produce innovative editing
techniques, devise unusual lighting effects, or offer unique interpretations of a role as those in
the above-the-line classifications do.

168 See Abbott, System, 9.
169 Abbott does not acknowledge the class distinctions inherent in his definitions.
Elements of casting, however, make the profession hard to define within Abbott’s categorization. For example, although casting directors receive above-the-line credit in film, television, and theatre, theirs, as I mentioned previously, is the only occupation ineligible for Oscar and Tony consideration. Blurring the line between profession and occupation, casting exemplifies the tension between the two. Other industry professionals insist that casting directors rely on occupational knowledge and employ skills defined primarily as clerical: organizing (cataloguing actors as types), list-making (recalling actors and their roles), and budgeting (negotiating talent deals). AMPAS takes this position and, consequently, has steadfastly refused to grant casting directors Oscar consideration, even though it recently added a branch for casting directors.\(^{170}\) Academy representatives insist that the creative, interpretive aspects of casting – the choice of which actor should play each role – are done by other members of the above-the-line production team, usually, the director and producer. Bruce Davis, executive director of AMPAS, states that directors in particular oppose Oscar recognition for casting directors because they believe that they choose the stars and the main supporting actors. Explaining the directors’ position, he claims that “if a casting director is involved in the process, in many cases he or she is bringing in actors only for tertiary characters.”\(^{171}\) (I discuss this dispute further in my next chapter.) The Academy’s refusal to recognize casting directors is one reason why CSA sponsors the Artios awards, founded, in part, to show that casting is creative and awards-worthy work.

For those who deem it creative work, casting employs abstract knowledge that includes identifying talent; pairing actors with chemistry; and, to evoke Abbott’s criteria that

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\(^{170}\) Casting directors have been at-large members of the Academy for more than thirty years and may vote in the best picture category; branch status allows them to serve on the organization’s board of directors. For information, see Daniel Holloway, “Welcome to the Club,” Back Stage - National Edition 54, no. 32 (August 8, 2013): 11, [http://search.proquest.com/docview/1436786473?accountid=14553](http://search.proquest.com/docview/1436786473?accountid=14553).

professionals should “redefine a task,” assigning roles in ways that reveal new facets of an actor’s abilities, uncover hitherto unexplored dimensions to a well-known part, or emphasize certain aspects of a role over others. These interpretations of character, in turn, affect our reception of the text. MGM’s original choice for Dorothy, sunny Shirley Temple, offers us a very different character – and a very different Wizard of Oz (Fleming, 1939) – than the one played by the always-wistful, melancholy Judy Garland. As Pam Dixon, a past president of CSA, notes, many do not recognize casting as an art because the tools of the trade are occupational (paper pictures and resumes, cameras and editing equipment used solely for recording and distribution purposes). Yet, for casting directors, actors’ faces, bodies, and voices function as “tools” every bit as artistic as drawings, models, and designs.

II. A Profession Begins: Broadway

Journalists who wrote on casting in the first decades of the twentieth century characterized and often dismissed it in ways that foreshadowed Abbott’s distinctions between occupation and profession. In the eyewitness accounts that contemporary reporters left of the Broadway casting process, several viewed casting as an occupation by using the criteria that Abbott would later invoke (although they did not use Abbott’s express terms). For instance, in part because they aligned casting responsibilities with those of the agent – both, in these reporters’ determinations, more dependent on informational knowledge than abstract thought – they often referred to casting directors by the title of “casting agent.”

This misperception arose because, although creative decision-makers (actors and actor-managers) had taken charge of casting in prior eras, agents had done so since the beginning of the twentieth century. Louis Shurr (d. 1967) personified the agent-casting director. At one point

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representing Bob Hope and Ginger Rogers, he cast *Oh, Kay!* (1926) and *Desert Song* (1926), among other musicals. Describing himself as the producer’s “partner” who “select[ed] people as if they were for his own show,” Shurr indicated that he gave creative input (“selected people”) and considered himself a full member of the production team (“partner”) even though he worked free-lance and was not an in-house employee.\(^\text{173}\) Contemporary casting personnel dislike the term “casting agent” because it does not distinguish their profession from the agent’s. More importantly, by omitting “director,” the title of “casting agent” undermines the profession’s authority and influence. Thus, journalists’ use of “casting agent” often reveals, intentionally or not, their bias against or ignorance of the profession.

Agents, however, did not function as casting directors for long. Ultimately, as I mentioned in my previous chapter, they faced a significant conflict of interest: because they received commissions for placing the actors they represented in roles, this system encouraged them to hire their own clients and charge high fees.\(^\text{174}\) Although this practice continued in some form for decades, today’s union, state, and federal regulations forbid agents from acting as casting directors and casting directors from collecting any money from the actors they hire.\(^\text{175}\)

Partly because of these concerns, the professional casting director – the member of the production team solely responsible for finding and hiring actors – emerged around World War I. A search of available trade journals reveals that *The Photo-Play Review* mentioned Alan Crosland (1894-1936), in-house casting director for the Edison Company, by name and title as

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early as 1915.\textsuperscript{176} Katharine Cornell referred to her future husband, Guthrie McClintic (1893-1961), as a casting director when she met him in 1917. In her memoir, she described his duties in terms that today’s casting directors would recognize: employed by a famous theatrical producer, McClintic attended many New York shows and took notes on the actors with whom he was unfamiliar, filing them in his office for future reference.\textsuperscript{177} By 1920, journalists regularly used the title when reporting on Broadway and Hollywood.\textsuperscript{178} Within a decade, even though casting directors received no screen credit and only an occasional mention in playbills, the general public recognized the title. One reader wrote Photoplay in 1938 that one of her “favorite pipe dreams is of being allowed to be casting director of a big studio for a day…”\textsuperscript{179}

With time, casting became a well-respected profession, but the earliest articles frequently depicted contemporary casting methods as “shoddy” and “inefficient” (Theatre Magazine, best-described as a highbrow Photoplay, berated casting personnel for keeping inadequate records on available actors) and casting directors as unimportant members of the production team who possessed few skills other than the ability to assess physical beauty.\textsuperscript{180} After observing a casting director meet with actors, reporter Louis Cline wrote dismissively that he:

is simply a middleman buying ‘talent on the hoof’…He believes if a person appeals to him in matters of savoir faire, speaking voice, smile, and, if it be a woman, comely figure, attractive coiffure, knowledge of make-up…and graceful

\textsuperscript{177} See Cornell, I Wanted, 12.
walk, that person will appeal to audiences by the same token.  

Cline equated the casting director with the agent (both “buy” talent) and emphasized throughout his article that this particular (anonymous) casting director spent more time with the actresses he found attractive, carefully notating their height and weight, and the colors of their eyes and hair.  

Despite Cline’s dismissive attitude towards the profession, his article does usefully outline the theatrical casting director’s duties during this era. As he indicated, casting directors in the 1920s and 1930s held “generals” – meetings with actors that involve no readings – and took copious notes on each performer’s appearance. While Cline focused on the casting director’s interest in actresses’ looks, however, other casting directors mainly concerned themselves with the actresses’ (and actors’) type. Although the lines of business casting method disappeared around the turn of the last century (to be reborn during the classical Hollywood era, as I discuss below), typecasting – or casting according to physical qualities – still affected some casting decisions. One (anonymous) contemporary theatre casting director claimed that because appearance is often shorthand for character, directors frequently preferred to cast an actor who resembled his or her role. Reminiscent of Stern’s theory that typecasting in the early-modern era shortened rehearsal periods, this casting director believed that typecasting saved directors and actors valuable pre-production time “by removing the burden of creating an outward resemblance …” Noting that “[in] the day of the director that an actor rarely creates anyhow,” she argued not very convincingly that the director made all creative decisions while the players contributed only their physical appearance, offering neither character interpretation nor artistic

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182 See Cline, “Casting Agent.”
input into the play. Her experience contradicts Burge’s assertions that directors of the time increasingly preferred to cast actors more emotionally than physically suited to roles because modern playwrights, beginning with Ibsen, often wrote parts less dependent on types.

In fact, casting directors specializing in non-musical theatre attempted to lessen the importance of typecasting. Theresa Helburn (1887-1959), most famous for producing Oklahoma! (1943) and Picnic (1953), recalled doing so when she began her career as a casting director for the Theatre Guild in the mid-1920s. The Guild, which grew out of the Provincetown Players (producer of Eugene O’Neill’s early work), prided itself on mounting critically acclaimed new plays. More concerned with the actor’s emotional rightness for the role than his or her type or appearance, Helburn remembered concentrating on actors’ abilities and her response to them:

I do my casting from the pit of my stomach. If it feels hollow, I know that the actor is not convincing in the part. If there is a more rational approach to casting, some infallible rule of thumb, I don’t know it. Rather, it is a kind of empathy, an awareness of the actor’s potentialities that grows while you watch him and listen to him.

Helburn used other evocative and expressive language to describe the actors she auditioned, noting, for example, that “something electric…comes through” when a good actor reads. Her words anticipate and encourage what McDonald calls “the charismatic theory of stardom,” referring to actors famous for their personalities who are seemingly born rather than made. Helburn’s characterization of her process, however, undercuts casting directors’ expertise. While

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185 See Burge, Lines, 226. One fortunate by-product of this new system of casting is that older actors were less likely to play roles too young for them.
187 Helburn, Wayward, 137.
she recognizes that the best actors exude a power that transcends looks, her words are imprecise and weaken her claims to professionalization. Although Helburn acknowledges her authority to critique the actors who appear before her, she does not view herself as possessing any particular aptitude for evaluating them, despite the fact that she auditioned or interviewed over ten thousand actors during the course of her long career.189 Her insistence that casting is intuitive (“the pit of my stomach”) and not “rational” anticipates the intangible language that many of today’s casting directors use to describe their work. They often depict their ability to judge acting talent, arguably the most important aspect of their jobs, in ill-defined, almost mystical terms that challenge perceptions of the casting director as expert professional (I address this tension in my next chapter).

Despite attempts to do away with typecasting, many casting personnel meticulously noted actors’ appearance as a way of classifying performers for office card catalogs. Like Helburn, theatre producer Cheryl Crawford (1902-86), who later co-founded the Actors Studio (where Marlon Brando and James Dean studied), cast for the Theatre Guild. She described interviewing actors desperate for work during the Depression, “catalogu[ing] them as to types and experience” and putting the index cards (with a picture, if available) in a box for “future reference.”190 Crawford recalled that:

> during the day I was seeing actors and actresses, a very depressing experience since unemployment was severe…They came flowing in from all over the country with dreams in their heads and nothing in their pockets. In a year or so I had an exhaustive

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189 See Helburn, Wayward, 134.
190 Cheryl Crawford, One Naked Individual: My Fifty Years in the Theatre (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1977), 32. These cards, ubiquitous in casting offices, included actor’s information (name, contact numbers, brief physical description, and select productions). At times, a picture – usually cut from a newspaper or playbill – was attached. For examples, see cards from theatrical agents Lyman and Chamberlain Brown in the Lyman and Chamberlain Brown Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York, NY.
In-house casting directors who worked exclusively for the theatre or company that employed them, Crawford and Helburn typify the theatre (and film and television) casting professional in the first half of the twentieth century. As late as the 1960s, most theatre casting was done by the show’s producer and director in conjunction with an internal casting staff. During Broadway’s heyday – where producers earned money from multiple shows – producers as prolific as David Merrick (1911-2000) and Harold Prince (b. 1928) could afford to maintain on-site casting personnel.\(^\text{192}\)

Another member of an in-house theatrical casting office was Lina Abarbanell (1879-1963), who cast several musicals, including the famous state department-sponsored tour of *Porgy and Bess* in 1952. I use her experiences and those of Shirley Rich (whom I discuss below) as case studies to demonstrate how many theatrical casting directors of the era were hired, and their training, working conditions, and casting methods.

Like many of her contemporaries, Abarbanell started in casting as an assistant to a well-known producer, in her case, Dwight Deere Wiman (1895-1951), scion of the John Deere agricultural implements-manufacturing family. Among his credits were the original productions of Paul Osborn’s *Mornings at Seven* (1939) and Clifford Odets’s *The Country Girl* (1950), as well as a pair of Richard Rodgers/Lorenz Hart musicals: *On Your Toes* (1936) and *Babes in Arms* (1937).

Although Abarbanell’s career trajectory replicated many Broadway casting directors’, she was unique (then and now) in that she turned to the profession relatively late in life (she was over 191 Crawford, *One*, 34.
192 See “Actresses to Compete for Role,” *New York Times*, August 12, 1957,
http://search.proquest.com/docview/114085065?accountid=14553 (accessed September 10, 2012); and Margaret Harford, “Playwright Shurtleff Won’t Talk to Actors,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 1962,
fifty when Wiman hired her) after a highly successful career as an opera singer and actress. Born in Berlin to a father who was a prominent orchestra conductor, she studied with Max Reinhardt before debuting as Hedvig in Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck* at fourteen; she later sang at Berlin’s Royal Opera and in Vienna for Emperor Franz Joseph. The young star came to America in 1905 to perform in Humperdinck’s children’s opera, *Haensel and Gretal*, at New York’s Metropolitan Opera House. Good reviews and appreciative audiences encouraged her to remain in the United States, and she toured for the next several years with a light opera company in such leading roles as *The Merry Widow*, *Flora*-Bella, and *Madame Sherry*.¹⁹³ She also appeared on Broadway for legendary producer-directors David Belasco (Sacha Guitry’s *The Grand Duke* in 1921) and Jed Harris (the 1938 revival of Gogol’s *The Inspector General*).¹⁹⁴ Wife of fellow German Edward Goldbeck, a journalist for *The Chicago Tribune*, Abarbanell was delighted when their only child, writer-translator Eva, married composer Marc Blitzstein (1905-64) of *The Cradle Will Rock* fame.¹⁹⁵

Affectionately known as “Madame” (she was reportedly as charming off-stage as she was on), Abarbanell first joined Wiman’s company as a performer in his 1925 production of *Sparkling Burgundy*, adapted by Goldbeck.¹⁹⁶ Shortly after the premature deaths of her husband

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and daughter, in 1934 and 1936, respectively, she left the stage when Wiman invited her to become his chief assistant and talent scout after she advised him on Strauss’s operetta, *Champagne, Sec* (1933). Professionally and personally fond of her (he left her a considerable bequest in his will), he later promoted Abarbanell to company associate.

Abarbanell’s duties with Wiman were varied and considerable. She evaluated new properties, met with prospective singers, and, at one point, taught the Norwegian star Vera Zorina to speak English when she debuted in Wiman’s *I Married an Angel* (Rodgers and Hart, 1937).197 She also found actors for such dramas as Odets’s *The Big Knife* (1948) and *The Country Girl.*198 She quickly discovered, however, that her extensive operatic training and performance experience best prepared her to cast Wiman’s many musicals. Valuing “singing actors and acting singers,” she used her considerable skill set to evaluate a potential prospect’s singing, dancing, and acting abilities.199 Abarbanell explained her systematic process thus:

> In judging applicants, I classify them. My highest rating is A-1. They are the people who have everything – singing ability, dramatic ability, attractive appearance. Class A consists of those who have beautiful voices and are good enough in looks and acting ability. Those who get a B mark have possibilities…I.A.P…stands for ‘In a pinch.’ These applicants might get by if Mr. Wiman would close one eye.200

She worked most closely with the child performers in *Babes* and the Kurt Weill/Langston Hughes musical version of Elmer Rice’s *Street Scene* (1947), not only casting the roles, but also

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198 Among Abarbanell’s ideas for the lead in *The Country Girl* were film stars Constance Bennett, Myrna Loy, Maureen O’Hara, and Barbara Stanwyck; Uta Hagen ultimately won the role. See Abarbanell Papers.
199 Lina Abarbanell, interview by *Mr. and Mrs. Opera*, n.d., Blitzstein Collection.
coaching the young actor-singers for their debuts. She spent eight months auditioning for the latter musical. “I went to radio studios, night clubs and everywhere I thought I might find exceptional talent,” she told a reporter, spotting one young performer at a street dance. Hughes praised her hard work in a *Chicago Defender* column, noting that she interviewed hundreds of singers and actors for the various roles.

Abarbanell soon earned a reputation as a “star-finder,” claiming such future opera stars as Dorothy Kirsten and Walter Castle as her discoveries. Thus, after Wiman’s death in 1951, Abarbanell went on to cast for several other projects, including the 1951 revival of Marc Connelly’s *The Green Pastures*, and consulted on at least one film, Otto Preminger’s *Carmen Jones* (1954). In the early 1960s, she was casting director for Alfred De Liagre, Jr. on the Broadway musical, *Kwamina* (1961). And, remaining close to her prolific son-in-law (the two dined together every week), she either cast or consulted on two of Blitzstein’s musical adaptations of well-known plays: 1949’s *Regina* (based on Lillian Hellman’s *The Little Foxes*) and *Juno* (adapted from Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* in 1959), starring Shirley Booth and Melvyn Douglas. Abarbanell also acted as a de facto producer for *Regina*, writing Friedelind Wagner, then executive director of the Bayreuth Festival and with whom she had a warn relationship, about the possibilities of presenting the opera there.

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201 Abarbanell Papers.
202 Abarbanell Papers.
205 See Abarbanell Papers and “Juno Playbills,” Marc Blitzstein Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI. Abarbanell also cast *Let’s Make an Opera*, a Benjamin Britten opera that Blitzstein directed; the show closed after only five Broadway performances in 1950. For information on Abarbanell and Blitzstein’s relationship, see Eric A. Gordon, *Mark The Music: The Life and Work of Marc Blitzstein* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989).
206 See Friedelind Wagner to Lina Abarbanell, 29 September 1959, Blitzstein Collection.
Arguably, Abarbanell’s most famous production was the well-received 1952-56 global tour of George Gershwin’s and Dubose Heyward’s *Porgy and Bess*. Starring William Warfield (Porgy), Cab Calloway (Sportin’ Life), and Leontyne Price (Bess), the production was, in the words of one press release, “a cultural ambassador” to Europe and the Soviet Union “to answer the Russian propaganda charge that Negro talent is neglected in the United States – a plaint often sounded by Paul Robeson and other red sympathizers.” To that end, Abarbanell oversaw talent searches all over the country, including New Orleans and Chicago. Warfield’s presence was almost certainly due to Abarbanell’s influence: she had cast him in *Regina* three years earlier, when he was a relative unknown.

Once asked if she missed performing, the self-professed “gold digger for talent” smiled and shook her head. She assured the reporter that she was no longer concerned with “one career…but 1000. And I am frank to say I am as happy watching younger persons succeed as I was in succeeding myself.”

Like Abarbanell, prominent casting director Shirley Rich (1922-2010), later known for *Saturday Night Fever* (Badham, 1977) and *Kramer vs. Kramer* (Benton, 1979), began her career as casting assistant/secretary for a prolific producer: in her case, songwriters Richard Rodgers (1902-79) and Oscar Hammerstein II (1895-1960). Rodgers hired Rich – whom he knew only slightly through her work with the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA) – when he began casting *South Pacific* (1949). In an unpublished interview she gave in 1993, Rich hinted

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209 Mr. and Mrs. Opera.
that Rodgers may have grown frustrated with his casting director, John Fearnley. In Rodgers’s employ for many years, Fearnley, Rich recalled, “had no memory” for any of the actors he auditioned, while she, Rodgers noted, possessed that particular skill:

I was lucky, God gave me a memory…The most important thing…was to remember anybody that auditioned, good or bad, which…has been my blessing over my career.

While taking notes for him during rehearsals and try-outs, Rich impressed Rodgers with her knowledge and insight; he soon gave Rich more responsibility in the casting office. She began making lists and running audition sessions for, among other shows, *The King and I* (1951). She did not earn much money; her love of theatre made her view working for the legendary Rodgers and Hammerstein as a “privilege…not [for] the financial rewards.”212 In her interview, Rich does not mention that her wages may have been lower than the producers’ male employees’, but she does admit that her lack of negotiation experience may have hurt her financially. A few years later, when she was hired by MGM as its east coast talent scout, her fiancée, an investment banker, advised her to ask for more money than she originally planned. Shocked but pleased when the studio agreed, Rich did not hesitate to negotiate more substantial salaries when she started her own casting business in the 1960s.

As the examples of Rich, Abarbanell, Crawford, and Helburn reveal, in an era in which men dominated casting (and most other entertainment fields), the New York theatre employed several female casting directors. Like their modern-day successors, many collaborated with the same producer/director on more than one project, forming close working relationships that anticipated today’s director/casting director partnerships, such as Juliet Taylor’s long-time

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212 All quotes are taken from Shirley Rich, interview by Mimi Kahn, 1993, transcript, Dorot Jewish Division, New York Public Library, New York, NY.
association with Woody Allen. These casting directors included Judith Abbott (d. 1984), who cast several of her father’s, George Abbott’s, legendary musicals, including *Pajama Game* (1954) and *Damn Yankees* (1955); and Myra Hampton Streger (1896-1945), who worked with Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman on *My Sister Eileen* (1940) and *Lady in the Dark* (1943) (like Rich, she also functioned as her employers’ secretary). Other well-known women casting directors included Evelyn Barnes Peirce (d. 1991), the director of casting for the Federal Theatre Project’s Talent Bureau in New York; Terry Fay, who cast the 1950 Broadway production of Carson McCullers’s *The Member of The Wedding*; Jane Broder (d. 1977), an agent and the casting director for the original productions of Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* (1938) and Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953); and Gertrude Applebaum, Bettina Cerf, Ruth Frankenstein, Gayle Kenerson, Margaret Linley, Sherlee Weingarten, and Mary Wharton.213

Women, however, had little presence in feature film casting (I discuss this further in my next chapter). If Broadway and off-Broadway engendered the birth of the casting director, Hollywood oversaw his (rarely her) growth. The early theatre casting directors demonstrated skills that included assessing talent, recruiting labor, and assigning roles – knowledge that, even today, underpins the profession. Studio casting directors and talent scouts employed similar skills and knowledge, but they did so in a more institutional setting, and on a larger and more visible scale. As they solidified and standardized the casting practices still in use today, these casting personnel generated respect for their new profession.

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III. A Profession Develops: Hollywood

The classical Hollywood cinema, ascendant from the mid-1920s through the early 1960s, functioned akin to other industries (automobile, aerospace) via highly specialized forms of production and organization. As film, one of the dominant twentieth-century culture industries, became more narratively and technologically sophisticated, production expanded and organized, and divisions and subdivisions in labor developed. As new jobs were created, the casting director and talent scout emerged. This section looks at how casting personnel operated within the studio system production model. How were casting departments organized and how did they fit into the larger studio hierarchy? Where did these casting directors come from and what skills did they possess? And how did they discover and cast such individual, iconic stars as Bette Davis, Clark Gable, and Katharine Hepburn within the environment of the mass-produced Hollywood film? While film scholars such as Jeanine Basinger and Naremore insist that the studio casting directors and talent scouts “were little more than file clerks” and that “Hollywood agents, producers, and directors found most of the new performers,” in fact, studio casting personnel exercised more creative authority and artistic input than film historians commonly believe.

Although casting personnel had existed in some form in the theatre industry for several years, they did not become part of the cinematic production team until the advent of the embryonic studio system, around 1915. In the years before World War I, “the cinema of

214 Janet Staiger traces the history of this specialization in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*. She identifies six management systems in film production, classifying them by increasingly complex divisions and subdivisions of labor: the director system, the director-unit system, the central producer system, the producer-unit system, and the package-unit system.

215 Casting and talent positions were not separated in Broadway theatre offices, one way in which the studios – larger, richer, and more prolific (in the sense of distributing more product) than theatrical offices – operated under a more highly specialized organization of labor.

attractions” did not need casting directors and talent scouts: because most actors were not
deeded crucial to a picture’s success, neither time nor money was spent on finding them. Indeed,
the fledgling industry initially resisted the theatrical star system, in which star performers were
box office draws for their respective plays (recall the touring combination companies, which
featured stars). James O’Neill (1847-1920), for instance, toured successfully for decades as the
lead in The Count of Monte Cristo, though reviews panned the play and the rest of the cast.217
Despite the commercial successes of actors like O’Neill, film directors, hoping to keep
production and salary costs low, did not give the earliest movie actors either onscreen credit or
publicity of any kind. They did not need to: cinematic spectacle and novelty drew in early
audiences, not actors’ names and faces.

Consequently, prior to the 1910s, film casting was a haphazard affair. The earliest
filmmakers often doubled as de facto casting directors: D.W. Griffith (1875-1948) visited New
York’s Lambs’ and Players’ theatre clubs to entice stage actors to star in his one-reelers.218
Others found actors by meeting those “making the rounds” of the movie companies to gain
employment.219 In 1912, actor Charles Graham recalled visiting Vitagraph in the hopes of being
cast; a man (whose name and title he never learned) informed him that he would perform the role
of “Walking Gent” (a term often found in theatrical typecasting).220 Other directors contacted
talent agencies with descriptions of the types they required; agents sent in any suitable clients,
collecting a finder’s fee if the client was cast. Once film production expanded and studios began

217 For representative reviews, see “Amusements,” Los Angeles Times; and “Amusements,” The Washington Post.
218 See McArthur, Actors, 193-94.
219 See McArthur, Actors, 193; and Frances Agnew, Motion Picture Acting (New York: Reliance Newspaper
Syndicate, 1913), 55.
to employ larger staffs, the assistant director often functioned as casting director for the smaller roles and extras.  

Between 1910 and 1912, however, audience members’ interest in the actors they saw grew. They began to inquire about the actors they liked, writing to the film companies for information. Fans referred to their “nameless” favorites either by character name or identified them with the studios for which they performed, christening Mary Pickford (1892-1979) “little Mary” and calling Florence Lawrence (1886-1938) “the Biograph Girl.” Realizing actors’ economic potential – audiences now often attended pictures to see specific performers – studios responded to public demand. They began to issue publicity materials; by 1910, theatre lobbies regularly displayed photographs of popular actors. In 1911, actors gained even greater visibility when Thomas Edison’s became the first studio to release pictures with cast credits. The earliest fan publication, The Motion Picture Story Magazine, also appeared at this time (audience members bought copies at their local theatres); a decade later, Photoplay, one of the most popular fan magazines, boasted a circulation of approximately two million. As fans grew more numerous, fan clubs emerged, offering members photos, autographs, newsletters, and

221 See Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, Classical Hollywood, 149.
224 Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, Classical Hollywood, 312.
In the 1920s, Hollywood studios created publicity departments to process the thousands of fan letters and autograph requests that poured in each day. Stars were now essential to the economics of the movie industry: no other film component drew audiences so consistently. As film historian Tino Balio writes, “stars created the market value of motion pictures.” Studios could charge exhibitors higher fees for pictures with popular actors, knowing that movie-goers would pay to see their favorites. As the industry matured, however, studios discovered that stardom operates cyclically: audiences not only yearn for established actors, but also hunger for new faces. Studios fixated on finding “the next big thing” and many tried to avoid casting the same actors over several pictures (Fox did not employ a stock company of supporting players for this reason). Audiences were tired of seeing the “same old faces” in every film, movie mogul Samuel Goldwyn (1879-1974) complained before firing his casting director because he thought the man had not found enough new talent.

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The constant search for new product – young people with star potential – proved too
time-consuming for directors or other personnel; thus, in 1915, the first casting directors were
hired and more codified casting procedures put in place. (Again, film followed a trajectory
similar to theatre’s: recall that New York’s growing actor talent pool similarly overwhelmed
impresarios in the late 1800s.). One of the first film casting directors, Samuel F. Kingston, who
worked for the William Fox Film Corporation in New York, described his new duties in detail in
a film trade journal:

When a play has been selected for production and the director and scenario writer
have prepared it to their satisfaction my work begins. I am called into consultation
and the various types of characters in the story are explained to me. I then put in
operation every facility of my office to secure the players who most nearly
represent, without the art of make-up, the characters desired — with all due
consideration, of course, to their individual abilities. The magnitude of this labor
may be imagined when I say that I have fifteen regular directors…to cast for and
that my work makes it necessary for me to interview or at least give a glance to at
least 15,000 players and extra people a year.231

The “magnitude” of Kingston’s labor was partly due to Fox’s refusal, as I noted earlier, to retain
a stock company. Thus, like most casting directors, he set aside a certain number of hours per
day to meet new talent, keeping their names, contact numbers, and pictures on file in his office.

231 Samuel F. Kingston, “Casting for Pictures,” Moving Picture World 33 (July 1917), Internet Archive,
http://archive.org (accessed December 6, 2012); see also “MacIntyre Makes Record of Actors,” Moving Picture
Davis, “A Kitchener Among Cameras,” Photoplay 11-12 (February-September 1917), Internet Archive,
He shared any promising discoveries with the studio directors and producers, who worked closely with studio casting directors in selecting actors for their films.\textsuperscript{232}

The new casting directors were reluctant to explain how they assessed potential when either meeting or auditioning actors. Often interviewed for fan magazines eager to provide their star-struck readers with insider knowledge, casting personnel described their workdays in detail, as Kingston does, but answered questions about what they felt constituted talent and presence in vague terms. In 1926, for example, Paramount’s casting director, Fred Datig, told \textit{Motion Picture Magazine} that a “great deal of casting is pure luck.”\textsuperscript{233} Media critic Lola G. Yoakem described the casting system of the silent movies as “face casting…the accent was always on the face.”\textsuperscript{234} She claimed that this emphasis on the face continued even after the coming of sound; studios valued looks, she maintained, more than the actor’s proficiency. Certainly silent cinema focused on the performer’s face and expression, but her argument is debatable. In 1920, Clifford Robertson, casting director for the Goldwyn West Coast Studios, told the \textit{New York Times} that he was looking for players with “‘intelligence and quickness at grasping an idea.’”\textsuperscript{235}

The face ceded some importance to the voice with the introduction of sound in 1927. This technological innovation – arguably the most significant in the history of film – influenced all aspects of film production, distribution, and exhibition. In terms of casting, the new technology affected the profession and the process in three ways. First, it lengthened the audition process.\textsuperscript{236}

\textsuperscript{234} Lola G. Yoakem, “Casting,” \textit{Film Quarterly} 12, no. 2 (Winter 1958): 36.
\textsuperscript{235} “Screen,” 79.
\textsuperscript{236} Animated sound films underwent extensive audition processes. When Walt Disney was casting \textit{Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs} (1937), the studio’s first animated feature film, casting staff canvassed radio stations and voice
Casting directors could no longer rely solely on an actress’s appearance and record of work when hiring her because studios, concerned with how actors might sound onscreen, refused to cast any performer without testing her voice. While studios had conducted tests in the silent era, the number of tests per role increased once sound arrived as many actors’ untrained voices forced studios to consider more performers for each role. Given the amount of time and money a test involved – early sound tests required separate disc recordings of the actor’s voice and could run as high as two hundred and fifty dollars (three thousand today) – this increase in the number of tests was significant. Emerson Yorke, casting director at the Paramount Long Island studio, explained why the new audition procedures were so cumbersome: “‘When we have developed a roster of talking screen players…it will not be necessary to make as many tests…but right now when all players, stage as well as screen, are starting from scratch we must be sure of their voice qualifications.’”

Film casting directors also “start[ed] from scratch” as evaluating “voice qualifications” became an important aspect of their job. Their efforts to assess film-worthy voices were complicated by uncertainties over exactly how those early sound film voices should sound. In his work on Hollywood’s transition to sound, Donald Crafton contends that filmmakers initially sought what they described as “quality” voices with the kind of precise diction and British-accented delivery often found in the stage actors of the period. Accordingly, casting directors recruited actors from the legitimate stage, but several failed to attract audiences. While some

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theatre actors and even Vaudeville performers found success in film (Irene Dunne, Al Jolson, and Mae West), others (Ina Claire and Helen Kane) did not. Some sounded too affected to audience’s ears; others, as Fred Beers, casting director at MGM in the late 1920s, complained, could not adapt to the rapid pace of filming. In addition, after the 1929 stock market crash, talent scouts could no longer depend on Broadway for a never-ending supply of fresh talent: the Depression drastically affected the theatre as the number of actors employed on Broadway dropped from 6,031 in 1927-28 (a very prosperous year) to 4,110 in 1932-33.

With time, the “quality” voice gave way to the “hybrid” voice, which Crafton defines as one “with clear diction, as onstage, but with the everyday spontaneity, ease, and colloquialism of American (not British) English.” Film audiences’ favorable response to American colloquialisms produced the ethnic-sounding (and looking) stars of the 1930s, particularly James Cagney, whose urban accent typified the voice of the Depression-era star. Actors with foreign accents, such as Greta Garbo, also did well in the early sound era as studios now preferred that the actors who played foreign roles speak with the appropriate accent.

Besides extending the audition process, the coming of sound influenced casting in two other significant ways: it enhanced respect for and expanded the casting field. The former development resulted from (and paralleled) positive reassessments of the screen actor’s abilities. In analyzing the early sound era, Crafton points out that one narrative used to describe actors

243 See Crafton, Talkies, 495. Audiences did respond to some actors with theatrical-sounding voices, such as Norma Shearer, one of the 1930s’ top-ten box office draws.
who now spoke on film was labor. Prior to the introduction of sound, he argues, movie-industry journalists often complained that screen actors did not do the work of becoming another character, believing that they essentially played themselves. Actors used their faces, bodies, and the force of their personalities with little apparent attempt at manipulation and need for technique, thus giving the impression that their profession demanded neither skill nor training. These journalists, Crafton continues, believed that sound forced actors to work harder physically and mentally, off screen (elocution and voice lessons) and on (by using their voices to create a character, performers had to think as they constructed their delivery). Some of this narrative was reinforced by actors. Even those Broadway stars who had also acted in silent cinema often scornfully described the newer medium as inferior. Writing for the New York Times, stage and screen performer Otis Skinner (1858-1942) dismissed the silent film hero as “handsome, graceful and [and someone who] wore…clothes well.” Cataloguing body parts, he noted that “[a] pair of eloquent eyes, a good profile, a seductive figure…were the main requisites” silent stars possessed. Talkies, however, allowed actors to use and develop skills hitherto necessary only for the stage.

Whether or not sound performers are superior to and more skilled than those of the silent era is highly debatable and a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter. Certainly, the argument that silent stars worked less hard and less effectively than their talking counterparts ignores the difficulties of sustaining emotion through multiple takes and privileges performance

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245 Clark argues that the discourse that actors (specifically, stars) “did not work” continued even after the coming of sound: “viewed as ‘personalities’ as opposed to ‘laborers’…they merely displayed the qualities they possessed or the personalities that were packaged for them by others.” See Clark, Negotiating, 25.

246 Silent cinema often drew on the stage for stars, particularly if producers, always looking for good marketing strategies, could convince an actor to repeat his or her successful stage performance on screen. Marguerite Clark (1883-1940), for example, starred in the stage and screen versions of Laurence Housman and Harley Granville-Barker’s Prunella. See “Written on the Screen: Relayed Releases, Clippings and Comments,” New York Times, June 2, 1918, http://search.proquest.com/docview/100064666?accountid=14553 (accessed February 12, 2014).

skills essential to the stage (the voice) over those central to the screen (the face), revealing an age-old bias toward theatre as the more serious art.\footnote{In addition, brilliant silent performers such as Rudolph Valentino, Greta Garbo, and Charlie Chaplin, among others, undermine the claims that intertitles alone rather than performers’ eyes, expression, and body language communicated an actors’ emotions. As Roland Barthes said of silent film stars (Garbo, in particular): “they [belong] to that moment in cinema when capturing the human face still plunged the audiences into the deepest ecstasy, when one literally lost oneself in a human image as one would in a philtre, when the face represented a kind of absolute state of the flesh, which could be neither reached nor renounced,” see Roland Barthes, Mythologies, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 56.} However, this new discourse of labor and technique brought about by technological innovations increased respect for film acting that, by extension, included those who found and cast the actors. As admiration for acting as a skilled profession grew, journalists began to recognize that casting directors and talent scouts possessed viable and important skills that went beyond merely “buying talent on the hoof;” rather, these professionals could analyze and evaluate actors’ proficiency.\footnote{See Crafton, Talkies, 447; for his discussion of actors and the transition to sound, see, 445-515.} While some journalists of the era recognized the professionalization these jobs required – noting the “modern business efficiency” casting directors and card files brought to the process, for example – many, as indicated above, had downplayed it.\footnote{See “Research Bureau for Casting,” Moving Picture World 26 (November 1915), Internet Archive, http://archive.org (accessed December 10, 2012); and “Casting Efficiency,” Moving Picture World 26 (December 1915), Internet Archive, http://archive.org (accessed December 6, 2012).} After the coming of sound, however, popular culture authors began to offer narratives of labor that acknowledged casting as a profession requiring knowledge, aptitude, and, most significantly, artistic inspiration. In her mass-market book on Hollywood, Alice Evans Field described casting directors as “trained” experts with “phenomenal memories for faces and personalities,” noting that “[t]he good casting director will try to get away from stereotypes in his choice of players” and use his imagination.\footnote{See Alice Evans Field, Hollywood U.S.A.: From Script to Screen (New York: Vantage Press, Inc., 1952), 79-80.} Here, Field characterizes – and credits – casting as a creative profession rather than a clerical occupation.

While increasing respect for casting as a profession, the introduction of sound and the corresponding growth in the scale of production lengthened the amount of time casting directors
spent on each picture; as a result, studios were forced to hire extra personnel to manage the increasingly complex audition process. Many film companies had employed on-site casting staff and talent scouts since the late teens; after 1927, these offices expanded to include assistants, associates, extras’ casting directors, and secretaries.  

252 Most of this workforce became long-standing salaried employees. As the casting offices’ success in scouting and casting actors became more integral to a film’s success, studios promoted those casting personnel whose taste and ability to evaluate talent they found valuable; the most successful casting directors became heads or vice-presidents of casting departments.  

253 In a contemporary pamphlet on careers in the motion picture industry, Terry Ramsaye estimated that the higher-echelon casting directors made fifty thousand a year, an excellent salary for this era.  

254 These new specialists sprang from analogous backgrounds and possessed similar expertise. Many began their careers as agents. Ivan Kahn, for instance, ran his own agency before joining Twentieth Century Fox as a talent scout. As media scholar Tom Kemper points out, Kahn’s skills as an agent – “the ability to assess talent” and make connections – “translated readily to the demands of his new studio position.”  

255 Indeed, Kahn’s scouting duties closely resembled his responsibilities as an agent: he and his assistants attended the theatre regularly, took copious notes on any new talent they saw, and kept the notes on file for future reference. Partly because the professions shared several similarities, many agents, talent scouts, and casting directors moved among the three careers with ease: agent Minna Wallis started out in the Warner

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253 See “How Players Are Picked.”


Bros. casting department, and Paul Kohner was a casting director at Universal before opening his
titular agency (still in operation today).

Other successful casting directors possessed backgrounds in business – an asset as casting
directors negotiated all actors’ deals below a certain amount of money. William (“Billy”)
Theodore Grady, one of golden-age Hollywood’s most famous casting directors, was a booking
manager and Vaudeville agent (he once represented W.C. Fields) before joining RKO and, later,
at Irving J. Thalberg’s urging, becoming east coast talent scout and then head of casting at
MGM.

These studio casting departments’ responsibilities were three-fold: to cast each film’s
roles, manage the studio’s contract players, and recruit new talent. While cinema scholars rarely
mention casting directors and casting departments in their analyses of the classical Hollywood
production model, some do examine the methods and criteria that studios used to find and sign
talent. Ronald L. Davis’s *The Glamour Factory: Inside Hollywood’s Big Studio System* and
Basinger’s *The Star Machine*, in particular, detail what the latter calls the “factory-like” casting
process in which young people with a desire for fame and money (and a few who aspired to act)
were systematically molded into star-commodities that the studios used to sell their film
products. Most primary information about how casting was conducted during this period,
however, comes from the “horse’s mouth:” several prominent Hollywood casting directors and
talent scouts – including Grady, Phil Friedman (1895-1974), and Rich – wrote unpublished or
out-of-print memoirs detailing their experiences at the studios.

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256 See Kemper, *Hidden*, 70. Some casting directors used their jobs as stepping-stones to higher-profile careers: the
Edison Company’s casting director, Alan Crosland, later directed *The Jazz Singer* (1927), and William Wyler (1902-
81), director of the Oscar-winning *Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) and *Ben-Hur* (1959), began his career as a casting
director at Universal; see “William Wyler,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com (accessed October 23,
2013).

Grady left comprehensive accounts describing the hierarchical organization of the MGM casting department, duplicated by all the major Hollywood studios.\textsuperscript{258} Occupying their own multi-room bungalow, the heads of casting ran offices staffed by casting associates, casting assistants, extras casting personnel, talent scouts, and secretaries; all but the last were male.\textsuperscript{259} While studios employed a top-down management style in all departments, many lower-level workers maintained some decision-making rights and input into the creative process. For example, while the casting director supervised the leads, assistant casting directors oversaw the featured performers (actors whose names appeared in the main title credits, but were not stars) and bit players (those with only one or two lines).

Grady and Friedman, who had worked as talent scouts, also described the scouting process in their memoirs, which replicated some practices from earlier periods.\textsuperscript{260} In his account of his time at MGM, Grady alluded to the kinds of geographical and professional networks that theatre personnel in past eras had used to find new actors: “Usually when a player is outstanding…the other actors will talk about it, and it gets back to New York by a sort of underground route.”\textsuperscript{261} In addition, other production personnel – directors, assistant directors, older actors – often recommended talent from the shows they either worked on or saw.

Talent scouting, however, underwent three important shifts in the twentieth century. First, the process was no longer conducted on an ad hoc basis. Studios hired professionals –

empowered with the title of “talent scout” – to find and evaluate new talent. Second, those who scouted talent no longer operated within a relatively confined geographical space. While early-modern recruiters rarely ventured outside London to identify those with potential, their modern-day counterparts benefitted from nineteenth- and twentieth-century innovations in travel (train, car, plane) and communication (telephone, teletype; later, fax, e-mail, and Skype) to take advantage of greater geographical distances and, thus, gain wider access to a larger talent pool. Finally, studios stressed talent-scouting in ways that the theatres in past periods had not. Locating new faces was crucial to sustaining Hollywood’s massive productivity – it released approximately five hundred pictures a year during its heyday – and talent scouts kept busy supplying their employers with fresh product.262

While few left recollections of the directions they received from the studios, talent scouts wrote at length about their major responsibilities, which included unearthing new discoveries, interviewing them, and sending detailed progress reports to the company.263 They left no stone unturned in their quest for new prospects, attending music schools, cabarets, community theatres, professional theatres, and film screenings all over the world.264 Friedman, who worked for Universal, Pickford-Lasky, and 20th Century-Fox, recalled attending Broadway openings, high school plays, summer stock, night clubs, beauty contests, amateur hours, radio shows, and fashion shows. He traveled all over the country, often away from the office for months at a time.

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262 See Basinger, Star, 15.
During his “spare time,” he listened to the radio (a good source for voice talent), and perused magazine covers and newspaper fashion ads for attractive new faces.265

After locating a prospect, talent scouts arranged for a screen test, which took place in either New York or Los Angeles. These tests were elaborate and expensive: actors rehearsed for several days, worked with the studio’s drama coach, and were photographed in full dress and make-up. Friedman noted that casting directors often heavily influenced these tests (as they would, as I argue in my last chapter, control recorded auditions several decades later), supervising the process and coaching the neophyte actor throughout.266 Studio and casting officials then used the tests to determine if they should place the prospect under contract; according to Davis, the casting director contributed heavily to this decision.267 Once optioned, the fledgling actor or actress received several months of acting, movement, and voice training.268 During this trial period, the studio either decided to exercise the actor’s option (an industry-standard seven-year contract), or let him or her go.269

At times, studios engaged in highly publicized, wide-spread searches to locate new actors. In 1925, for example, Paramount announced a nation-wide talent hunt. Dividing the United States into thirty “zones,” the company sent representatives to each area with the mandate that they interview any eligible man or woman under the age of thirty. From this talent pool, the studio chose twenty newcomers to test and train at their new acting school, including future stars Thelma Todd (who appeared in several Marx Brothers’ pictures) and Charles Edward “Buddy” Rogers, star of Wings (Wellman, 1927), the first Oscar-winning best picture. Warners held a

267 See Davis, Glamour, 83.
268 See “Meet the One-Man.”
269 See Lew Schreiber to All Producers, 18 March 1959, Walter Wanger Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.
similar search in 1930, when the studio was desperate for contract players with audible speaking voices. And David O. Selznick employed three scouts in the west, the northeast, and the south to conduct Hollywood’s most legendary talent search: the role of Scarlett in *Gone With The Wind* (Fleming, 1939).

Studio casting personnel used various creative methods to locate what they considered “hard-to-find” types: ethnic minorities and unique or “specialty” actors. One casting department hired a Los Angeles hospital intern to supply it with people with missing legs, harelips, palsy, or other unusual physical conditions for that studio’s horror and medical pictures. Open calls were not uncommon, such as those conducted for the little people in *Wizard of Oz*.

Movies with large ethnic casts posed special challenges. While each film’s leads were usually cast with stars – who were rarely ethnic minorities until the 1970s – efforts were made to cast some of the supporting players and particularly the extras with the appropriate ethnicity. As early as 1918, talent scouts and casting directors canvassed ethnic neighborhoods for suitable players: for *Mandarin’s Gold* (Apfel, 1919), the casting director scoured New York’s Chinatown. And while *Juarez* (Dieterle, 1939) featured the Austrian-born Paul Muni in the title role, several Spanish and Mexican actors played some of the supporting roles, and all the

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extra and atmospheric parts. In 1936, Grady recalled finding two thousand Chinese for *The Good Earth* (Franklin, 1937) by watching people in “banks, laundries, stores, cafés, schools [and] buses” in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Vancouver.

The studios’ qualified interest in ethnic performers allowed a few minority casting directors to work on classical Hollywood films. Charles Butler, an African American, managed the “colored” film extras at the Central Casting Bureau, at times turning to local churches for musical talent. And talent agent Bessie Loo (1902-98), who ran her own business for nearly forty years, specialized in providing studios with Asian and Asian American supporting actors and extras. When *The King and I* (Lang, 1956) was looking for wives and children for Yul Brynner’s King of Siam, Twentieth-Century Fox contacted her. In 1989, the Association of Asian-Pacific American Artists awarded her the Pioneer Award for her work in securing employment for Asian and Asian American actors, today still one of the most underrepresented populations onscreen at just under four percent of all roles.

Although Loo began her career as an actress, we do not generally know what kind of professional background, skills, and preparation most scouts possessed. Robert Palmer, head of casting at RKO, explained vaguely that his studio trained scouts “to judge ability and pictorial possibilities and to estimate personality and audience appeal,” but provided no criteria for how

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276 Grady, “Casting,” 64; see also “Casting 91,000 Film Actors a Year.”


these judgments and estimations were carried out. Like many other casting directors (recall Helburn’s discussion of “intuition”), scouts often claimed that they relied on instinct: one (anonymous) veteran talent scout, when asked by a journalist what he looked for when signing actors, responded “if I could answer that question…I could command my own salary from any studio in town.” Legendary MGM talent scout and drama coach Lillian Burns, in particular, exaggerated this tactic, calling her ability to judge talent a “gift from God.” Al Trescony, a talent scout for MGM, explained that he looked for “personality;” while Warner Bros’s Sonny Baiano emphasized an actor’s ability to “make people believe you.” Certainly, most scouts looked for people who were photogenic and attractive, with pleasant speaking voices, expressive faces (Trescony and Baiano mentioned the eyes, in particular), and vibrant personalities, but these norms were so imprecise that talent scouts probably based their choices on the known tastes of their studio heads, much as today’s casting directors adhere to the preferences of the directors they work with.

Rich’s memories of her days as a talent scout support the theory that scouts were directed to abide by studio preferences. One of the few scouts to speak in detail about the training and mandate she received from the studio, Rich described her time at MGM in an unpublished oral interview she gave in the early 1990s. While her memoirs are valuable historical documents, we must remember that Rich was atypical of most talent scouts: she was trained in the theatre and in New York, and she was a woman. Talent scouts’ constant traveling made the career difficult

280 Scott, “Everyone Connected.”
281 For all quotes from talent scouts, see Davis, Glamour, 83.
283 The aforementioned Burns, ex-wife of director George Sidney (Bye Bye Birdie, 1963), and Metro’s Lucille Ryman, who had also worked for Universal in New York, were two of the other few female talent scouts. See Mary
for women, especially those with husbands and children (Rich was not yet married when MGM hired her and she only worked for the company for a short while). Moreover, while Grady and Friedman wrote about their experiences while still employed by MGM and Warner Bros., respectively, Rich gave her interview decades after she left her studio; therefore, she is more candid than either Grady or Friedman about her employers, whose taste in actors she soon found she did not share.

Rich left Rodgers and Hammerstein’s casting office in the 1950s when chief of production Dore Schary (1905-80) hired her to work as the east coast talent scout for MGM. Because, as she admitted, she possessed only theatre experience and “didn’t know anything about movies,” Ben Thau (1893-1983), MGM’s head of talent,284 flew her to Los Angeles for six weeks to show her what she described as “the M-G-M product….so I would know what they needed in the way of young contract players.”285 By referring to the studio as a branded “product,” she indicates that she was carefully instructed in its attributes, familiarizing herself with them during a whirlwind of watching movies, observing studio acting classes, visiting sets, and, most enjoyable for her, meeting MGM’s famous actors:

I had a chauffeured limousine every day, picking me up at…the Beverly Hills Hotel…Lillian Burns, the famous acting teacher who taught Lana Turner and all the others, I would go to her class and watch her coach. I used to see at least two movies a day…and I could go and watch [Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy] working on their film.286

Rich, one of classical Hollywood’s few female middle-management employees, recalled with some ambivalence her treatment by the male studio executives. Rich remembered Schary with admiration, but Thau and at least one actor, Enzo Pinza, propositioned her. Neither man pursued her, however, after she mentioned her fiancée.

Rich was given, she recalled, a mandate to go to the east coast’s top theatre departments and find women and, particularly, “men in their late twenties who are talented in acting and romancing…the future Robert Taylors” (a curious prototype as Taylor, a classically handsome, athletic, and wooden leading man, had not been a top-ten star since the 1930s). So, she “went to Amherst [and] Carnegie Tech…I could be looking here [New York] and seeing people in shows and stuff, but the main thing was to try to get them…just as soon as they had finished school…they wanted very young.” She soon discovered, however, that even with MGM’s tutelage, her theatre background ill-equipped her to adequately judge film talent: “my eye for actors really was based on the theater,” she insisted, a medium that does not demand a specific look. Her weeks at MGM left her with the impression that the studio “had in mind glamourous [sic] girls off of the beaches… and that was not my cup of tea.” Instead, Rich favored classically-trained young actors who were not traditionally attractive, testing prospects like Sada Thompson (1927-2011), later known for the television series, *Family* (ABC, 1976-80). She did try to recruit a more typical Hollywood-looking actor, Paul Newman (1925-2008), then co-starring on Broadway in William Inge’s *Picnic*, but, on director Josh Logan’s advice, he decided not to test. Ironically, Rich later became a successful movie casting director (I discuss her

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287 Rich papers.
289 Rich, interview, 1-62
290 Rich, interview, 2-63.
291 See Rich, interview, 2-64.
further in the next chapter), but, by the 1970s, the decade in which she became active in film, tastes in actors had changed. Less conventionally handsome performers such as Al Pacino (b. 1940), Robert De Niro (b. 1943), and John Travolta (b. 1954), whom Rich hired for *Saturday Night Fever*, had replaced the traditional romantic leading man, or Robert Taylor-like, MGM star.

While classical Hollywood talent scouting frustrated Rich and left her feeling like little more than a cog in a Fordist machine, Friedman, one of the era’s most prodigious scouts, illustrated how that process – and that position – enhanced a studio’s bankability. He numbered among his discoveries some of Hollywood’s most lucrative stars, including Alice Faye, Rita Hayworth, and Temple. His most significant find, however, was Clark Gable, and Friedman’s involvement in launching that legendary actor’s career demonstrates the influence casting personnel often have on media production through their impact on talent. In 1930, impressed with Gable’s performance in a local play, he arranged for Universal to test him. Friedman appears to have had influence at the studio: although screen testing an actor was a complex process – commissioned only for select candidates – his enthusiasm convinced Universal executives that Gable was a viable prospect and engaged William Wyler to direct the test. Ultimately the company, unhappy with the result, decided against placing Gable under contract. Undeterred, Friedman introduced the young actor to agent Ruth Collier, who signed him. Her associate, Minna Wallis, later sold Gable to MGM for *A Free Soul* (Brown, 1931), which made him a star. According to Friedman, after Gable’s meteoric rise, a regretful Universal gave him “a free ticket to pick talent” – indicating that studios did allow the scouts they trusted some creative latitude.293 A year later, he successfully tested Bette Davis, suggesting her for her first role, *Bad Sister* (Henley, 1931). While we cannot know with any certainty how many careers Friedman

293 See Friedman, “Reaching for a Star,” 48.
launched, his reminiscences indicate that he found several economically viable prospects, felt that the studios largely trusted his taste, and believed he had significant input into testing and casting decisions.

The talents scouts’ most promising finds joined the studio’s in-house stable of talent. The studios, who kept approximately six hundred actors under contract at any given time, imitated, albeit on a larger scale, the nineteenth-century stock company system and typecasting method of casting. They referred to their contract players as “stock company actors,” categorized them by type, and divided them into hierarchical classifications reminiscent of those the theatre companies had employed. Basinger breaks these categories down by type: stars, character actors, and supporting players (who played more than one distinct type). Balio, on the other hand, organizes classical Hollywood actors by hiring practices: those either under multi-year (stars), yearly (featured players), and six-month contracts (stock players), or employed per picture (supporting). Similarly, Friedman refers to all actors (except stars) by their contract classifications: those who either worked by the week (featured players) or were engaged per day (“bit” or “day players”). Other performers – bit-part players (those with only one or two lines), specialty players (who possessed a unique talent required for a specific picture), and extras – were hired as needed.

Studio casting departments divided all non-star principals into a variety of “classes” or types, including dress (society) men and women, juveniles (a holdover from the theatrical lines of business), bald men, tall men, military men, pretty girls, homely girls, maids, character

294 For statistics, see Clark, Negotiating, 23.
295 “Character actors” were specific types, such as Edward Everett Horton, the WASPy, befuddled support in several Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers musicals.
296 See Basinger, Star, 454-55. Basinger notes that additional sub-divisions included B-level actors, freelancers, and stars of short subjects.
297 See Balio, Grand Design, 155.
women, short women, and ethnicities. Secretaries typed all performer information on index cards (name, contact information, approximate daily and weekly salary range, age, weight, height, and eye and hair color), taped a small photo of the actor on the back of his or her card, and filed them in the studio casting office.  

The prevailing view of casting at the classical Hollywood studios is that they recycled a finite number of stars and contract players throughout their pictures despite the constant search for new faces. This process streamlined the production process (by lessening the quantity of roles casting directors needed to fill) and associated specific actors with their studio’s brand (the New York-bred James Cagney was the quintessential urban Warner Bros. star). However, while the studios kept a sizeable stable of actors under contract and approximately eighty percent of each film’s cast was drawn from this pool, free-lance actors filled the rest of the roles. Finding performers for at least twenty percent of the roles for approximately five hundred pictures a year made the casting offices’ work as demanding as other departments’; Grady estimated that he hired 91,000 actors a year. Thus, for Grady, casting directors’ most important asset was their knowledge of actors. Classical Hollywood film production, he stressed, moved rapidly; in addition, much like television sit-coms do today, movies often added characters the day before the actors were needed on set (today, this practice in film is uncommon). With only a few hours to fill these roles, the casting staff was forced to produce the names of all suitable actors quickly. As Grady explained:

…our department is familiar with all important productions, and the players in them,

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298 Casting departments’ typing categories were unusually detailed: at Paramount, approximately one thousand actors were listed as “lawyer types,” then subdivided into “shrewd, Dixie, hawk-faced, inquisitor, benevolent,” etc. See Idwal Jones, “You’re Not the Type,” *New York Times*, November 3, 1935, http://search.proquest.com/docview/1013437777?accountid=14553 (accessed January 8, 2013).
299 See Kiesling, *Talking*, 129.
300 See “Casting 91,000 Film Actors a Year.”
that have been seen on stage or screen during the past thirty years. In my files are the synopses of practically every picture or play produced during that time, with particular attention given to the actors and their abilities…we aim…to know – the appearance, record, and dramatic abilities of every available actor and actress in the show world…I’m no super-memory genius. Nor are my assistants…But the point is that when the call sheets come through in the afternoon for the next day’s shooting, we don’t have time to sit down…and start thumbing through the files. We have to know who is most likely to fit the director’s conception of each rôle, and be prepared to suggest, without delay, that person.

To make suggestions “without delay,” Grady turned to his files containing the photos and detailed information of approximately 15,000 actors, of whom half received regular work. As Grady recalled, “Usually…I know a player who will fit any given part. If I don’t, we have a record of them all, with everything they’ve ever done…I never forget a face.” These files allowed him to assemble lists of suggestions for each character once he received that picture’s script and breakdown. Prepared by each movie’s assistant director, breakdowns included a list of all cast members, the number of scenes each character appeared in, and the total number of days each actor was booked to work or to be idle (on call, but not scheduled to work).

After reading the script and the breakdown, company casting directors began their process by recommending actors already on the company payroll to that film’s director and unit producer (today’s casting directors call these suggestions an “idea list”). As Friedman noted, the casting director also supplied his “reasons” for each suggestion, indicating that casting directors

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301 “Meet the One-Man.”
302 Today’s film and television casting directors refer to this breakdown as a “board” or “day-out-days;” actors are hired for the run of the play in theatre.
enjoyed some creative and decision-making status in the classical Hollywood production process.  

After discussing the lists with the casting director, the director and producer then assigned roles; if unsure of any prospects, the director might test one or two of the suggested actors. Once the director, producer, and casting director agreed on a cast, the casting director arranged for the top-billed or unknown actors to be tested in full costume and make-up appropriate for that particular film so that the studio executives, who always had final say, could approve the choices.粉末 believed that directors were often forced to accept the studio’s casting choices, even when the former considered an actor unsuited to the role. The more high-profile and successful directors, however, usually received cast approval. The most famous, such as John Ford, had access to their own stock companies.

If no member of the production team was satisfied with any of the choices, the studio borrowed actors from other studios. Claudette Colbert and Gable were on loan from Paramount and MGM, respectively, when they won Oscars for Columbia’s *It Happened One Night* (Capra, 1934). Thus, among his many other duties, the head of casting analyzed all loan-out requests for studio contract players, indicating that he had a great deal of power over his actors’ careers. As Grady mentioned, these requests were time-consuming for:

> The script must first be read carefully, to see if the rôle is suitable for that person – for an ‘uncongenial’ rôle might do him more harm than good. With seventy-five

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304 See Friedman, “The Players are Cast,” 106-16. In an analogous process, today’s studio and network executives view the casting director’s recorded auditions before approving an actor.
[in-house] players in this category (not including stars) you will have
some idea of the time required. The compensating fact is that the other studios
have the same worry.308

As I indicate above, casting was conducted in-house with one exception: the extras. A company
called Central Casting, established in 1926, supervised most of the pictures’ extra, or non-
speaking, roles – receiving one percent of the salary of each extra booked. Prior to Central
Casting’s founding, extras casting was disorganized and difficult for actors to navigate. Those
interested in extra work were forced to make the rounds of the studios, which were often miles
apart. Once at the studio, aspiring extras waited outside the gates for several hours, hoping for a
day’s worth of work. Because extras congregated haphazardly and inefficiently, film directors
were at a loss when they needed either large numbers of people for crowd scenes or specific
ethnicities, ages, and types. Moreover, extras often worked under poor and disorganized
conditions: salaries were inconsistent; call and meal times chaotic; and female extras, in
particular, harassed or otherwise taken advantage of.

Central Casting’s founding addressed these problems. The agency, in the center of
Hollywood, registered everyone who applied for extra work (in the office’s heyday,
approximately seventeen thousand adults and children, although fewer than one thousand worked
consistently), guaranteed fair and reliable salaries, and required all applicants to join the Screen
Extras Guild.309 Central Casting mandated that most extras demonstrate proof of prior film

308 Grady, “Casting,” 65.
309 Field, 83-84. Usually, however, approximately three to five thousand extras registered with Central Casting. In
the late 1920s, extras averaged a little over eight dollars per day or roughly forty dollars a week. In the late 1940s, an
extra worked approximately thirty days a year and made less than seven hundred dollars; for figures, see “Close-
experience when registering; other applicants were recommended by studio or production personnel. Some extras with special skills worked frequently enough to join SAG, but most remained extras or left the business entirely.

Central Casting’s process was fast-paced, operating with the controlled chaos and high-pitched intensity of Wall Street. The studios sent in their requests via teletype. Secretaries gave the copies of the descriptions to the four staff casting directors, who sat at a single long table near the switchboard. From dawn until all the studios’ orders were filled (often late at night), four switchboard operators answered several hundred calls an hour as those looking for extra work telephoned to inquire about the day’s prospects. The operators announced the names of the performers calling in over the loud speakers. If a name matched the type of extra a studio needed that day, one of the casting directors pressed a button, which allowed him to speak with the performer in question. He then gave the extra the name of the studio, the call time, and any clothing requirements (modern sports dress, evening wear, etc.). While this method was easier for the actor than visiting the studio, he or she did have to call in numerous times as studios sent in extras orders throughout the day.

The Central Casting directors (all male) possessed powerful memories (and quick reflexes). They acquainted themselves with the photographs and brief physical descriptions (ethnicity, type, special skills) of thousands of extras, instantly recognizing the names of those calling in and ascertaining within seconds whether or not they fit that day’s requirements.

310 Field, Hollywood, 84-85
312 For scenes that necessitated large numbers of ethnic performers, Central Casting turned to their contacts within the local ethnic communities.
Other extras casting director duties included supplying stand-ins for each studio’s major stars and visiting the set to ensure that all the extras appeared on time and in proper dress.313

When sound was introduced, Central Casting staff, like their studio counterparts, adjusted accordingly. Extras were forced to re-register, delineating their experience singing, speaking foreign languages, whistling, and imitating sounds (animals, birds).314 Authentic-sounding diction and accents became key, complicating casting immeasurably. As one extras casting director complained:

if a girl looked distinctly Latin we could cast her as an Italian fisherman’s daughter or a French maid…But now the Italian Fisherman’s daughter must speak a few words of Italian. The French maid must sing a little song in French…I did an unheard of thing the other day. I sent a blonde girl out to a studio to play a French maid. But she was French and could speak the language and that was all that counted. It’s an entirely new business.315

In the classical Hollywood era, casting consolidated into a coherent, respected profession with a recognizable, industry-wide culture. Even operating under a top-down, highly specialized organization of labor and working conditions many scholars consider Fordist (that is, mass production with little opportunity for autonomy and deviation), the studio casting directors and talent scouts (Rich is a notable exception) believed that they were valuable members of the production team, that they exerted some creative control over the production process, and that

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their opinions were respected by the studios’ more powerful decision-makers. Casting directors honed their craft, perfected their skills, and increased their knowledge working on multiple projects for the fast-paced studios. Consequently, they were prepared when the next new culture industry appeared in the middle of the twentieth century, one that outdid the pace of film production: television.

IV. A Profession Matures: Television

Television negatively affected the film industry (polls throughout the 1950s found that families who owned televisions attended movies less often), and its means of distribution and exhibition were markedly different, but it modeled several of its production methods and work processes after those of the cinema, principally because the classical Hollywood studios produced a large percentage of early television. Features of the casting process, in particular, proved remarkably similar for both mediums. Television talent development programs and casting departments, like their film counterparts, scouted and groomed actors. Warner Bros. Television’s talent program, for example, produced television stars James Garner (Maverick, ABC, 1957-62) and Clint Eastwood (Rawhide, CBS, 1959-65).

Early television – shows that aired in the 1950s – was produced according to the central producer model, a throwback to a management style popular during the silent era, in which a central authority oversaw all a company’s films. At Warner Bros. TV Guy Stevens supervised all the studio’s television shows, answering only to Jack Warner, then head of the studio. In his analysis of Warner Bros. TV, Christopher Anderson, who describes the television production process as, like film’s, an “assembly line,” notes that this model of production meant that several components of each television series (scripts, locations, stock footage, and actors) recycled

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316 For a discussion of these polls, see Peter Lev, Transforming the Screen, 1950-59 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2003), 9.
throughout different shows. Maintaining a uniform style among the different series streamlined the production process, saving the studio valuable time and money. As Anderson points out, however, television’s in-house, centralized casting offices faced the same problems that the early silent studios had in terms of reusing the same faces and risking audience fatigue:

[w]ith more series in production, it also became increasingly difficult for the casting department to avoid circulating the same supporting actors from series to series. Some producers worried about the frequency with which one detective series went on the air with a villain who had recently appeared on one of the other series.318

The re-circulating actors of this period also included television stars, among them, Peter Brown, who made multiple appearances on at least four Warner Bros. shows before becoming a regular on Lawman (ABC, 1958-62); Roger Smith, who appeared in three; and Ty Hardin, a series regular on both Cheyenne (ABC, 1955-63) and Bronco (ABC, 1958-62). Anderson notes that Warner Bros. TV frequently cast as series stars actors who looked and sounded alike to avoid disruptions in the production process.319 Although he gives no examples, they doubtless include Hardin, who was brought on as a possible replacement for Clint Walker in Cheyenne before getting his own series.

The Los Angeles studios produced shows for what were, at that point, New York-based networks – ABC, CBS, and NBC – although some of the earliest series were produced in New York. Although three thousand miles away from Hollywood, the networks patterned some aspects of their administrative structure after the movie studios’: their casting offices, for example, were organized along the same hierarchical model (casting director, associate, and

319 See Anderson, Hollywood TV, 269-75.
assistant) and engaged in similar types of labor. At CBS, head of casting Robert Fryer employed fourteen assistants, met approximately three hundred actors a day, and kept copious notecards on each actor he auditioned. He continued the stock company traditions of theatre and classical Hollywood by organizing the talent he met by type (leading man and ingénue) and sub-headings (“sensitive guy” or “tart”). Fryer, whose typecasting shorthand was particularly whimsical, also included cards for “dull actors,” supporting actors whose subdued acting styles threw the non-glamorous star into sharper contrast.

Fryer, like Friedman and Grady, left a published recollection of his casting career. Discovering an interest in theatre while serving in the army, he worked as a general manager before turning to television (he was only thirty-one when he became CBS’s head of casting). In part because of his theatre background, he preferred to cast theatre performers as he believed they were better trained than film actors. (At that time, because most features shot on the west coast, east coast actors had more theatre than film credits.) He noted that over the years the new medium of television increased its cachet in ways advantageous to casting directors.Originally, television attracted a limited talent pool: only novice actors with unremarkable credits (such as roles in stock theatres) showed interest in television; within a few years, Fryer hired Broadway stars.

New York-based actors applied for television roles in ways analogous to their early Hollywood counterparts: they made the rounds of the networks and filled out forms detailing the roles they had played (CBS required applicants to possess at least one year of professional acting

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experience). If the casting office was interested in a particular applicant, he or she was asked to return in a few weeks prepared to deliver either a short dramatic monologue or song. These auditions were often elaborate: at CBS, the audition was held in a sound studio, in front of a microphone, to test the performer’s voice.

At times, network casting directors in the early days of television also acted as talent scouts. William Nichols, head of casting at NBC, saw Wally Cox doing stand-up comedy at a Village club and hired him for *Mr. Peepers* (NBC, 1952-55). When the network casting directors conducted comprehensive searches, they employed additional talent scouts to assist them. For example, when approximately one thousand African American actors (and some white performers) across the country auditioned for the two leads in CBS’s *Amos 'n' Andy* (1951-53), the network hired African American actor-playwright Flournoy Miller as a talent scout for the project (like Loo, he was one of the few talent scout/casting directors of color at a major media industry). The networks, which had final casting approval, tested those prospects in whom the studio showed the most interest.

The biggest challenge to getting the necessary authorization was the blacklist. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) encouraged the studios and networks to blacklist (prevent from working) actors, writers, directors, and other media workers suspected of being communists or fellow travelers. Well-known victims of the blacklist included film actors John Garfield (1913-52), famous for *The Postman Always Rings Twice*

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323 See Val Adams, “Star of Past.”
(Garnett, 1946) and *Body and Soul* (Rosen, 1947); and Larry Parks (1914-75), star of *The Jolson Story* (Green, 1946).

Networks also prohibited their casting offices from hiring any blacklisted actors. Dependent upon advertisers to underwrite their programs, and fearful that audiences in the Midwest and the south would boycott any program starring “commie” performers, networks avoided any actor who might alienate either group.\(^{326}\) Thus, casting offices were directed to “clear” the names of all actors they wanted to hire. This process involved calling the agency authorized to clear names and supplying it with a list of the actors to whom producers wished to make offers. The agency returned the call several hours later, approving or rejecting each actor with a simple, unelaborated yes or no. Because the agency charged the networks approximately twenty-five dollars per name, most television producers resented this process as it often cost them hundreds of dollars per episode. In interviews she gave in the 1990s, legendary television casting director Ethel Winant (1925-2003) recollected other difficulties:

> I would submit two hundred names for every show; and the agency would complain to my boss, but my bosses hated the blacklist as much as I did and were not sympathetic to the agency. Sometimes it would take a couple of days to get back, which hurt our negotiating position with an actor, so they created a rule that they had to get back to us within twenty-four hours. I would dial the number and say, ‘I want to clear Viveca Lindfors.’ Then I would say to my secretary, ‘What time is it?’ She would say, ‘It’s three-nineteen.’ ‘Okay, tomorrow at three-eighteen dial Viveca Lindfors’s agent. If they call at three-twenty-five to turn her down it’s too late.’ Certain names were submitted every week just in the hope

\(^{326}\) Marion Dougherty, who cast for *Kraft Television Theater*, recalled, “there were certain people we were told we couldn’t use.” See Dan Georgakas and Kevin Rabalias, “Fifty Years of Casting,” *Cineaste* 25, no. 2 (2000): 26-32, *Art Full Text (H.W. Wilson), EBSCOhost* (accessed March 5, 2014).
there would be a clerical error because if they were cleared once they could be
hired.\textsuperscript{327}

As Winant’s strategies to circumvent the approval process indicate, television casting directors
often influenced whether or not performers could work. It is possible, for example, that if the
clearing agency did not meet the twenty-four hour deadline, a casting director could allow a
possibly compromised actor to accept the role. Ironically, in some ways, the blacklist empowered
casting directors to make strategic hiring decisions.

V. Conclusion

Like their Broadway and Hollywood counterparts, Winant and Fryer operated as in-house
employees. While the television and theatrical production offices were smaller and, thus, less
highly organized and specialized than the studios’, as full-time, contracted labor, those who
worked in any of these three culture industries were members of relatively stable production
teams and loyal primarily to their employers. Few, however, felt marginalized in their positions:
as the above examples indicate, casting and talent personnel considered themselves valuable
employees and active co-creators in the artistic process. Indeed, as heads of casting running
major departments, talent scouts making important discoveries, or casting directors evading the
blacklist, casting personnel exerted power in what otherwise appear to be limited spheres of
influence within large businesses run by more powerful decision-makers.

In the 1960s, however, casting personnel lost this job security and, potentially, their
influence and professional status when they experienced yet another transition in labor
organization and production practices. At this time, the studios released their contract actors,
closed their talent departments, and downsized their casting offices. Broadway production

\textsuperscript{327} See Kisseloff, \textit{The Box}, 424. Winant also recalled that all television personnel were forced to sign loyalty oaths,
though she claimed she never did; see Kisseloff, \textit{The Box}, 415.
offices also reorganized, letting much of their in-house workforce go. In my following chapter, I examine casting’s next and current phase of employment: “The Independent Casting Director.”
CHAPTER III: THE INDEPENDENT CASTING DIRECTOR, 1960-PRESENT

“‘Being a casting director is not primarily about making a list of actors who can play a certain role…It’s really about coming up with the person who can take the role to greater heights.’”^328 David Rubin, casting director

“Casting is my form of creative expression.”^329 Leslee Dennis, casting director

In the early 1960s, faced with increasing competition from television, most studios dismantled their in-house stock companies, shuttered their casting departments, and began to hire independent casting directors on a per-project basis.^330 Similarly, Broadway producers – experiencing smaller audiences and shrinking revenue – closed offices which often included permanent or semi-permanent casting staff. Conversant in their profession’s knowledge, skills, and techniques, several casting directors, now operating as independent contractors, opened their own offices.^331

“The Independent Casting Director” continues to explore how casting developed and adapted to different organizations of labor and production models by concentrating on free-lance casting employees and their new, project-based working conditions. Additionally, casting’s concomitant shift from a male-dominated to female-centered profession allows me to analyze gender’s profound influence on two of my project’s ongoing themes: the debate over casting as either clerical or creative work and the casting director’s status as a decision-maker. While we may, as film scholar Mark Garrett Cooper argues, see casting directors as typical of many female-dominated careers given “nominal authority” rather than any real structural power, I contend that the casting director becomes a more powerful decision-maker in the era of

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independent entertainment production as cast-contingent projects have become the preferred method of financing.\textsuperscript{332}

I. The Free-lance Casting Director

After the studio system’s demise, Hollywood replicated business practices increasingly found in other industries: rather than hire long-term contract workers, as classical Hollywood had, the new regime turned to short-term project-based labor.\textsuperscript{333} Sociologists who study the organizational structure of work refer to these new free-lance professions as “boundaryless” careers (distinct from those which are “bounded” or “conceived to unfold in a single employment setting”).\textsuperscript{334} While studios, theatre companies, and networks retain some permanent employees for primarily administrative and accounting purposes (Lincoln Center Theater, for example, maintains an in-house casting department), the majority of the contemporary media workforce now works non-exclusively.\textsuperscript{335}

Some media scholars view this historical shift in work practices as seismic and, certainly, independent contractors adapted to altered material conditions of labor, including job insecurity and alienation.\textsuperscript{336} In fact, however, even under the studio system, few films hired identical production teams: the directors, screenwriters, producers, designers, and cast varied, to some degree, with each picture. In addition, film now imitates the long-standing employment practices

\textsuperscript{332} See Mark Garrett Cooper, \textit{Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood} (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), xxvii-xxxviii.
\textsuperscript{333} Caldwell refers to this new pool as “nomadic labor;” see \textit{Production Culture}, 113-14.
\textsuperscript{334} See Arthur and Rousseau, \textit{Boundaryless}, 5. Other terms include “portfolio” or “individualized” careers.
\textsuperscript{335} On-site theatre casting directors continue to cast their companies’ shows. Studios and networks employ vice-presidents of casting to mediate between the project’s production team (including the casting director) and the company “suits” responsible for approving all final casting choices. While some studio casting directors do cast in-house projects, television casting offices rarely do.
\textsuperscript{336} See, for example, Caldwell, \textit{Production Culture}, 114 and 145-46; and Christopherson and Storper, “The Effects.”
of theatrical production offices, which, since the end of the stock company system, have relied on a combination of permanent (or semi-permanent) and free-lance staff.\textsuperscript{337}

This shift in hiring practices affected the casting profession in two significant ways. First, by dismantling their casting and talent offices, the studios divorced themselves from any long-term investment in talent (targeting, training, and providing continuous, long-term employment). Gone were actors’ fabled seven-year contracts and, with them, the corresponding need for talent scouts and talent development personnel (coaches, dance teachers, etc.). Thus, today’s casting directors must fulfill some of these two professions’ functions. While they do not scout talent full-time, they do engage in talent hunts, particularly for children and ethnicities, that sometimes yield unknowns (I elaborate on this in my next chapter).\textsuperscript{338} They also take on some talent development chores by running acting and audition workshops, and, certainly, by coaching actors during auditions. However, casting directors neither work as acting coaches nor do they oversee actors’ training and professional development (the latter increasingly the purview of managers); instead, today’s up-and-coming actors attend BFA and MFA programs, the occasional acting class, and/or receive private coaching.

Second, casting directors share what most of today’s media labor experience: more volatile employment opportunities and difficulties in sustaining career success. Sociologists Faulkner and Anderson note that the project-based worker is “no longer localized in ‘the office,’ with the prospect of a long career sustained by a regular succession of promotions. Rather, a career is a succession of temporary projects embodied in an identifiable line of film [television

\textsuperscript{337} As early as the 1970s, scholars Lawrence Peter Goodman and Richard Alan Goodman applied what they called “the concept of temporary systems” to the impermanent aspects of theatre’s organizational structure; their work anticipates current sociological scholarship on boundaryless careers in film and television. See Lawrence Peter Goodman and Richard Alan Goodman, “Theater as a Temporary System,” \textit{California Management Review} XV, no. 2 (Winter 1972), \textit{Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost} (accessed July 5, 2013).

\textsuperscript{338} Reality television series employ talent scouts, rather than casting directors, but this genre is beyond the purview of my dissertation.
and/or theatre] credits.”

Thus, today’s casting directors acquire jobs through their contacts (usually, directors and producers with whom they have worked in the past) and on the basis of their reputation (the artistic and/or economic value of the last plays, movies, or series they cast). One by-product of obtaining jobs through contacts and credits is that today’s casting directors tend to be associated with different mediums (theatre, film, or television) and/or genres (dramas/comedies). If a casting director works frequently with a show-runner who specializes in television sit-coms, then she is likely to get calls to cast other comedy series as other producers will logically assume that she knows the comic actor talent pool well. Ironically, given actors’ complaints during the last several decades that they are often “typecast” by those in positions to hire them, casting directors themselves experience similar restrictive hiring practices. Film casting directors interested in working in television are often told that they cannot handle that medium’s faster pace (an episodic drama is produced in eight days, comedies in six); while television casting personnel are accused of not having the right taste in actors for film.

Feature film casting directors make names for themselves not by alliances with specific studios – as in the classical Hollywood era – but by relationships with well-known directors. Phyllis Huffman cast nearly two dozen feature films for Clint Eastwood before she died prematurely in 2006; Juliet Taylor and Ellen Lewis collaborate with, respectively, Woody Allen and Martin Scorsese. While these partnerships are free-lance, they emulate, to some degree, the hiring practices of golden-age Broadway, where in-house casting personnel worked with a single director/producer (as Rich did in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s office).

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339 Faulkner and Anderson, “Short-Term.”
Although many casting directors can sustain careers through associations with prolific producers and directors, others find per-project employment uncertain and anxiety-producing. Several media scholars argue that independent contractors often experience job alienation (short-term employment undermines workers’ loyalty to the projects and their employers), job insecurity, out-sourcing, runaway production, poor wages and lack of benefits.\textsuperscript{342} For many laborers, pride in their craft alleviates the tensions caused by alienation and strong unions mitigate some of the other problems, but casting directors and their associates did not unionize until 2006, putting them particularly at risk for low wages and poor benefits.

This is the employment climate several casting personnel faced when the new entertainment model forced them to start their own businesses. Many chose to open offices in New York, where the creative industries as a whole were more accustomed to project-based employment. Michael Shurtleff (1921-2007), who cast the original Broadway productions of \textit{Irma La Douce} (1960) and \textit{Jesus Christ Superstar} (1973), and wrote an influential book on auditioning, started Casting Consultants in 1962; Cis Corman, Marion Dougherty, Alixe Gordin, and Rich opened their offices a few years later.\textsuperscript{343}

While Rich’s case is atypical of many casting directors – she returned to casting at the comparatively advanced age of forty-one, after a nine-year hiatus to raise her children – her memoirs shed some light on how the first independent casting directors managed their careers within this new organizational labor structure. Married to a Wall Street investment banker, living in Scarsdale, and active in her local League of Women Voters, she was leading the life of a


a typical suburban housewife when she decided to return to work (interestingly, under her maiden, not married, name). Although she had kept her files from her days with Rodgers and Hammerstein (“because I had made that casting file…and I wasn’t going to leave all of those wonderful singers and dancers and actors in that [office]”), she was aware of the difficulties she faced in re-entering the business after nearly a decade’s absence.  

She initially contacted her old employer for assistance, but, appalled at the length of her commute from Scarsdale to Manhattan, Rodgers discouraged her. Undeterred, Rich then turned to Prince, director and producer of Stephen Sondheim’s musicals, whom she had met through Rodgers. Comfortable with female casting directors (he had previously worked with Judith Abbott when he was employed by her father), he hired Rich to cast some roles for Fiddler on the Roof (1964). Although never under contract, she remained his in-house casting director until 1969, when she left to start her own business.

Although Rich enjoyed working for Prince, she found that casting constant replacements for his Broadway shows and multiple touring companies left her little time for her growing family. Feeling some guilt as a working mother (“the children are growing up and you’re in New York so many hours a day “), she decided to open her office on the advice of a friend. As an independent contractor, she reasoned, she could take on fewer projects, enjoy more flexible hours, and return home for dinner.  

Rich has said repeatedly that she could not have done so without her husband’s emotional and financial support (she often described him as “immensely supportive and happy to have me doing something I love”). Before she became successful, she depended on his salary for the initial start-up costs and to hire a nanny for her elementary school-age children. She also relied

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344 Rich, interview, 2-69-70.  
345 Rich, interview, 2-92.  
346 See Shirley Rich Papers.
on his advice when she negotiated some of her working conditions, particularly fee and credit. Ultimately, however, she was determined to make her business viable without her husband’s financial assistance:

As a profession that you would open up your own business…I didn’t realize really how radical it was at the time. All I thought about was, well, I will try it. And also, I made up my mind that, regardless of Lew’s [her husband’s] success in Wall Street…if I do this…it must work on its own…To me it was, if you’re going to do this, then you make it work, and if you can’t make it work, forget it…But it had to pay for itself.347

In the end, Rich’s company more than paid for itself. She became one of the profession’s most prominent casting directors – one of the few to move easily among theatre, film, and television projects. Her Broadway credits number the original productions of *Ballroom* (1978), directed by Michael Bennett, and Beth Henley’s *Crimes of the Heart* (1981). In addition to *Saturday Night Fever* and *Kramer vs. Kramer*, her other significant film titles include *Serpico* (Lumet, 1973) and *Three Days of the Condor* (Pollack, 1975). And she cast one of the earliest AIDS television movies, *Andre’s Mother* (PBS), in 1990.

Although Rich was ultimately very successful, she never forgot the anxiety she felt when going out on her own. She primarily lamented losing her job security and the solidarity she had felt in Prince’s office; “it’s like being part of the family in a company,” she said wistfully to one interviewer.348 While it is true that casting directors no longer employed for decades at the same studio or production company have lost some sense of community (and, perhaps, some opportunities for advancement), it has not been eradicated. Entry-level assistants learn “on the

job” through old-fashioned mentoring and apprenticeships, and often remain employed by one casting director long enough to be promoted to associate and, in some cases, to partner. Also, because casting directors often retain the same assistants and associates from project to project, this particular production team, although relatively short-term and impermanent, maintains some of the cohesiveness found in the company casting offices. As Lewis explained:

Casting is like an old-fashioned trade, where you learn how to do it by who you work for…it’s a little family in itself inside the movie production. It is an apprenticeship and I truly enjoyed my experience. Just by sitting there while I was working for Juliet [Taylor], I learned so much just from watching and listening. Still, when I do a movie with her I’ll just want to stop and listen. There is a trade to be learned. The “old-fashioned trade,” however, did adapt to new business practices. As the case of Rich indicates, free-lance casting directors found themselves in unfamiliar territory as they negotiated salaries and credit, particularly as they had no union to set industry minimums. It is difficult to quantify how much casting directors earn as their salary depends on experience, budget, and medium (film usually pays more than theatre, and studio movies are more lucrative than independents). In 1970, roughly the same year that Rich opened her office, Dougherty, at that time the best-known casting director and, therefore, presumably the highest-paid, made seven hundred and fifty dollars per week on Peter Bogdanovich’s The Last Picture Show (1971), which was a studio movie. In 1986, Janet Hirshenson and Jane Jenkins, who had, at that point, done

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349 Casting By traces the lineage these mentorships can produce, as the example of Dougherty, Taylor, and Lewis illustrates.  
350 D’Aries and Hirsch. “Art of Casting.”  
352 See Harold Schneider to Bert Schneider, 27 August 1970, Peter Bogdanovich Collection, Manuscripts Department, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.
several movies for John Hughes and were much in demand, earned more than three thousand per week for a Bogdanovich feature film.\textsuperscript{353} Today, a well-known casting director with several credits might earn ten thousand a week for a big-budget studio feature.\textsuperscript{354} Theatrical casting directors earn significantly less. Shurtleff and Alan Shayne, the casting directors for the Arthur Laurents/Stephen Sondheim musical, \textit{Side Show} (which opened more famously as \textit{Anyone Can Whistle} in 1964), earned one hundred per week.\textsuperscript{355} By 1989, the fee for a Broadway play was approximately seven hundred a week; today, casting directors working on musicals (which pay more than straight plays) earn as much as fifteen hundred per week.\textsuperscript{356} These salaries – all earned by the profession’s most prestigious casting directors – represent the highest amount a contemporary casting director can make.

The movie industry not only pays more lucratively than theatre, but also, ultimately, provided casting directors with better credit placement. Stalmaster was the first casting director to receive single-card, main-title credit on a film in this period (1968’s \textit{The Thomas Crown Affair}), yet a search of on-line \textit{Playbills} reveals that Rich did not receive title page credit in a theatre program until the early 1980s. These credits were hard-won. According to the recent HBO documentary, \textit{Casting By}, the DGA refused to allow casting directors movie or television credit for several years because they objected to the profession’s use of “director,” claiming exclusive rights to that title. (As mentioned in the previous chapter, early entertainment journalists dismissive of casting personnel also did not refer to casting directors by their appropriate title, calling them “casting agents” instead.) When the DGA finally acquiesced, they

\begin{footnotes}
\item[353] See Gareth Wigan to Kurt Neumann, 12 November 1986, Peter Bogdanovich Collection, Manuscripts Department, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.
\item[354] See Anonymous Studio Casting Director, e-mail message to author, November 2, 2013.
\item[355] See Michael Shurtleff and Alan Shayne to Kermit Bloomgarden, 28 June 1963, Kermit Bloomgarden, Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.
\item[356] See my e-mail exchange with an anonymous theatre casting director, November 6, 2013.
\end{footnotes}
insisted that casting directors be billed without their titles; thus, their cards simply read, with far less significance, as “Casting By” (hence, the documentary’s title). That the DGA, whose members are overwhelmingly male, does not prevent directors of photography, also primarily men, from receiving billing with their professional titles intact, demonstrates gendered attitudes towards casting (discussed in more detail below).\(^\text{357}\) Indeed, the documentary emphasizes a central irony: while Scorsese, Robert Redford, Norman Jewison, and Allen praise their casting directors, directors have been, historically, the largest stumbling block to casting directors’ attempts to legitimize the profession.\(^\text{358}\) Tellingly, it is only television, the only major culture industry among the three I analyze which does not privilege the director – or any other primary auteur – that grants casting directors award status.

While Rich and her contemporaries adjusted to some changes in hiring and work-place conditions under the new labor model, other practices remained the same. The audition process, for example, despite what several media journalists and casting directors claim, did not alter significantly until the introduction of digital media (I address this transition in my final chapter). This assertion works against the accepted narrative – reiterated in Casting By – that legendary casting director Marion Dougherty (1923-2011), who cast Midnight Cowboy (Schlesinger, 1969) and The Sting (Hill, 1973), introduced the audition procedures still in use to correct the studio system’s careless and deficient methods.\(^\text{359}\)

In interviews, Dougherty, who began her career in early television, accused the studios and networks of “recycling” the same actors: “It was like ordering a Chinese meal: one from

\(^{357}\) Taylor Hackford (An Officer and a Gentleman, 1982), who was DGA president when Casting By interviewed him, acknowledges this inconsistency, but offers no explanation for why the guild consents to “director of photography” and not “casting director” other than to assure us that he personally accepts neither.

\(^{358}\) As I mentioned in my previous chapter, directors also deny casting directors Oscar consideration.

column A and one from column B…you’d always see the same actor cast in the same kind of role – cliché casting”\textsuperscript{360} Her narrative suggests that casting was inadequate in the studio era and much improved today – a teleological view undermined by classical Hollywood’s great performances. Indeed, Dougherty denied the contributions of all studio-era – and theatre – casting directors:

In the old days, of course, casting used to be done by the producers and directors. There really were no casting directors. And such ‘casting’ would be done from the studio lists, not according to ‘who is best for this part out there somewhere.'\textsuperscript{361}

Huffman, who began her career working for Dougherty, concurred:

Prior to Marion, casting was a laundry list affair…Directors would audition several actors indiscriminately for a role. Marion made casting a selective process, honing the final auditions before a director down to three or four actors who had different angles on the part.\textsuperscript{362}

Taylor, who also trained under Dougherty, went further: “Before Marion, casting directors were more secretarial and organizational; nobody really looked at them for their opinions.”\textsuperscript{363}

Others also ascribe the creation of modern-day casting to Dougherty, but this exists only as what Caldwell calls a “genesis myth” (self-reflexive origin stories told by industry insiders) and has little basis in reality.\textsuperscript{364} As my previous chapter proved, the studios and theatrical production offices did, indeed, “look at [casting directors] for their opinions.” Contrary to Basinger’s assertion that casting directors did not have “agency or power,” Hollywood’s

\textsuperscript{360} Hurtes, \textit{Backstage Guide}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., vii.
\textsuperscript{361} Andrew Horton, “‘My Casting Couch is Too Short,’” \textit{World Literature Today} 80, no. 2 (March-April 2006): 42.
\textsuperscript{363} See Amy Goodman, “Recasting the Casting Director,” \textit{The Independent} 22, no. 3 (April 1999), \texttt{http://www.independent-magazine.org/node/399} (accessed August 21, 2013).
\textsuperscript{364} Caldwell names and analyzes different genres of self-reflexive industry talk throughout \textit{Production Culture}.
legendary heads of casting exercised both. In addition, neither theatre nor even film casting directors pulled from “columns A and B.” Actors rarely worked under exclusive contract for Broadway producers and several were not members of the studio stock companies. Session schedules taken from the production files of John Ford’s *The Long Gray Line* (Columbia, 1955) resemble the audition sheets used today: actors of different, but comparable types (Peter Graves, later of CBS’s *Mission Impossible* fame, and Fess Parker, who played television’s Daniel Boone on NBC, represent some of the actors scheduled) are listed by interval along with their agent’s name; not all are studio contract players. And a list of suggestions for the role of Mrs. Kelley in *King Kelley* (which does not appear to have been made) also looks like today’s idea lists in that it includes a wide, but discriminate, range of talented actresses who were not under studio contract (Gretchen Thomas, for example, who appears on the list, was a radio and theatre actress). Even when studio casting directors did bring in contracted actors for parts, they at times encouraged directors and producers to consider these players for types of roles they had not heretofore played. Gordon, when he was head of casting at Twentieth Century-Fox, encouraged producer Walter Wanger (*Cleopatra*, 1963) to remember actor Richard Beymer for “a role so far removed from what he did [as young Peter van Daan] in *The Diary of Anne Frank*” (Stevens, 1959).

While Dougherty did not invent the contemporary casting process as we know it, crediting a woman with this innovation does, however, have important repercussions for the next

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365 For Basinger’s remarks, see *Casting By*.
366 See Interview – *The Long Gray Line*, 8 February 1954, John Ford Collection, Manuscripts Department, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.
368 W.L. Gordon to Walter Wanger, 15 May 1959, Walter Wanger Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.
major effect on casting I analyze as it transitioned from in-house to independent: the increase in the number of female casting directors and the resulting feminization of the profession.

II. The Gendered Casting Director

Since the collapse of the studio system, women have composed the majority of casting personnel. According to CSA’s online directory, only approximately 151 out of 576 members – a little more twenty-five percent – are male. Casting, however, was not always so feminized. As mentioned in my previous chapter, men dominated during the classical Hollywood years; women rarely rose above the level of secretary after the 1920s in the studio casting departments. Given the almost complete absence of women in film casting in that era, it is surprising that the field was later so hospitable to them; indeed, by the early 1970s, they held executive casting positions in several major studios.

There do not appear to be any conclusive reasons either for why women were not film casting directors under the studio system or for why they dominated the profession so rapidly across all mediums after it ended. Certainly, studio-era casting directors benefitted from recruitment, apprenticeship, and network systems that favored men. Many casting personnel

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369 For figures, see Casting Society of America, http://www.castingsociety.com (accessed April 17, 2013). Note that not all casting directors are members of CSA (the organization is neither a union nor a governing body), therefore, the numbers may be incomplete.


began their careers in other predominantly masculine fields that demanded analogous skills. As I mentioned previously, Grady was a booking manager and Vaudeville agent, and Friedman was a talent scout. As the latter example indicates, talent scouts could transition into more prestigious careers as casting directors, but their constant traveling made the career difficult for women, particularly those with families.

While the traditional studio system generally did not employ women in fields deemed masculine, there were enough exceptions in other areas of production or in comparable fields to render curious the lack of feature film female casting directors. Women, for instance, made headway as editors, including Jane Loring (RKO), Viola Lawrence (Columbia’s head editor,) and Margaret Booth (supervising editor at MGM).372 And several women worked as talent agents – Ruth Collier, Sylvia Hahlo, and Wallis, among others – at this time.373 Yet, even during World War II, when all industries suffered losses of personnel as men entered the service, women did not fill casting slots, although they did take on other industry jobs, such as projectionist.374

Despite the fact that casting is one of the few creative occupations in the culture industries (other than actress, costume designer, dramaturge, and film editor) that consistently employ women, little scholarship examines why the profession underwent such a profound demographic shift. Some media journalists theorize that the preponderance of female casting directors occurs because most films feature male protagonists and women are better arbiters of

372 See Karen Ward Mahar, *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 201. The studios employed several female film editors who worked on high-profile projects; others included Barbara McLean, who won an Academy Award for *All About Eve* (Mankiewicz, 1950); Alma Reville (Alfred Hitchcock’s editor as well as wife); Anne Bauchens (Cecil de Mille’s movies); and Adrienne Fazan (*Singin’ in the Rain*, 1952). When asked why women found success in editing, Carol Littleton, Lawrence Kasdan’s editor, offered theories that could apply equally to female casting directors: “When your only participation is being a spectator…you become an extraordinarily keen observer…As a result, women have an intuitive sense of what is true in human behavior.” See Linda Seger, *When Women Call the Shots: The Developing Power and Influence of Women in Television and Film* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 17.

373 See Sylvia Hahlo to Michael Myerberg, 11 May 1943, Michael Myerberg Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

masculine attractiveness than male casting personnel would be. Of course, this dubious theory does not explain why there were no female casting directors in the studio era, which produced many films featuring male stars.\footnote{375}{See Robert Downing, “University of Iowa Graduate is Now Right-Hand-Woman for Fabulous Broadway Team of Rodgers and Hammerstein,” n.p., Shirley Rich Papers, Iowa Women’s Archives, Iowa City, IA; and Austin Bunn, “Casting Call: Avy Kaufman Directs the Show,” The Independent Film and Video Monthly (March 2004), \url{http://archive.org} (accessed October 28, 2013).}

Only two film scholars propose theories and neither adequately explains this phenomenon. Karen Mahar offers several general explanations for why women rarely rose above the level of clerical or manual labor in the sound era: the larger budgets, technological innovations, and complex productions thought to be too much for the “gentler sex” to navigate; and standardized, often gendered, labor divisions within a workplace that soon organized under a hierarchical, conservative business and production model.\footnote{376}{See Mahar, Women Filmmakers, 180-81, 198-99, and 202-03.}

Yet, these theories apply equally to television, a medium in which women held casting production titles and acted as decision-makers (as the careers of Winant and Dougherty exemplify) contrary to their experience in classical Hollywood.

Erin Hill offers the only sustained explanation for casting’s new demographics by looking at the classical Hollywood casting offices’ gendered divisions of labor between the clerical workers (female) and the managerial staff (male). She begins by detailing the rise of the industrial clerical workforce in the early 1900s; by the 1930s, she notes, women, “thought to be more suited to the monotonous-yet-detailed work of operating stenographs, typewriters, and filing cabinets,” composed the majority of this kind of clerical labor in many fields.\footnote{377}{See Hill, “Gendering;” see also Margery W. Davies, Woman’s Place Is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870-1930 (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1982), 52; and Olivier Zunz, Making America Corporate, 1870-1920 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 126.}
these gender-skewed demographics in other industries, Hill rightly assumes that women also made up most of the secretarial pool in the studios.  

Hill argues that casting offices depended upon female clerical labor for two reasons. First, actors were classified by type – a method of organization that depended on secretarial labor (typing, filing) who “assigned, recorded, and cross-indexed” all that information. Second, Hill mentions that the studio heads considered casting a managerial – rather than production-oriented – profession. She offers as evidence a 1934 hierarchical flow chart that aligns RKO’s casting department more closely with the studio’s legal and executive branches (such as contracts) than with the production departments. These male managers engaged in work that demanded clerical labor: contracts had to be typed, loan-out agreements (for contract players who were lent to other studios for the occasional film) had to be filed, and telephones had to be answered.

In proposing why casting transitioned to a female-dominated workplace after the studio system ended, Hill turns to the talent department for answers. This department, which included drama teachers and what Hill calls “other studio caretakers” – dance, movement, and deportment instructors – was primarily staffed by women. As she details their duties, she emphasizes the title of “caretaker,” noting their “emotional labor such as [the] nurturing…of actors and the ‘women’s work’ of teaching.” As the studios dismantled their contract-player system and most production labor became free-lance, Hill argues that the newly independent casting profession merged the tasks of the female clerical worker and studio acting coach with those of the male talent scout and casting director. However, while these casting directors combined elements of

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378 See Hill, “Gendering.”
379 See Hill, “Gendering.”
381 Hill argues that these same “feminine” characteristics – the ability to take care of actors – encouraged women to enter the talent agent field.
gendered masculine and feminine labor, most were increasingly women because the profession became devalued as its “status changed from executive/managerial to that of below-the-line crew” in the post-traditional studio era.\textsuperscript{382}

While it is true that many of the first independent casting directors began their careers as secretaries (Rich, for example), Hill’s explanations for how casting became gendered as feminine as it evolved from the clerical/teaching studio professions pose four problems. First, she does not clarify what she means when she alleges that the female clerical staff “assigned” actors to typecasting categories. The ability and power to assign types suggest a level of responsibility above that of typist. The accounts of studio-level casting that journalists and casting directors have left indicate that male casting directors met with the actors and “typed” them before handing the cards with their notes to their female staff.

Second, Hill assumes that RKO’s production organization represents all the studios’, but other evidence shows that some studios grouped the casting department not with the executive branches, but with the production departments. Paramount’s 1929 production flow chart places casting between music and construction, indicating that even in the classical Hollywood era, casting did not fall easily into the clerical/production divide.\textsuperscript{383}

Third, while most teaching work is gendered – certainly, coaching young actors in deportment, posture, and dancing is perceived as feminized labor and was, indeed, usually taught by women – those who taught acting imparted a skill that takes years of training and practice to perfect. The women who held these positions in the talent department were expert professionals – not easily replaceable devalued labor. Lucille Ryman Carroll, head of MGM’s talent department from 1941-54 and one of the studio era’s few female executives, had studied acting

\textsuperscript{382} See Hill, “Gendering.”
\textsuperscript{383} This chart is reprinted in Howard T. Lewis, \textit{The Motion Picture Industry} (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1933), 31.
at UCLA and the prestigious Pasadena Playhouse; she appeared on Broadway in 1933.\(^{384}\) Burns, also at MGM, had studied with Dame Lilian Baylis at the Old Vic. Paramount’s Phyllis Lougton (1907-1987) had also acted on Broadway, was a well-known dialogue coach, and one of the few female theatre stage managers/directors.\(^{385}\) Sophie Rosenstein (1907-45), the legendary coach at Universal, had an M.A. in theatre and was part of the University of Washington’s drama faculty for a decade.\(^{386}\) Columbia’s drama coach in the 1940s was the well-known actress Josephine Hutchinson, who appeared in, among other projects, several productions of Eva Le Gallienne’s Civic Repertory Theatre, *North by Northwest* (Hitchcock, 1959), *My Son, My Son* (Vidor, 1940), and *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (Stevenson, 1940).\(^{387}\)

Talent department employees (who included men) ran the apprenticeship programs; coached new prospects during their screen tests and for specific film roles; and taught scene study, diction, movement, voice, pantomime, make-up, dancing, riding, fencing, and gymnastics, among other classes. *Photoplay* called these teachers “distinguished members of the dramatic and motion picture professions,” indicating that the rhetoric surrounding training young actors was not always feminized.\(^{388}\) Indeed, *Photoplay* compared the Paramount Pictures school to two

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hyper-masculinized entities: “What West Point or Annapolis does for the patriotic young man this school will do for the ambitious screen aspirant of either sex.” In addition, the studios would never have entrusted their young talent – in whom they poured a great deal of time, effort, and money – to amateurish and unqualified teachers. Burns coached such major stars as Lana Turner, Janet Leigh, Esther Williams, and Debbie Reynolds. She also sent reports on new talent to studio executives; Louis B. Mayer regularly consulted her when determining which actors’ options to extend and which to drop. If, as Hill argues, today’s female casting director evolved, in part, from the female drama coach, she developed from a well-respected, highly skilled decision-maker, not from someone engaged primarily in “women’s work.”

Finally, Hill’s theories for how casting transitioned into a female-dominated profession do not account for the significant number of female casting directors who worked in the New York-based culture industries. Although Hill holds that casting in the late-twentieth century became feminized in the sense that others perceived the profession as one primarily exemplified by feminized labor (secretarial, teaching) and characteristics (nurturing), casting was more feminized in terms of demographics on the east coast, where non-studio theatre, early cinema, and early television employed more women. Consequently, it was the post-World War I industrial shift in production location from the east to the west coast and the subsequent highly specialized classical Hollywood organization of labor that prevented women from working as

389 See “First Real School.”
391 See Davis, Glamour, 82.
392 Ironically, given that Los Angeles is very decentralized with little public transportation, this city contained more women who worked outside the home than New York did during the early years of classical Hollywood. According to historian Hilary A. Hallett, by 1920, women outnumbered men in Los Angeles; in addition, a disproportionate number were single and, therefore, more likely to be employed than their married counterparts. Hallett notes that the movie industry in particular attracted women; many came from other areas of the country specifically to break into films as the profession of actress was one of the few careers open to them. For details, see Hilary A. Hallett, Go West, Young Women! (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 12-13.
casting directors in film, but not in theatre or television. The profession did not change from one that was almost exclusively all-male to one dominated by women, as Hill posits, rather, male and female casting directors coexisted, albeit on opposite coasts and in different culture industries.\footnote{Casting By makes a similar point by noting the number of female casting directors who worked in New York at this time.}

A look at the sheer number of women who worked in casting in New York supports this theory and I offered several examples of those in theatre in the previous chapter. Women in casting succeeded in New York and did not in Hollywood largely because theatre was non-studio based and, thus, was organized according to a more fluid industrial model less dependent on the separation and specialization of labor. Theatre’s lower budgets and smaller staffs, in particular, created looser working conditions and less codified production practices that proved more hospitable to female employees. Divisions of labor were less stringent, stigmatized, and gender specific in theatre than they were in the studio hierarchy, allowing women to gain a broad range of work experience that generated opportunities for promotion. Many of the women listed in chapter two held other positions simultaneously with casting within their respective production offices (recall that Abarbanell also read scripts). The multiple tasks that Rich took on in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s office allowed her to move easily from her low-level clerical position (secretary) into one with decision-making rights (casting director), illustrating how theatre’s organization of labor gave women opportunities they lacked under the mammoth studio system’s more rigid and hierarchical structure.

Early cinematic labor was organized in some ways similar to theatre’s and to analogous effect. Film historian Ally Acker’s brief accounts of women active in the silent era indicate that several were employed in multiple positions later held almost exclusively by men, such as Ida May Park (d. 1954), who wrote and directed, and writer/producer/director Nell Shipman (1892-
Indeed, as scholars who study women’s significant contributions to the early silents point out, women held more powerful positions in this era – including director, screenwriter, and casting director – than they did in classical Hollywood. Challenging what Jennifer M. Bean calls a “teleological model of progress,” women were actually more successful in cinema’s first two decades. Certainly, women were, in part, hired as casting directors for gendered reasons. At that time, casting directors engaged the extras as well as the principals; most people who applied for extra work were female; and some male employers were known to take advantage of female extras. However, several female casting directors who worked for the early movie companies (Columbia, Famous Players-Lasky, Metro, Metropolitan, and RCA Gramercy) were also screenwriters and or studio managers, including Ouida Bergere, Patricia Foulds, Nellie Grant, Lillian Greenberger, June Mathis, Elizabeth North, Nora Reed, and Lillian Valentine.

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This phenomenon was due, in part, to the looser and more informal working conditions that existed in film before the studio system fully developed in the 1920s. Less codified production practices allowed for more fluid divisions of labor less hierarchical and gendered than they would become in later years. Thus, women in the silents worked in all areas of production— including casting—in ways they did not in classical Hollywood.

One classical Hollywood exception was Ruth Burch (1900-2000), casting director for B-list Hal Roach Studios (best known for the Our Gang series and other B-list films). In 1932, Burch began her career as a secretary to an executive at Roach Studios. While typing actors’ contracts, she familiarized herself with industry rules and regulations; in 1941, Roach promoted her to casting director. When he left to serve in World War II, Burch moved to David O. Selznick Studios. After the war, she returned to Roach Studios, renting offices as an independent casting director. In her recollections of her casting career, Burch does not mention encountering any gender discrimination. While she may not have wanted to share these experiences with interviewers, articles about Burch do not depict her in sexist terms; rather, journalists portray her as skilled at her job, mentioning her photographic memory and hard work.399 Although Burch’s success partly illustrates the exception that proves every rule, she also benefitted from working for Roach and Selznick, heads of smaller studios who ran operations less stratified than the

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majors’. This organization likely created less stringent divisions of labor, allowing Burch to move from secretary to casting director in ways she could not at, for example, MGM.

Burch went on to cast such seminal television series as *The Andy Griffith Show* (CBS, 1960-68) and *The Danny Thomas Show* (ABC/CBS, 1953-65), proving (along with Rich and Dougherty) that early television welcomed women more easily than did classical Hollywood. Indeed, women cast many of the first television series, replicating the hiring practices of early silent cinema that engaged women in jobs later reserved for men. This parallel was, again, partly due to early television’s production conditions, which were, in some ways, as unsystematic as those of early film. Dougherty, who started her career in the late 1940s at the advertising agency that produced and cast the *Kraft Television Theater* anthology series (NBC, 1948-58), remembers that:

> No one knew what we were doing. I did what seemed to work for me, which was calling people in and reading them for something, and then whittling it down to a couple of people I thought were right, and then bringing them in to read for the director.\(^{400}\)

Given that the audition process (“calling people in” and “reading them”) had existed for several decades, Dougherty ignores the continuities among theatre, film, and television casting, perhaps over-stating her chaotic working conditions. Nevertheless, early television’s relatively loose production practices allowed women to assume more pivotal production roles. When interviewed about women’s prospects in television in 1948, one female television director credited her success to the diverse skills that early television’s looser and less gendered divisions of labor afforded her: “When I started…in 1941…everybody did everything. Officially a receptionist, I

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made maps for the news telecasts...a bit of acting and some writing on a quiz show.”

Originally employed in a stereotypically low-level feminine job, she progressed to one with greater responsibilities and decision-making capabilities by means of her other work experience and credentials.

Unlike their early film counterparts, however, female casting directors in television did not disappear, even after television’s production practices and organization of labor solidified in later years. They worked throughout the golden age of television and beyond, holding managerial positions from the 1960s on. Ironically, many of these women owed their positions to an older medium: radio. ABC, CBS, and NBC began as New York-based radio stations, and women were employed in casting positions when these networks were primarily known for their radio programming. Marjorie Morrow, for example, started in the casting department of Columbia CBS in 1937; by 1947, she was the company’s casting director. Betty Shay assisted NBC’s Wynn Wright, the production manager, in hearing monologues for those actors and singers interested in breaking into radio. And Julliard-alumnae Eleanor Kilgallen (sister of television-personality Dorothy) began her career as a casting director for CBS radio in the 1940s before turning to television casting in the early 1950s, indicating that there was a convergence—certainly in hiring practices—between the radio and television industries.

Kilgallen and one of her assistants, Monique James (1926-2001), were among the earliest casting directors to form their own independent casting company, Casting Consultants, when they left CBS in 1950. Television producers turned to the partners when they could not cast a

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role using their networks’ in-house casting personnel. The duo worked on, among other series, *Armstrong Circle Theatre* (CBS, 1950-57). Kilgallen later moved to Universal as its east coast talent scout and James became a well-known agent.\(^{404}\)

Other contemporary female television casting personnel included Alixe Gordin, Faye Lee, Rose Tobias Shaw, and Winant, who became CBS’s highest-ranking female executive when the network made her vice-president of talent and casting in 1973. Her credits include *The Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1959-64) and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-77) She also executive produced *Hogan’s Heroes* (CBS, 1965-71) and *The Wild, Wild West* (CBS, 1965-69). In 1999, the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences inducted Winant into its Hall of Fame.\(^{405}\)

Winant left several recollections of her experiences casting early television. Born in California, she moved to Manhattan in 1945 to work with Liebling-Wood, the theatrical literary agency that represented playwright Tennessee Williams. Williams asked her to take notes for him during rehearsals for *A Streetcar Named Desire* (her career followed a similar trajectory to Rich’s and Burch’s, who also began as clerical workers before transitioning to production work). When that job ended, a friend convinced her to try television. After writing to Worthington Miner, producer for the dramatic anthology *Studio One* (CBS, 1948-58), Winant attended a rehearsal of the series:

> It was exciting. There was so much more energy than in the theater. When I went to the studio I was dazzled by the technical stuff. I also liked the fact that everything was done so fast, and when it was over you just went on to the next


show without looking back. I was dying to work on it.\textsuperscript{406} Miner offered her a job as a casting assistant.\textsuperscript{407} She went on to cast another anthology series, \textit{Playhouse 90} (CBS, 1956-61). Winant found the television casting process exhilarating, meeting many talented newcomers. Because television in the early years did not pay well, established actors refused to do it unless they headlined their own series. Their reluctance gave talented young theatre actors the opportunity to gain some national exposure on television. Winant and her anthology series thus helped launch the careers of such future stars as Newman, Joanne Woodward, and Jason Robards.\textsuperscript{408}

While the looser production conditions and more permeable divisions of labor present in early television, early cinema, and theatre gave women more opportunities in casting, this theory does not entirely explain either why women made inroads in some areas of production at the studios (the talent departments, editing) and not in others (such as casting), or why women dominate casting today. Whatever the reason(s) for this trajectory, however, casting is now viewed as a feminized profession. Therefore, as Banks notes in her study on costume designers (also predominantly female), analyses of how gender operates in the culture industries must include not only attention to demographics, but also “examine the gendering of individual professions within the industry.”\textsuperscript{409} Indeed, culture critics, entertainment journalists, industry professionals, and casting directors themselves often characterize casting as feminized not only in terms of the sheer number of women employed, but also in the way the profession is

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\textsuperscript{406} Kisseloff, \textit{The Box}, 233.
\textsuperscript{407} See Lavietes, “Ethel Winant.”
\textsuperscript{408} See Kisseloff, \textit{The Box}, 233. Film stars also feared over-exposure; but, by the mid-to-late 1950s, more film stars agreed to do television; see Christine Becker, “Televising Film Stardom in the 1950s,” \textit{Framework} 46, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 5-21, \textit{Art Full Text} (H.W. Wilson), \textit{EBSCOhost} (accessed March 12, 2014).
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perceived. For example, Rosemarie Tichler, the casting director at Joseph Papp’s New York Shakespeare Festival for over twenty-five years, notes that casting involves a certain amount of emotional labor, “it’s a service job. You make sure the director and the playwright are happy [and] you treat [the actors] with great care and love because you want them to do their best work.” And most of the skills that Hill enumerates as necessary for the profession are associated with femininity, including casting directors’ ability to “keep the atmosphere positive.”

Analyses of gendered attitudes towards culture labor are important because female media workers are paid less than men (as they are in most other professions) and often hit a “glass ceiling” in their efforts to advance. Indeed, in recalling their experiences as independent casting directors in the 1960s, many women commented on how gender affected their promotion opportunities. Certainly, the profession’s openness to women provided more women with employment in what is still a male-dominated industry. Gendered barriers to entry collapsed in the post-studio era as the earliest female independent casting directors (Rich and Dougherty) hired and promoted other women, giving them the mentoring heretofore available only to men. Indeed, contemporary articles on female television casting directors rarely commented on their gender. While one journalist referred to June Neff, who cast Martha Raye as Baby Snooks in NBC’s pilot of the same name in 1957, as “pretty,” most characterized female casting

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410 For representative examples, see Hill, “Gendering;” Hurtes, Backstage Guide, 2nd ed.; and Mayer, Below the Line, 100.
412 See Hill, “Gendering.”
directors as professionals skilled at their jobs: in fact, when looking for a piece on casting
directors, the New York Times published an article written by Morrow.⁴¹⁴

Many women, however, viewed their success with ambivalence. Those who entered the
managerial class, for example, once the purview of men, often found their status within the
company affected by their gender. Winant, CBS’s first female network executive, was especially
negative about the challenges she faced. Although women were promoted to executive casting
positions at the networks and studios earlier and more often than women who worked in other
areas of production, Winant recalled how difficult it was for women to advance in an industry
that still operated along traditionally gendered hierarchies.⁴¹⁵ As she recalled, even the social
divisions between men and women affected the material conditions of her professional life:

A lot of the networking has to do with the wives…The town is built around the
dinner party…[the wives] are smart, highly motivated and have a view of the
business…They can see who needs to be courted, who should sit next to who. I
think ‘the club’ is of husbands and wives. It’s harder for a woman working in the
industry because her husband is usually in another club if he’s successful…A
woman doesn’t have somebody carefully working to make sure she is moving as
cleverly as she could.⁴¹⁶

Winant, a divorced mother of three, sarcastically told one reporter that she, too, wished she had
had a “wife” to take care of some of the more mundane, but necessary, aspects of her job:

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⁴¹⁴ See Morrow, “Precarious.”
⁴¹⁵ Although many of the network executive positions that women held were in areas of programming that catered to
female audiences, such as daytime (soap operas and talk shows) and “Movies of the Week” (usually melodramas
aimed at women).
⁴¹⁶ Mollie Gregory, Women Who Run the Show: How a Brilliant and Creative New Generation of Women Stormed
Hollywood (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 64.
When the phone rang and I was told we all had to be in New York tomorrow morning and needed to be at the airport at six P.M., the guy down the hall would pick up the phone…and tell [his wife] to pack the blue suit. I had to be out of [the office] because I had to lay out my own blue suit, put the dog in the kennel, make arrangements [for the children].

Throughout her career, Winant remained unimpressed by her executive rank: she felt it did nothing to improve her standing within the network. As her recollections of the way that CBS announced her promotion indicate, her new title came with little agency:

CBS never asked me if I wanted to be a vice president…They surprised me by announcing my new title, an incredible honor, at the affiliates meeting. The affiliates liked me. I worked well with them, and in those days the network courted affiliates…Afterwards, I said to them, ‘What if I’d said no?’ That had not occurred to them. ‘It’s really nice…but you wouldn’t have treated a man like that. You’d have negotiated a new salary, you’d have made a deal.’ … I could have gone out and said it was all a fraud…that I’m not really a vice president, nobody’s paying me, but that wouldn’t have looked very good.

Only later, Winant continued, did the network agree to pay her “a little more money,” but the salary was neither commensurate with her new title and position nor equal to what male vice-presidents made at the network. She also felt that titular positions such as vice-president became devalued when women were appointed to them, noting that her new position did not provide similar opportunities for other women. Structurally, she claimed, gendered hiring practices did not change:

417 Gregory, Women Who Run, 64.
418 Gregory, Women Who Run, 11-12.
I don’t think [CBS] paid much attention to women before or after I was a vice president…at the top levels of the network, the corporate people probably said, ‘What are we doing with women?’…When they looked around…they had to say, ‘Not much.’”

Yet, the female casting directors who considered themselves underpaid and undervalued because of their gender often did themselves a disservice by using rhetoric that feminized their profession, even as they pointed out the occupation’s strengths. Taylor, for example, ascribed certain traits of the profession specifically to women:

I think that some of the personality ingredients that are needed by casting directors tend to be associated with feminine qualities. To enjoy casting and to be good at it, you have to be interested in people. You spend an awful lot of time getting to know other people…It involves a lot of curiosity and patience. I think women tend to have more of these qualities than men.

For Taylor, this nurturing extended to her office environment, a tactic she learned from her years with Dougherty:

Marion taught me that you can create an environment that makes everyone comfortable. Her office was in a cozy brownstone. It wasn’t at all officey. This would make the director feel relaxed. Most important was what went on in the reception area. I think that everyone who is a casting director has usually started out as a secretary. It’s the way you learn to be kind and friendly to the actors who are usually very nervous.

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Huffman agreed that an important aspect of the casting director’s job was to make everyone feel comfortable, but she noted, this was often a strategy designed to elicit the best audition from an actor so that the director and producer “can see whatever…they have to see:”

When someone comes into the inner office to meet the director and producer, it’s my job to make it as nonthreatening as possible so they can see whatever it is that they have to see in a very short amount of time…I think that the people [other casting directors] who don’t really give a lot of thought or understanding to the idea that it’s really about producers and directors get sort of carried away with this power.422

While Huffman acknowledges the tactics involved, the kind of language she, Taylor, and countless other casting directors used (and still use) to describe their jobs emphasizes what are perceived as the feminized aspects of casting: the abilities to “make everyone comfortable” and to appear “nonthreatening.” Jennifer Euston, who casts Orange is the New Black (Netflix, 2013), diminishes casting’s claims to professionalism when she compared it to “hosting” (both casting directors and hostesses make introductions and put people at ease); Dougherty, reportedly tough and pragmatic, referred to herself in interviews as “a Pollyanna.”423

Although examinations of this language are complicated by the fact that the speakers are talking on the record, analyses of “production talk” are, as Caldwell points out, still a useful tool for “cultural sense-making and self-ethnography.” As he argues, how the workforce self-represents often shapes others’ responses to the profession.424 While many female casting

directors resented being treated differently from men, they also repeatedly characterized their work as one that was best done by women because of their essentialist feminine qualities as Vickie Thomas (*Django Unchained*, 2012) does when she refers to her “women’s intuition.”

As Mayer states, women in feminized media occupations, such as casting, often put themselves in a “double bind” with this kind of rhetoric:

[W]omen…may see themselves as uniquely qualified for their role by virtue of their gender [but] may have difficulty…negotiating from a position of their natural qualifications. After all, it is very difficult to demand payment for something that comes naturally.

Thus, women’s self-reflexive talk contributes to perceptions that casting directors’ strengths are inborn (“natural”) and not the results of learned and hard-earned skills and abilities.

Indeed, the casting profession has evolved into an occupation so feminized that even today’s male casting directors echo this “nurturing” rhetoric. Listing a casting director’s most important skills, independent film casting director Craig Campobasso notes that casting is:

like being a psychologist; we must know everything about human behavior to direct the actors in a short time to get them where we need them to be before presenting them to the…director…Casting directors are like surrogate parents to actors. We calm them down when they are nervous; nurture them and their talent; and direct them to attain the goal at hand – getting the part. All casting directors must be compassionate and passionate about the actors we choose to bring in.

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427 D’Aries and Hirsch, “Art of Casting.”
Rick Pagano, of 24 fame (Fox, 2001-14), describes his professional partnership with Sharon Bialy in equally stereotypical gendered ways, admitting that he’s known as the “bad guy” who will “rail” at agents if necessary while she will “stifle her anger.” And Joseph Middleton (Donnie Darko, 2001) believes that casting directors are “hand-holding the director…We are taking care of the studio, the studio’s vision, the studio’s money and the producers, who are a big entity.” He does, however, phrase “hand-holding” more actively, as “pushing [the director] toward our vision and, ultimately, his vision.”

The insistence that successfully fulfilling casting duties requires emotional labor (“kind and friendly,” “great care and love”) is, along with the disproportionate number of female casting directors employed and a corresponding de-emphasis on the more stereotypically “masculine” elements of the job, one of the three main reasons that the profession is deemed feminine today. “Emotional labor” was coined by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild to describe paid work that “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others [often] the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place.” Jobs that call for this kind of service often fall to women (Hochschild concentrates on flight attendants). Whether the feelings induced are genuine is a question she does not answer. The issue is not whether those in feminized professions experience authentic emotions; rather, they “willfully [manage] emotion when the occasion calls for it.” Certainly, elements of casting involve the kind of emotional labor Hochschild evokes: the casting directors quoted

431 Ironically, in the last few years, as the economy has produced more service-related jobs dependent on emotional labor, such as health care, women have experienced employment opportunities that rival men’s. Men, who gravitate in greater numbers towards physical labor, lost many jobs (manufacturing, construction) during the last recession; see Paul Davidson, “Women Gain Ground in Jobs Race,” USA Today, June 9, 2013, http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2013/06/09/women-gain-jobs/2402495/ (accessed June 19, 2013).
432 Hochschild, Managed, 164-65.
above claim they must “produce the proper state of mind in others,” either to calm a nervous actor or to serve the director’s vision, for example.

The belief that casting entails emotional labor and is, therefore, gendered as feminine, was not held by the studio system’s mostly male casting directors. Indeed, their recollections (quoted in “The Company Casting Director”) include none of the emotional language or expressive discourse voiced by the casting directors quoted above. Neither Grady nor Friedman, the highest-profile studio casting directors of their day, mentions placating a director or holding an actor’s hand. Rather, their memoirs contain straight-forward, almost textbook-like accounts of the casting and talent scouting processes. This shift in perceptions supports Banks’s similar conclusions regarding costume designers: that the gendering of certain professions is socially constructed. Casting is not, as the above comments indicate, an innately “feminine” profession more congenial to women and their supposed strengths (such as taking care of others); rather, the feminized rhetoric surrounding the casting director corresponds with the increase in the number of women entering the profession.

The last reason that casting is deemed feminized also exemplifies “production” talk: by stressing emotional labor, the language surrounding the profession downplays the more traditionally “masculine” skills that casting involves. Few casting directors, for instance, discuss preparing budgets (television casting directors estimate each week’s casting budget) and negotiating actors’ deals. Marcia Ross, former Vice President of Casting for Disney, is an exception, noting the importance of the latter ability: “[i]f you can’t make a deal for an actor,

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433 See Banks, “Gender Below-the-Line,” 87-98.
434 As linguistics scholars Janet Holmes and Maria Stubbe argue, perceptions of feminine work often depend on “the gendered composition of the workforce.” See “‘Feminine’ Workplaces: Stereotype and Reality,” in The Handbook of Language and Gender, ed. Janet Holmes and Miriam Meyerhoff (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 581.
then you don’t have that actor.”

Although casting directors rarely hire stars, they typically negotiate all other actors’ salaries, credit placement, travel arrangements, and dressing room situations; at any point in the process, a casting director might lose a performer over one of these issues. Bargaining with agents is a talent usually associated with producers (more likely to be male), but casting directors prove equally adept as they negotiate the challenge of hiring the actor the director wants while staying within the budget the producer sets.

In fact, casting directors now often take on more of the duties of a typically masculine profession: the producer. At least since the 1990s, independent films with insufficient funding have hired casting directors who, with their agent contacts, are in a position to attach a name to a film in order to raise money. The most high-profile example of this method of financing is the Oscar-winning Crash (Haggis, 2004). Early in pre-production, that movie’s casting directors, Sarah Halley Finn and Randi Hiller, interested Don Cheadle, a well-respected film and television actor, and Golden Globe winner for HBO’s The Rat Pack (Cohen, 1998). Cheadle’s presence encouraged actors of similar stature (Sandra Bullock, Matt Dillon, Terrence Howard, Thandie Newton, and Ryan Philippe) to sign on to the film; their presence raised the rest of the financing. Finn and Hiller ultimately earned co-producer credits.

When recounting their efforts to attach talent to cast-contingent projects, some casting directors resist narratives of nurturing and, instead, invoke traditionally masculine rhetoric. One casting director, a two-time Artios winner and former casting executive, describes her quest to find a name actress for a low-budget feature film in very active, assertive terms (two “masculine”

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traits). She recalls that respect for her reputation encouraged agents to return her phone calls, but “I had to hound them [and] stay on everybody.” She quickly discovered that “I had to be the producer,” a position she grew to like and “felt I had the skills to do.” When she later returned to an executive position, she found herself enjoying “the deal-making and the legal process.” This particular casting director prefers to compare her professional skills to those of a “diplomat” rather than invoke either “hostess” or other occupations traditionally associated with femininity. Diplomats, working in a male-dominated field, must, as she notes, “know how to play people.” “Playing people” involves a level of agency and action absent from the “nurturing” rhetoric cited above.438

Casting directors must be equally forceful in theatre, where it is difficult to attach high-profile actors who can raise money and attract audiences as theatre pays considerably less than film and television, and demands a longer time commitment. As Pat McCorkle, longtime casting director for New York’s Roundabout Theater, explains:

An actor has to want to do theater very badly because it isn’t economically viable…They have to balance their theater work with a commercial career…so the theater now competes directly with movies and television for the same actors.439

Many theatre casting directors note that their access to stars is increasingly important in an economic climate that charges audience members upwards of a hundred dollars to see a Broadway show.440 Thus, casting directors who work primarily in theatre often find themselves

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438 All quotes are taken from my phone call with an anonymous studio casting director, November 4, 2013.
439 Bloom, “Theatrical Casting.”
440 While theatre is often a “hard sell” — particularly to agents looking for more lucrative employment for their clients — recent events have made attracting money-making talent to plays easier. Within the last decade, several high-profile movie stars with no previous theatre experience (Julia Roberts, Jessica Lange, and Sean Combs, among others) have taken leads in Broadway or off-Broadway plays largely because of theatre’s cachet as serious art. One problem, however, is that many of these actors were first-time theatre performers, which showed in their
resorting to what Donna Isaacson, then casting director for Manhattan Theater Club and currently Executive Vice-President of Casting at 20th Century Fox, calls the “noodge” factor— that is, rather than take “no” for an answer, they must forcefully pursue actors they are interested in until all possibilities are exhausted. The ability to “noodge,” which admittedly downplays the more aggressive tactics used to attach an actor, nevertheless works against perceptions of casting as a profession that demands primarily “soft” or stereotypical feminine skills.

Ultimately, as one journalist notes, “Successful casting directors need a writer-producer’s feel for a show’s style, a director’s eye for talent, a business affairs exec’s grasp of contracts, an agent’s negotiating skills and a line producer’s flair for scheduling along with a talent for thinking ‘outside the box.’”

Ironically, given most casting directors’ language, the positions to which this writer refers (director, producer, executive, agent) are associated with typically masculine skills, such as business acumen.

III. The Creative Casting Director

Comparable to the feminized rhetoric surrounding casting is reflexive language that describes it in mystical terms. This discourse depicts casting ambivalently. On one hand, it portrays casting as instinctual, defining the casting director’s professional identity as creative rather than clerical, a hierarchical mark of distinction in the culture industries. On the other, by minimizing, even obfuscating, casting as a skill that can be learned and perfected, mystical language contributes to perceptions of casting as feminized and devalues the profession’s performances. Reviewer Ben Brantley, for example, described Roberts as “stiff with self-consciousness” in her debut in Richard Greenberg’s Three Days of Rain. See Ben Brantley, “It’s Her! It’s Her! And, Oh Yeah, There’s a Play,” New York Times, April 20, 2006, http://search.proquest.com/docview/93142511?accountid=14553 (accessed August 13, 2013).

legitimacy. Few who invoke this rhetoric (scholars, journalists, and casting directors themselves) note that casting directors base their fabled intuition on their expertise and experience.

In referencing their mystical ability to recognize talent, casting directors draw on rhetoric commonly associated with artists. As Beck observes, society often views cultural work as “special and mysterious and [which] can only be undertaken by special and mysterious people…” In their analysis of the concept of creativity, however, culture critics Keith Negus and Michael Pickering take issue with emphases on the mysterious. Seeking to demystify the term, they note that the idea of creativity as inspired mitigates the craft aspects of art. Although this binary has existed since the Romantic era (which stressed the transcendent aspects of creation), those engaged in creative work, they argue, expend time and effort on learning and sharpening their particular skill (acting, writing, painting).

Definitions of creativity – what it is and who engages in it – have important implications for culture-industry labor. Those deemed artistic are privileged and rewarded (increased remuneration, greater prestige, more decision-making rights, awards eligibility) in ways that those judged as clerical are not (recall Dixon’s comments on casting’s perceived “occupational” tools of trade). As Negrus and Pickering point out, these evaluations are often subjective and establish a “cultural hierarchy” by labeling some workers as more deserving than others. Thus, we must examine not only the labor adjudged creative, but also the criteria (and those who set the criteria) used to arrive at said judgment. What determines whether or not casting is creative, and who defines those determinants?

444 See Negus and Pickering, Creativity, 48. Regev uses the apt term “creative class” to describe the culture industries’ status-based organization; see Regev, “It’s a Creative Business.”
As I indicated earlier, theatre, film, and television workers are classified as either creative or clerical by the terms “above-the-line” or “below-the-line” (that is, their position on the production budget sheet and in the credits). Casting directors, however, illustrate how unstable and arbitrary these categories are. For example, as noted previously, they are eligible for Emmys, but not Oscars or Tonys, the three most prestigious awards in the culture industries. Hence, the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences grants casting directors creative status and recognition while AMPAS and the American Theatre Wing do not.

Partly because they object to their liminal status within the industry as creative personnel, casting directors often depict their ability to appraise talent as unexplainable and, therefore, synonymous with creativity. As Avy Kaufman (Lincoln, 2012) told one reporter:

I don’t think casting is anything that can be taught. It’s intuition, part of who you are. People ask me, how do you know you’ve chosen the right actor? I really rely on my intuition. It’s almost as simple as whether you believe the actor when he or she reads the part.445

Debra Zane (American Beauty, 1999) agreed that evaluating acting skills is difficult to quantify:

I can’t explain...how people who work in casting know [which actor will get the part], because there are so many elements involved...It’s almost like a chemical reaction where, maybe when you’ve been doing it long enough, you can watch an audition and you can say to yourself, ‘The director is going to love this person.’446

Ironically, given all her years of professional experience, Dougherty pushed the “unknowable” discourse the furthest:

445 Helena Lumme, Great Women of Film (New York: Billboard Books, 2002), 44.
People ask how I cast and I say I don’t know…There’s a lady named Sylvia Browne who is quite a well-known psychic. I’ve met her a couple of times and have said, ‘I wish I were psychic.’ She said, ‘Well, how do you cast?’ When I said I just got hunches, she insisted I must be psychic.  

This kind of mystique rhetoric is not unique to contemporary casting directors. Casting personnel in earlier eras also evoked magical language to describe what they did. I have already given the example of Helburn; Cheryl Crawford, recalling her days as casting director for the Theatre Guild, noted:

As a professional tea-taster does not find it easy to explain why one tea tastes better to him than another, so a casting director has difficulty explaining how he knows just the right actors to select for certain parts. Some casting directors say they do it by ‘intuition’; one of the best of them claims that she knows by a peculiar sensation she gets ‘right in the middle’ (presumably in the middle of her stomach), but even she cannot describe exactly what the sensation is. A great deal of the process of casting a play stems from the subconscious.

Even directors subscribe to this “magical” language. Praising Middleton, with whom he frequently collaborates, director Doug Liman (The Bourne Identity, 2002) echoed Dougherty by recalling the “weird psychic sense that Joseph has to look into the future and say, ‘Yes, this person hasn’t done this role before, and they’re ready to do it right now.’”

This language extolling casting directors’ mystical abilities associates them with other creative personnel and legitimates their claims to artistry. Indeed, for many casting directors, their extravagant rhetoric may serve as a deliberate strategy designed to resist perceptions of

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447 Georgakas and Rabalais, “Fifty Years of Casting.”
448 Crawford, One Naked, 41.
them as clerical. However, it also weakens casting’s aspirations to professionalism by undermining their claims to knowledge and proficiency. If, as Valerie McCaffrey (*American History X*, 1998) bemoans, “‘People just don’t know what we do. Some producers don’t even know what we have to go through to find an actor for a role…There should be more recognition of ‘the difficulty of putting all the pieces together,’” then words such as “intuition” and “hunches” do not do justice to this “difficulty.”

As Mayer, in her piece on reality casting directors, notes “By asserting that the caster’s skills were organic or intuitive, they [the casting directors] perpetuated the unprofessional stigma surrounding the labor, as well as undermining its skill set…”

Given that casting is one of the few creative industry jobs that requires no credentials, degrees, and, until recently, union qualifications, this rhetoric undercuts a profession dependent upon expertise and experience for its reputation. In reality, casting directors incorporate several measurable skills into their evaluations of talent. Because they must look through hundreds of headshots and resumes for each project in a finite length of time and narrow down the submissions to a manageable number to pre-read (audition, by themselves, those actors they do not know), read (audition, with the director, those performers with whom they are familiar), or make an offer, they must possess prodigious knowledge. Casting directors familiarize themselves with well-known acting coaches, schools, and programs to assess actors’ training; watch a wide variety of plays, movies, and television series to acquaint themselves with specific talent pools and performance styles, and to assess actors’ credits; and learn the diverse tastes and negotiation styles of the agents and managers on whose recommendations they sometimes depend and with whom they make deals. In addition, casting personnel know enough about acting and acting

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technique to coach an actor through an audition, ascertain whether or not that actor is someone to whom the director will respond, and, hopefully, elicit the performance that will allow the actor to “book” the role.

The casting directors who offer a more concrete assessment of their skills acknowledge this need for professionalism. Answering an interviewer’s question regarding intuition, Campobasso responded differently from those casting personnel quoted above by emphasizing his experience, “Directing actors for over twenty-two years, I know who can pull off a lead and who can’t by the way the actor takes my direction, no matter how difficult the role.” He then enumerated the many abilities casting demands. While some (“an eye for…talent”) evoke the mystical, most demonstrate proficiency and quantifiable skills (negotiating, multitasking, managing personalities):

You must have an eye for actors and their talent, develop a relationship with all agencies representing them, be a people person who can handle many personalities on each production, be a good negotiator and assemble a winning cast that will satisfy distributors. Casting directors are multitaskers that can bring the world of make-believe to life.

Some casting directors, evoking the knowledge-based aspects of their jobs, mention their prodigious memories – Tichler told one interviewer that she could remember the performances of any actor she had ever seen (“I’d unspool the reel”) – or investigative skills. Mentioning the latter, Finn stresses the intellectual aspects of her profession, comparing casting to elements of academia:

The philosophy of researching, like when I’m casting a film, is almost like a

\[452\] D’Aries and Hirsch, “Art of Casting.”
\[453\] D’Aries and Hirsch, “Art of Casting.
\[454\] See Tichler, Women in Theatre.
research project. I see as many actors as I can, and learn as much about the director, the time period, and the vision for the film as possible. I get as much of a grasp for all these elements that I can, and then come up with the best suggestions.  

By stressing her ability to research, uncover, and learn, Finn evinces a more rational approach to casting – one based not on her “gut,” but skill and logic.

Ultimately, the mystical language casting directors often use to explain what they do and how they do it frequently obscures their professional identity as decision makers. Discourses of creativity are important, but casting personnel need, as Naremore asserts, “to think systematically about the art of casting and [not be] vague about the reasoning and process involved” if they are to win the respect many feel they lack. In order to gain Oscar-recognition, for example, which casting directors view as the ultimate signifier of professional and creative worth, they must prove to AMPAS that their artistry can be judged by methods more quantifiable than “the gut.”  

Perceptions of how much input casting directors have in the production process vary widely and imprecise rendering of the skills the job demands does little to dispel the notion that casting directors either have no control over hiring practices or that their

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456 Naremore, “Casting By.”

input is indefinable (“who knows where a casting director’s job ends and the director’s begins” is a common complaint). In fact, as the final section argues, the casting director is a powerful – and decisive – member of the production team.

IV. Conclusion: The Casting Director as Decision-Maker

Analyses of decision-makers are complicated by the fact that theatre and film often subscribe to the auteur theory: one person, usually the director, makes all the creative choices for a particular project. Decision-making rights are more diffuse in television, which relies on a stable of writers and directors; however, the show-runner (usually a writer-producer or the creator) often fulfills this function. This emphasis on individual creativity – the cultural mystique of the lone genius (another legacy of the Romantic era) – helps explain why most scholars analyze texts as the realization of a single creative vision, even though theatre, film, and television are products of collective labor in ways that painting, for example, is usually not.459

Theatre, cinema, and television’s investment in the lone genius creates what Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell call “an organizational hierarchy of media labor” that elevates one creative member of the production team and marginalizes others.460 While I do not argue that others do – or should – have more decision-making rights than the director or show-runner, the concept of authorship in media production is complicated. While all casting directors agree that their main function is to serve the director by bringing him or her choices for each role, they disagree on their level of influence and power. Certainly, a casting director’s input depends on his or her years of experience and rapport with the director (long-time collaborators join forces more easily than those working together for the first time). As Scorsese, who calls Lewis “his main

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458 See Wilson, “Why Do Women.”
459 See Negus and Pickering, Creativity, 56.
collaborator,” says, “an honesty and a trust” naturally exists between long-term colleagues. ⁴⁶¹ Similarly, Allen shows Taylor, with whom he has worked since 1975’s Love and Death, his scripts at very early stages to get her ideas for each role. ⁴⁶²

Yet, some casting directors approach relationships with the director (or show-runner) in ways best articulated by Risa Bramon, who works with Oliver Stone. She makes an interesting distinction between “influence” and “power,” believing that casting directors contribute to the final casting decisions, but have few decision-making rights. Within the structure of the industry and the way that the production power hierarchy is organized, casting directors, she feels, lack that autonomy. ⁴⁶³

Other casting directors who believe, like Bramon, that their job is to influence rather than lead include Lynn Kressel, the casting director of Law and Order (1990-2010, NBC) and the first to win an Emmy for casting. As she explains, “It’s clearly the director’s vision. Ideally, there’s a good relationship and process that happens between a casting director and a director, and what a casting director does is try to make the director aware of the possibilities.” ⁴⁶⁴ Theatrical casting partners Julie Hughes and Barry Moss concur, “We must respond to the director. His life is on the line to some degree when he’s doing a show, and he has the final say in all casting decisions.” ⁴⁶⁵

Other casting directors, however, such as McCaffrey, point out that giving the director “final say” may not always serve his or her vision:

If I don’t think a certain actor would be right for a part, I’ll try to convince the

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⁴⁶¹ Casting By.
⁴⁶⁴ Hurtes, Backstage Guide. 1st ed., 89.
producers or director...It’s almost like you’re building a case. You need to prove not that they’re wrong, but that their choice may not be the best. We’re supposed to be experts, and it wouldn’t do a production any good if we went ahead and agreed with everything someone said when we knew one actor couldn’t hold a candle to another.\footnote{466}

Louis DiGiamaio (\textit{Hannibal}, 2001) agrees with this more active approach: “a casting director should have strong opinions and fight for actors they feel are right for particular roles.”\footnote{467} Rich was even blunter about her involvement in the projects she cast. Unlike many of her colleagues, she demanded credit for her films – at times, even gainsaying the director’s role in the casting process:

> When I did \textit{Serpico}... The only person I didn’t cast was Al Pacino. But I did cast a hundred people. I take credit. I don’t care what Sidney Lumet or anybody else in the world wants to say. I found them, I brought them to him, and there were one hundred.\footnote{468}

Emulating Rich, some casting directors resist perceptions of a sole creative authority and, in the last two decades, have taken public credit for their casting ideas. Dougherty, for example, convinced John Schlesinger to use Jon Voight for \textit{Midnight Cowboy}; the director had wanted Michael Sarrazin, who she felt was too “pretty” for the role.\footnote{469} Director Richard Donner credited her with suggesting Danny Glover for Mel Gibson’s partner in \textit{Lethal Weapon} (1987), a role originally written for a white actor.\footnote{470} And Judith Weiner persuaded writer-producer Gary David

\begin{footnotes}
\item[466] Hurtes, \textit{Backstage Guide}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., 119.
\item[467] Kondazian, \textit{Actor’s Encyclopedia}, 101.
\item[469] Horton, “My Casting Couch,” 44.
\end{footnotes}
Goldberg to cast Michael J. Fox in *Family Ties* (NBC, 1982-89) over Goldberg’s initial objections. More recently, Francine Maisler found 2014 Best Supporting Oscar nominee and Bafta (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) winner Barkard Abdi (*Greengrass, Captain Phillips*) through an open call she held in a Minneapolis Somali-American community. These four hiring decisions – each essential to their particular projects – illustrate the level of power a casting director can exercise over the production process.

Most casting personnel take a more middle-of-the-road approach than did Rich, aiming for a relationship with a director who will collaborate on hiring decisions by respecting the casting director’s opinion as an informed professional. As Tichler points out, she is “the expert, who knows the actor’s work,” and it is her job to make directors, often unfamiliar with many actors, aware of what that actor can do. At first reluctant to work with Papp – she had heard he was “a bit of a bossy guy” – she was relieved when, during her interview for the casting position, he assured her that he viewed the casting process collaboratively.

Others remark that while they may not make the final hiring decisions, they have a great deal of control over the audition process (I address this in the next chapter). As Florida-based casting director Lori Wyman explains:

After reading with actors for 30 years, I feel like I have plenty of acting experience…There is a certain way that actors need to be spoken to. I often sit in a casting session and the director goes on and on about what he wants, and I know by the look on the actors’ faces that they don’t have a clue what the director is

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asking for. Sometimes I know if I just interject a sentence or two, I can clear up
the whole thing, and I will risk it so the actor can get some clarity.\footnote{Daniel Lehman, “Why are You a Casting Director?” Back Stage - National Edition 51, no. 45 (November 2010): 12, \url{http://search.proquest.com/docview/821048171?accountid=14553} (accessed December 21, 2010).}

With her clarifications, Wyman often shapes the auditions in ways that affect the final outcome.

Ultimately, however, regardless of how integral individual casting directors are to the
production process, as casting director John Papsidera (The Dark Knight Rises, 2012) notes,
directors never make hiring decisions in a vacuum:

A director and producer want to own it. Ultimately it is their decision in collaboration
with everybody else, but by-and-large that director and producer would never know
the talent unless a casting director brought them in the room…\footnote{Sharon Waxman, “Casting Directors: When Will Oscars Recognize the Impact We Have on Films?” \url{http://www.thewrap.com/movies/print/70411} (accessed January 16, 2013). Caves makes a similar argument, noting that every member of the production team “brings different creative skills to the work;” see Caves, Creative Industries, 87.}

Allen concurs. Recently, in a rare open letter to the Hollywood Reporter, the notoriously
reclusive director pleaded for Oscar recognition on behalf of Taylor by detailing her crucial
contributions to his films:

…the casting director plays a vital part in the making of the movie…my films are
full of wonderful performances by actors…I had never heard of and were not only
introduced to me by my casting director…but…pushed on me against my own
resistance. People like Jeff Daniels, Mary Beth Hurt, Patricia Clarkson…Meryl
Streep…and Dianne Wiest, a stage actress completely unknown to me but known
by Juliet Taylor…If it were up to me we would use the same half dozen people in
all my pictures, whether they fit or not. Despite my recalcitrance, Juliet has forced
me to meet…and to hire people on nothing more than her strong recommendation.
Because my films are…about human beings, proper casting is absolutely essential. I owe a big part of the success of my films to this scrupulous casting process which…left to my own devices would never have happened.476

The production process, even one organized around a central authority, or auteur, is always collaborative, interactive, and negotiated. Even if, as many argue, the director makes the final hiring decisions, he or she does so based on the limited options the casting personnel provide. Thus, casting directors indelibly shape the projects they work on by providing the director with a finite set of choices, winnowing the volume of actors submitted down to a select number of performers who bring out either diverse or unexpected aspects of said role. As sociologist Howard S. Becker notes, the creation of any art work involves a series of choices (what fabric to use, where to place the camera, which instrument to play).477 While the auteur often receives sole credit for these choices (which are, theoretically, nearly infinite), in fact, he or she makes decisions heavily circumscribed by options other members of the creative team offer. By providing – and limiting – the alternatives available for each role, casting directors exercise more control over the decision-making process than most media scholars and media makers allow. Equally importantly, as my title, “Painting with Faces,” suggests, because the actors eligible for each role are as numerous as the colors on a palette, then the person who helps choose which “color to paint with” – the casting director – is an artist who deserves recognition.

Casting director’s decision-making powers, however, are now challenged by another shift in production conditions (though not in the organization of labor): the addition of digital media to the pre-production process. Actors’ self-recorded auditions and websites devoted to new talent appear to impinge on the casting director’s control over the audition process in particular. I

critique this next – and, currently, last – stage in the casting profession’s development in the next chapter, “The Digital Age Casting Director.”
Chapter IV: The Digital Age Casting Director, 1985-Present

“One of my policies is to leave no stone unturned. And I expect there are a lot more stones out there than I ever imagined now that there is access like this on the Internet.”
Lisa Beach, casting director

“[Digital media]’s all but eliminated the personal contact we used to have.”
Sheila Manning, casting director

Casting personnel continue to operate as free-lance labor, but, over the last decade, new technologies have shaped current casting practices by increasing the use of digital equipment in casting offices and intensifying digital media’s impact on audition procedures. In tracing the history of casting’s digital turn, I make two claims that extend my project’s on-going themes: changing production practices’ effects on casting’s working conditions and the casting director’s status as decision-maker. Thus, section one maintains that while digital devices make the casting director’s job more efficient by streamlining the audition process, they have not decreased workloads; in fact, by raising expectations for casting personnel’s familiarity with an ever-expanding pool of talent, the opposite is true. And section two argues that casting directors’ ability to record, edit, and disseminate hitherto live auditions gives them greater control over the audition process, enhancing their decision-making status within the creative production team.

I. The Wired Casting Director

Casting personnel began using new media in the 1980s, when the first computerized actor databases appeared; today they often turn to social media to find new talent. Over the years, casting technology has evolved as earlier electronic tools such as the Interactive Casting

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Directory (founded in 1994) gave way to more popular and longer-lasting online resources, including Breakdown Express, one of the profession’s most accessed sites. In some ways, the history of computerized casting lends itself to theories of teleological progress: while contemporary digital devices are not perfect, they are faster, possess higher quality graphics and resolution, and hold more information than those of the past.

Today’s casting offices use primarily three forms of digital technology. The first provides casting directors with greater access to information by contributing to what Jean Burgess and Joshua Green call the “growth of knowledge:” searchable databases that permit casting personnel to locate a comprehensive and wide-ranging pool of talent.481 The final two, video-sharing websites and digital cameras, enable casting directors to circulate information quickly and efficiently over an easily-accessible network as they record, upload, and share auditions almost instantaneously with other production team members.

Members of a knowledge-based profession, casting directors are hired for their familiarity with actors, who constitute the object of their knowledge.482 They must generate ideas and produce suitable candidates for roles, engaging in what journalist Michael Cieply calls “list building.”483 For nearly a century, casting personnel discovered actors through print materials (newspapers and fan magazines) and mass entertainment (off-Broadway plays, radio appearance, television episodes). They then located these performers to audition in several ways. They called the major actors’ unions for phone numbers; scoured print resources like playbills, Theatre

481 Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), ix.
World, and Screen World; consulted their audition schedules, idea lists, and other records from past projects; and searched their index card and photo files.\footnote{Published annually by Applause Books in New York, Theatre World and Screen World list most of the year’s theatre productions and film releases, respectively. Even today, casting offices maintain a headshot archive usually organized by actors’ gender, age, and ethnicity. As I mentioned earlier, in the classical Hollywood era, casting departments kept index cards with contact information and brief descriptions for as many as 15,000 performers.}

Most often, however, casting personnel turned to the two “bibles” of the casting world: the Academy Players Directory, founded in 1937, and the Players’ Guide, introduced seven years later.\footnote{When the Academy Players Directory debuted, other available casting directories included The Casting Director’s Album of Screen Children and The Standard, but only the Academy Players Directory and Players’ Guide listed union actors exclusively. For background, see Patricia L. Miele, “A Brief History of the Academy Players Directory (1936-1981),” 1937 Academy Players Directory Bulletin (1937; Los Angeles, CA: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 1981), x.}

The former, published thrice yearly in Los Angeles by AMPAS, provided over four hundred pages of headshots, industry contacts, and/or production credits for SAG members.\footnote{For a list of representative directories for this article, see fn 370. For a history of the Academy Players Guide, see Miele, “Brief History,” ix-xii.}

The four-volume set was divided into Women (“Ingénues,” “Leading Women,” “Characters and Comediennes”), Men (“Younger Leading Men,” “Leading Men,” “Characters and Comedians”), Children (“Girls”, “Boys”), and ethnic artists and artists with disabilities (the latter added in the 1980s) who were cross-listed under the gender categories.\footnote{Over the decades, “Colored” and “Oriental” labels gave way to “Black” and “Asian Pacific;” by the 1970s and 1980s, they included “Hispanic” and “Native American” artists.}


The Academy Players Directory was absorbed by the web-based casting service, Now Casting, in 2006 and renamed the Players Directory. It is now a multiformat publication –

Sponsored by reputable organizations, the books were reliable in that the actors were professionals and their information was vetted. They were also relatively easy to use: performers were listed in alphabetical order; the pictures provided casting directors with helpful visual aids; and the organizational categories of gender, age, and ethnicity replicated those used in breakdowns and office photo files. They were cumbersome, however, and could not, of course, provide access to audio or video clips. They also did not permit users to search beyond the most basic classifications: casting directors looking for actors with specific skills or in more narrow age ranges turned to additional resources. Finally, artists’ information was limited and not current: recent credits were routinely left out; contact numbers were often out-of-date; and yearly or even thrice-yearly publications could not keep pace with a fast-moving industry that saw new performers appear weekly and established artists change management.

Debuting in 1985, the first computerized actor database, RoleCall, addressed many of these problems by organizing its content and search techniques in ways familiar to casting directors, the designated end users for this product. Casting personnel simply entered their desired criteria for various recognizable fields, such as gender and age group, into the machine, and the matching names – along with headshots and resumes – appeared onscreen in a matter of seconds. The casting director featured in a New York Times article on the database looked for

489 The Directory exemplifies what Lev Manovich calls one of new media’s greatest benefits: its ability to generate different versions of the same object; see Manovich, The Language of New Media, 36-39.
491 Casting directors release breakdowns – character descriptions, work dates, location(s), plot synopses, and any other pertinent production information – of their current projects to agents and managers through Breakdown Services. After consulting the breakdown, talent personnel submit headshots to the casting office of the clients they feel are appropriate for each role.
male actors who could play mid-twenties to mid-thirties and box; he quickly downloaded thirty-five results. Co-created by playwright-actor-director Larry Atlas and computer designer Kip Perkins, RoleCall charged performers a twenty-five dollar annual fee, comparable to the fifteen dollars per issue that actors listed in the 1981 Academy Players Directory paid. Interested casting directors subscribed to the service for two hundred and fifty dollars per year (an additional office expense as the print guides were free). They also had to acquire equipment that included a computer, laser disk player, and television monitor to display the headshot images as computers could not yet display graphics. RoleCall, however, provided larger photos and more detailed credits for actor-clients than did most print resources, and its keyword search functions expedited searches – particularly for casting directors who needed performers with special talents.

The electronic database continued the established casting practices and information-gathering strategies casting offices used when accessing index cards, photo files, and players’ guides: whether in digital, analog, or print form, data on actors is primarily organized by physical characteristics and labeled by the descriptive keywords (“ingénue,” “leading man”) casting or proto-casting personnel have employed for centuries. Thus, RoleCall and its successors exemplify what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin call “remediation,” in which “the electronic version is offered as an improvement on the older version, although the new is still justified in terms of the old and seeks to remain faithful to the older medium’s character.”

493 See Miele, “Brief History,” xii.
494 For information on RoleCall, see Freedman, “Computers.”
“electronic version” of *RoleCall* contained search functions that either were superior to or absent from the “older medium[s]” of the index cards and print players’ guides, yet the database “remained faithful” to their organizational structure by cataloguing actors using common criteria casting directors recognized.

Wojcik argues that this method of organization often constrains actors and casting directors creatively as the former are “defined increasingly by physical appearance, race, body type, age, gender, and sex.” Furthermore, the terminology – “ingénue,” “Native American” – reproduces social stereotypes of gender, age, and ethnicity. While convenient shorthand for casting personnel, this “institutional practice” did not originate with either them or “outmoded casting traditions,” as Wojcik believes, but, rather, arose from pre-existing character descriptions created by playwrights or screenwriters. Additionally, the categories often encourage today’s casting directors to use ethnic authenticity in casting and aesthetic representation by assigning performers with specific cultural heritages to similarly ethnic roles. Partly as a result, casting personnel hire more actors of color than they did in the past, when it was not uncommon for whites to play ethnicities. Wojcik rightly observes, however, that this classification system is largely outdated in an era when many actors increasingly self-identify as multiethnic.

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496 Wojcik, “Typecasting,” 244-45.
497 Classical Hollywood, for example, frequently cast white actresses to play light-skinned African Americans. Examples include Jeanne Crain (*Pinky*, 1949), Ava Gardner (*Show Boat*, 1951), and Natalie Wood (*Kings Go Forth*, 1958).
breakdowns often include “open ethnicity” or “any ethnicity” next to individual roles, and the "Players Directory" e-book does not index ethnic actors separately, although it still divides performers by gender and age, and has separate sections for those with disabilities.499

For 1980s casting directors, "RoleCall"’s major disadvantage was not classification, but content. The program’s roster was restricted to only 3,500 actors; in contrast, the 1952 "Academy Players Directory" listed 5,700 and today’s online "Player’s Directory" contains over 120,000.500 Despite its limitations, however, the database was popular enough that several other electronic “photo files” appeared over the next decade, but, even with their advantages of speed and searchability, some casting personnel were slow to embrace these technological innovations.

"Back Stage," a weekly print and web resource for actors, conducted a poll in 1998 to determine how many casting directors used digital media; out of the eighty-four percent who had Internet access in their offices, only nineteen percent used it for casting-related purposes.501 When agent Nick Morf created the "Interactive Casting Directory" he ran into similar resistance: many casting directors he contacted for input balked at learning new computer skills.502 As a result, Morf designed his database with an interface and navigation system that anyone accustomed to television screen menus could operate.503 Using a remote control, casting personnel pointed and clicked on various pull-down menus labeled by categories including gender and age range. The Philips CD-I machine that connected to the television monitor provided headshots and any video

501 See Rob Kendt, “Net Results: Talent Industry to Utilize Internet,” "Back Stage West" 5 no. 45 (November 5, 1998), http://www.showfax.com/insidetrack/inset111403.html (accessed March 12, 2014). Of course, much of this resistance was generational; as younger casting personnel who grew up with digital devices entered the field, opposition to new technology has largely vanished.
or audio clips of performers who matched the entered data – the latter option unavailable in the more basic RoleCall.504

As the Interactive Casting Directory and RoleCall demonstrate, each succeeding database was more advanced than the last. Databases created after the early 1990s, when the World Wide Web’s invention dramatically accelerated Internet use, were web-based and increasingly high-tech compared to their electronic, pre-Internet predecessors.505 By the late 1990s they were hypermediated: casting personnel could download texts and pictures, and view video tapes sent by actors as “electronic postcards.”506 No longer dependent on computer discs, the Internet databases contained larger inventories, reached more users, and distributed content more quickly and efficiently: casting directors regularly received over one thousand online submissions within an hour and a half of posting a breakdown.507 As actor databases permeated the casting world, media centers outside Los Angeles and New York created databanks to showcase regional performers, expanding the available talent pool. Phillyfaces (established in 2002), for example, provided casting directors working on projects that filmed in the Philadelphia area with access to local talent.508 Actors posted “talking headshots;” thirty-second

504 Though free for casting directors, registered actors paid ten dollars per year (see Marx, “High Tech”). The presence of video and audio clips doubtless contributed to the comparatively steep enrollment fee, which was higher, for example, than RoleCall.
508 Other local casting databases included Florida’s Multiple Casting Service and Vancouver’s Casting Workbook (the latter still in existence); see, respectively, Hal Lipper, “The Casting Call Goes Electronic Next Week,” St.
digital videos clips in which they provided material about themselves. Shot by founder and professional photographer Joe Chielli, the videos showed his clients to better advantage than those on other sites who appeared in more amateurish-looking videos they self-taped.509

A Google search reveals that some electronic database prototypes such as the Interactive Casting Directory and RoleCall no longer appear to exist (Phillyfaces is still available).510 Casting directors now turn to similar, longer-lasting web resources such as IMDB.Pro (2002), a section of the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB) that provides actors’ contact information; Breakdownservices.com; Castnet (established in 1996); and Now Casting (1997). Of these four, IMDB.Pro and Breakdownservices.com are the most widely-used, in part because of their connections to pre-existing, highly-visible host companies: Breakdown Services has provided agents and talent managers in the United States and Canada with casting directors’ breakdowns since 1971.511 Adapting to the information age, the company went online a little more than a decade ago. Its earliest website featured headshots, resumes, and “acting slates” consisting of one-minute videos of actors talking about themselves. Since 2004, the company has permitted actor-clients to upload short performance clips. These videos – ranging from recitations of Shakespeare to commercial sound bites – allow actors to market themselves for specific types of projects.512 According to Gary Marsh, Breakdown’s founder, casting directors accepted the website gradually, and now find easy access to actors’ pictures and videos advantageous.513

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512 While Breakdown allows actors to post headshots for free, the company charges for the videos. But the price has dropped considerably: in 2005, performers paid two hundred dollars for a one-minute performance video; in 2013,
The databases’ ability to organize information increased steadily in sophistication and evolved along with the web. Older databases provided casting directors with name, contact information, and headshot only, and contained comparatively limited search fields and data. More recent databanks allow casting personnel to use a wider variety of criteria. SAG’s iActor, for example, permits casting directors to create and tag folders using their own descriptive shorthand.\textsuperscript{514} Some databases also enable casting directors to schedule sessions over the Internet, giving casting personnel the freedom and flexibility to work anywhere. Billy Da Mota, a commercial casting director, found this autonomy particularly advantageous, “I’ve logged in while in Hawaii and Belize…The point is that I don’t miss a job. I can be on vacation and log in on…my laptop.”\textsuperscript{515} As casting directors became more media literate and comfortable with computers – and the latter more user-friendly – they turned to digital devices with greater frequency. At present, this technology pervades casting offices, in part because it is increasingly portable: casting directors can now download actors’ data at any time from the IMDB app available on their cellphones.\textsuperscript{516} Busy casting offices that work on multiple projects with numerous roles to fill, sometimes at the last minute, appreciate this access.\textsuperscript{517} These advantages are crucial for professionals working in the fast-paced entertainment industry. The benefits,

\textsuperscript{513} See Pesselnick, “H’W’D’s.”
\textsuperscript{514} See SAG.org, \url{http://www.sag.org/iactor-online-casting} (accessed June 21, 2011).
\textsuperscript{515} Kopytoff, “Agents and Actors.”
\textsuperscript{516} Sonia Livingstone defines media literacy as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms,” and notes that as end users gain confidence and skill in manipulating technology, they are willing to try new equipment; see “Media Literacy and the Challenge of New Information and Communication Technologies,” \textit{The Communication Review} 7, no. 1 (March 2004): 5, \textit{Communication & Mass Media Complete, EBSCOhost} (accessed March 12, 2014).
\textsuperscript{517} Multicamera sit-coms, in particular, undergo script changes at the last minute: characters may be added the night before the actors are needed on set, and casting directors must search accordingly. Commercial casting directors also benefit from Internet databases as they usually cast their ads in less than a week. Sites exclusively for commercial actors include Casting Networks-LA Casting (2000) and the Casting Frontier (2005); for information, see Capra, “Online.”
however, are mixed because of the online talent directories’ major limitations: the medium’s limited content and lack of accountability.

Digital media hold more material than do their analog prototypes, yet the content any databank provides is finite. The databases discussed pre-select their talent pools according to agency status, union affiliation, geographical location, and/or ability to pay membership fees – the very criteria that print resources such as the *Academy Players Directory* employed. No Internet database provides casting directors with a one-stop shopping center for talent; thus, despite the cost, actors often join more than one.518 Because casting directors cannot rely on one digital database or any other single source to find performers, they must turn to additional Internet resources or print materials. Therefore, while the databases advertise themselves as saving casting directors valuable time, in reality some feel they do not.519 Instead, they add to casting personnel’s workload by increasing the number of avenues casting offices must pursue.520

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518 Some databases, however, are free with union memberships (*iActor*, for example, is owned by SAG). And while it is true that performers pay more to be listed on certain websites than they do in print directories, casting directors are also increasingly more likely to search online than they are to consult print material. In addition, actors save money by posting online clips of their work, rather than paying to either mail or messenger DVD copies.

519 See, for example, *Cast It’s* promise to casting directors: “you can do in minutes what used to take days;” *CastItBlog.com*, [http://www.castitsystems.com](http://www.castitsystems.com) (accessed June 27, 2011).

Sean Marks praised the Internet’s speed and efficiency, but noted that new technology did not make his job less labor-intensive:

When we have an open call, we’ll announce it on Facebook and it’s viral. It’s the quickest way to spread information. If I’ve allotted a whole day to cast a scene, I’m not going to get it done in two hours now because I’m using Face-book (sic). It’s just increasing the number of options I have…Face-book (sic) doesn’t decrease the amount I use anything else. It’s just another way to get the word out – whatever’s going to increase the number of faces I can see.521

Access to technology not only allows Marks to transmit information quickly, but also “[increases] the number of options” he has. Ultimately, though, it raises expectations for the amount of work he is required to do as the actors (“faces”) he is expected to see correspondingly multiply.

Moreover, it is not clear how often casting directors actually employ the databases’ clients. Certainly, the sites increasingly attract decision-makers: in 2005, Phillyfaces received one hundred and fifty thousand page views a month, while Marsh estimated that Breakdown Express, primarily accessed by casting personnel, got over five hundred thousand hits per day.522 Some talent agents believe that submitting actors online gives them an advantage over those sent by mail or messenger (and, indeed, most agents currently do so), but, as Marsh acknowledged,
there is no way to know how often casting directors call actors in for auditions based solely on their appearances in the databases. It is probable that the databases aid rank-and-file actors more than they do those who are better-known and already familiar to casting directors. None of these issues, however, affects the popularity of the databases, which have multiplied over the last two decades and now include websites dedicated to video-sharing.

Finally, casting directors and other decision-makers can abuse digital media, sometimes tainting the audition process. In 2009, for example, a theatre casting director tweeted during a session, making her unflattering comments about the actors available for her followers to see. Maria Somma, an Equity spokeswoman, objected, “It’s a very long road for an actor to get from seeing the casting notice to getting that audition. To have it mocked is unfair to the actors…there is an expected level of respect and professionalism, and these values were violated.” And producer Christine Vachon (Happiness, 1998) recalled working with a film director who, undecided between two actors, accessed their Twitter accounts to compare followers and chose the one with the larger number, turning the audition process into a popularity contest instead of a

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523 See Kopytoff, “Actors and Agents;” and Miller, “Hey, Look them Over”
524 Security issues are another drawback to several sites. Although Breakdown and iActor are password-protected, others, including MyActingSite, are not. Secure websites prevent casting directors from being inundated with headshots from actors who may self-submit, creating too much product for casting offices to sort through effectively (for a similar argument, see Kathleen O’Steen, “Casting Data Turf Feud Sparks Suit,” Daily Variety, April 28, 1992, www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/inacademic (accessed June 6, 2011). The passwords also benefit actors. On less-protected websites, anyone can click on the actors’ pictures and contact information, potentially exposing performers to unwelcome advances. Some actresses listed on the Philadelphia site, for example, received calls from pornography producers. Other clients expressed concern over possible stalkers. Many site-owners attempt to allay these fears: Chielli, for example, emphasizes that he does not list child actors’ personal information. While performers’ contact numbers were always available in printed form through the Players’ Guide and Academy Players Directory – including home numbers in the earliest issues – they were never as widely circulated or as easily obtainable as they are on the web, where any user can enter multiple sites. This increased access leaves clients vulnerable to potential threats, heightening concerns over Internet safety and forcing actors to protect themselves by listing service numbers, for example, rather than personal numbers on resumes. For information, see Miller, “Hey, Look Them Over;” see also Kopytoff, “Actors and Agents;” Lawrence Lessig, Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 79; and Diane Snyder, “Weaving Your Web (site),” Back Stage, July 29, 2010, http://www.backstage.com (accessed December 7, 2010).
525 Itzkoff, “Tweets at Tryouts.”
meritocratic system of employment.\textsuperscript{526} While an actor’s personal appeal affects many casting decisions, this particular case illustrates one way that social media may work against an actor – and a casting director.

II. Is It Live Or…?

All current searchable casting databases are examples of video-sharing websites: they allow users to post online videos in addition to headshots and contact numbers. Videos uploaded by actors are either demo reels, short clip compilations designed to showcase an actor’s work, or virtual auditions, which the actor records with no casting director present.\textsuperscript{527} These websites also support recorded auditions, here defined as those the casting director tapes and posts. This distinction between recorded and virtual auditions is crucial to analyses of digital media’s effect on the casting director’s decision-making status because the former involves the casting director’s participation while the latter does not.

While casting directors often browse video-sharing websites to scout new talent, they do not as yet predominantly rely on them for audition purposes. Two recent trends are changing this practice: the increased use of digital cameras and the rise in globalized talent searches. The former make web-disseminated auditions possible because casting personnel need them to conduct auditions online. And the recent surge in national and international talent hunts – the never-ending and now hyper-intensive search for new “product” – demands the kind of wide-ranging access the Internet provides.\textsuperscript{528} “We are expected to look at the global market…even when we start doing a [United States] television pilot, we’re expected to know the up-and-coming actors in Australia,” said Gary Zuckerbrod, casting director for the CBS series Without a

\textsuperscript{526} See Leo Barraclough, “Indie Pics.”  
\textsuperscript{527} Agents and actors keep a supply of demo reels on hand to send to casting directors, directors, and producers unfamiliar with the performer’s work. The demo reels were originally available on VHS and, later, DVD.  
As studios and networks require casting directors to launch increasingly comprehensive searches, several websites dedicated to supporting demo reels and virtual and recorded auditions have emerged to meet this need.

In this section, I discuss the impact of video-sharing websites and recording devices on casting directors’ contributions to what has been, until approximately two decades ago, a predominantly live audition practice (studio and network tests, which affect a small percentage of actors and are analogous to the classical Hollywood screen tests in that actors appear off-book and often in full hair and make-up, are exceptions). As auditions have become increasingly mediated, two issues have arisen that potentially affect the casting director’s decision-making status. First, how much control – if any – does the profession retain over audition procedures? And, second, how does mediation affect the casting director’s ability to evaluate an actor for a role? Can casting personnel adequately assess an actor’s skill via a recording or the Internet, or do aspects of digital media complicate their ability to do so?

Casting directors often acquaint themselves with performers through the Internet, usually by watching their demo reels. Hoping to entice casting personnel’s interest, many actors post clips of their recent film or television appearances on personal websites and include the links on their resumes. The high costs associated with traditional media circulation – production, distribution, and promotion – are reduced in the digital age. Thus, those who can afford the relatively low cost of a computer, software, and digital camera can create their own websites. Casting directors, however, often complain that the sites look amateurish and the navigation is confusing. As casting director Marci Liroff explained, “I like the ones that have all the info

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actually on the website…Putting a link that takes you to another website for your videos…takes you off of the actor’s website, and that’s not good. You want to have everything self-contained…”

Young performers with few credits must create their reels from scratch, using monologues as their “electronic calling-card” material. Actors, however, often do a poor job of self-taping, and talent services emerged to assist actors with their marketing. Nextframe (founded in 2001), provided its actor-clients with advice on how to shoot the videos and feedback from casting directors. For one hundred and fifty dollars, actors received direction on how to record the five-minute video clips, including tips on clothing and camera use. Casting directors paid by the site’s owner, John Stobaugh, watched the finished product and submitted detailed written critiques. While this practice violates one unwritten rule of the casting world – that no actor should pay to audition – for Stobaugh, the site democratized the casting process by giving actors who would not normally be seen by casting directors the opportunity to do so. As he explained:

531 Snyder, “Weaving;” see also Simi Horwitz, “Judy Keller Loves Actors,” Back Stage, January 5, 2011, http://www.backstage.com (accessed March 5, 2011). Marci Liroff, primarily a film casting director, is best-known for Mean Girls (Waters, 2004). Some websites help actors design professional-quality websites. MyActingSite.com (established in 2008) provides templates that allow performers to build and personalize their online portfolios with separate pages for resumes, bios, (“unlimited”) photo galleries, demos, mailing lists, and a “contact me” section. Initially, MyActingSite charged clients approximately forty dollars to set up the site and an additional twenty to maintain it; see MyActingSite.com, http://www.myactingsite.com (accessed May 27, 2011); as of October, 2013, the site appears to have waived the start-up fee.


The whole idea is to provide a service for people outside of Los Angeles who, like me, got the acting bug but didn’t have an outlet… If I had had something like this before moving out to L.A. – before quitting my job and leaving my friends – I could have gotten a better feel for how I stacked up against others.534

Nextframe allowed actors in diverse locations to interact with casting directors, but its benefits were mixed. While the website provided performers with valuable expert feedback and casting directors with the chance to see new talent, prospects for employment were unlikely: casting directors usually have neither the money to fly in actors for auditions nor the time to wait for them to do it themselves.535

Some aspiring performers post videos on websites that are not exclusive to actors. Thus, casting personnel increasingly turn to sites such as CollegeHumor.com and FunnyorDie.com to discover fresh faces. The most popular is YouTube (2005), the premiere video-sharing website.536 As television casting director Robin Lippin noted, “I definitely have reached out to YouTube and the Internet a lot more to find people. On some…pilots…I’ve found people on YouTube that have done skits, and they ended up testing for the show.”537 Casting directors who work on long-running musicals and must constantly search for new talent, particularly children, regularly turn to YouTube to find potential cast replacements.538 Since 2012, casting director Bernard Telsey

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535 For a similar argument, see Kopytoff, “Agents and Actors.”
536 See Burgess and Green, YouTube, 106.
(Rent) has employed an associate to monitor his YouTube Project, which encourages unknown musical talent to submit their reels for consideration. More recently, casting directors might search on Vine, an application that claims over forty million users. Owned by Twitter and launched in 2013, the site allows users to post six-second videos. Sites not specifically designed for casting directors present challenges. Unlike the actor databases, for example, they are not organized by common casting keywords and search fields. Instead, casting personnel must browse these sites more broadly by using search strategies that recognize and select relevant or similar terms. Moreover, as in the case of the self-taped demo reels, the sites’ amateur videos often feature distorted images, uneven sound, or poor performances, and casting directors must use their expertise to look beyond these shortcomings to spot potential.

Casting directors also find actors through electronic open calls, or Internet talent showcases. These showcases simulate embodied open calls in that anyone may audition – regardless of whether he or she is a union actor or has an agent. Both online and offline open calls have similar goals: to locate hard-to-find types such as children or actors of a certain ethnicity. Vietnamese actress Hiep Thi Le, the female lead in Oliver Stone’s Heaven & Earth (1993), was found through a live open call. Unlike “real-life” open calls, which primarily exist to fill major roles, Internet talent showcases sometimes locate actors for smaller parts. In 2010, Fox Television’s Glee (2009-) held an electronic open call on its MySpace page in which contestants

submitted videos consisting of a personal statement and a song. Given the time and money non-virtual open calls demand – casting directors must rent space, publicize the event, hire additional labor, etc. – this practice is prohibitive for non-starring roles. An online open call, however, is less taxing and demands little more than a casting director’s access to a video-sharing website – often a social network site (SNS) such as a film’s Facebook page. Journalist Jill Serjeant notes that “some directors are turning to the Net to cast small parts, eliminating time-consuming auditions and the process of sifting piles of paper resumes, head shots and tapes,” though she provides no examples. Reality programs, particularly talent shows such as NBC’s America’s Got Talent, use electronic open calls regularly, but this practice is still relatively rare for theatre, film, and scripted series. Casting directors generally find that open calls elicit more contenders than do those that are virtual: more than a thousand young girls attended the June, 2011 open auditions for the new Broadway version of Annie; in contrast, fewer than five hundred auditioned virtually. Thus far, no major Broadway star has been discovered via online auditions, though some who sent in videos and later auditioned in-person were cast in choruses or as understudies. Well-known theatrical director James Lapine, however, saw benefits in virtual auditions, “‘Actors, especially young actors, can be very nervous when they’re performing live in front of us…[v]ideo auditions can reveal a level of focus,”

concentration and confidence.”

Most scripted projects that do employ Internet talent showcases view them as promotional tools. In 2011, for example, anyone who wished to try out for the lead in the Sony feature film, Mortal Instruments (Zwart, 2013), posted his or her video on the studio’s fansite, Face of the Fan. The auditions were reposted on Facebook and mentioned on Twitter, intensifying the hype surrounding the film.

Ultimately, the video-sharing websites and Internet talent showcases provide casting directors with unprecedented access to unknown performers, but, as in the case of the electronic databases, do not lighten their workload. Casting directors use the web to supplement – not replace – the pre-digital search strategies of their predecessors. When Ellen Chenoweth cast the young female lead in the Coen brothers’ remake of True Grit (2010), she and her associate passed out fliers at rodeos, placed ads in local newspapers, and canvassed videos via the film’s web page. Like the actor databases that remediated existing information from the print talent directories but did not eliminate them, pre-digital (live searches) and digital (Internet talent showcases) casting procedures coexist: one does not supplant the other.

While casting directors appreciate electronic demo reels and Internet talent showcases, they are ambivalent about virtual auditions. Actors are rarely cast based solely on their web videos; traditionally, most casting personnel resist hiring those they have not seen in the room. Certainly, they welcome a video if an actor cannot appear in person. Casting directors credit the Internet with allowing them to audition actors in far-flung locations – a particular advantage

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546 For information on Broadway’s use of mediated auditions, see Healy, “Hopefuls.”
547 See Jurgensen, “The Oscars.”
548 See Jurgensen, “The Oscars.” The actress cast, Hailee Steinfeld, was hired through more traditional means as she was a working actress with an agent.
550 Casting director Mark Testa notes another positive aspect of virtual auditions: actors have more time to work with the material than they do when they audition live. See Sarah Kuhn, “Virtual Auditions: Future or Fad?” Back Stage, November 24, 2010, http://www.backstage.com (accessed December 21, 2010).
for a profession that operates globally, often under looming deadlines. As Ross noted, “…I find out about an actor in Mongolia, and within 24 hours I can scan and e-mail the sides to that actor…then, they can tape themselves in a little room and I can see their audition on my computer.”\(^{551}\) Beach concurred, appreciating virtual auditions as another way to meet new talent even though she had yet to cast anyone in this fashion:

…if the teen-movie genre continues with the kind of freight-train force that it has, we will need more kids out there. And the kid in Kansas who cannot find the bus fare to Hollywood can now put himself on the Internet and may be right for the part.\(^{552}\)

Many casting video-sharing websites, such as Breakdown’s *Actors Access*, also advertise auditions, encouraging actors to submit and adding to the project’s available talent pool.

Voice-over projects, which do not depend on an actor’s physical appearance, encourage virtual auditions. *Voicebank* (created in 1997 and based in Los Angeles) and *PROVoice* (launched in New York in 2000) showcase voice-over artists. On the latter site, casting directors or producers search for potential voices by performer name, location, or agency. They can also browse for specific character types by using several criteria: gender, age (“‘30-something’”), accent and/or dialect (“‘New York’”), attitude (“‘comedic’”), and quality (“‘edgy’”).\(^{553}\) After conducting the search, the client receives a list of matching results. When she clicks on each name, she can listen to digital audio samples of the actors’ voices and choose which performers

\(^{551}\) Longwell, “Cast Away.” *Showfax*, operated by Breakdown Services, provides audition material (“sides”) online or via fax.

\(^{552}\) Serjeant, “Casting Couch.”

\(^{553}\) These and other, similar descriptive words are called “tags” – industry vernacular for the kinds of qualities producers look for in voices. Industry consultants hired by *iPROvoice* supply the tags (with approval from the actors and their agents) after listening to the actor’s demo reel; see Michel Marriott, “An Online Casting Call for Disembodied Voices,” *New York Times*, March 27, 2003, [http://search.proquest.com/docview/92628526?accountid=14553](http://search.proquest.com/docview/92628526?accountid=14553) (accessed April 17, 2011).
to audition.\textsuperscript{554} The actors selected (or their agents) often use Voicebank’s or PROVoice’s technology to record their auditions and e-mail them to the casting director for review.\textsuperscript{555}

Voice-over casting websites make the cumbersome search-and-audition processes more efficient and cost-effective. Before the advent of digital technology delivery systems, casting directors bought videotape or CDs, recorded actors in office studios, and distributed the cassettes by mail or messenger – expensive and time-consuming methods. Today, casting personnel send and receive voice-over MP3s nearly instantaneously via e-mail or an Internet site.\textsuperscript{556} As Paul Reggio, actor and co-founder of PROVoice, pointed out, “What we’re doing is allowing talent from all over the place to be in the same pool as the talent in New York, in Los Angeles…The technology exists for the geography to be irrelevant.”\textsuperscript{557} While these websites have not ended location-based work, they certainly supplement it.

Yet, for all that virtual auditions offer, most casting directors agree that they are unlikely to replace face-to-face auditions at this point. Casting personnel object to three aspects of virtual auditions: frustrations with an evolving technology, the absence of casting director input, and the lack of liveness.

Until relatively recently, low bandwidth, the absence of hi-definition screens, and the poor quality of the MPEG-4s or streaming videos made auditions slow to download and difficult to watch: the picture was dark or grainy and the sound indistinct. In 2005, when Merry Alderman, a casting associate for Francine Maisler, expressed her aversion to video-sharing

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{554} See Marriott, “Online Casting.”
\textsuperscript{557} Marriott, “Online Casting.”
\end{flushleft}
websites, she specifically mentioned the videos’ aural and visual problems.\footnote{558} Despite technical advances in equipment and bandwidth, casting directors still criticize video’s poor appearance and inaudible sound. Many actors often use their own, inferior equipment to record audition sessions, exacerbating the casting directors’ dissatisfaction. As television casting director Mark Saks complained, “[On tape] the image is very small…and very flat and never well-lit, and the sound is never great.”\footnote{559} While many demo reels are also poorly produced, casting directors do not usually judge an actor’s suitability for a given role solely by demo reel; instead, the reel acts as an electronic calling card designed to encourage the casting director to bring the actor in for an audition. If, however, a casting director evaluates an actor by virtual audition only, the video’s quality may hinder her ability to appraise the performer.

Besides objecting to the videos’ physical attributes, casting directors also remark on the performances: actors who self-tape do not receive casting personnel’s direction and feedback, and their auditions often suffer accordingly.\footnote{560} Television actor Henry Dittman noted that while self-taping increases accessibility, it can hinder an actor’s chance for a role, “‘Good casting directors can really get [you] to the place where you need to be…They understand where a role is supposed to fit in, the tone of what you’re supposed to do.’”\footnote{561} Casting director Mark Testa (\textit{Cold Case}, CBS, 2003-10) agreed, “The disadvantage is the actor doesn’t have the advantage of what the casting director knows about the role in the room. And we don’t get to see them in the room to see if they’re physically right.”\footnote{562} Part of the casting director’s duties is assessing how a performer takes direction and if he or she is agreeable to work with, traits impossible to ascertain

\footnote{558}{See Miller; “Hey, Look Them Over;” see also Kopytoff, “Actors and Agents.”} \footnote{559}{Kuhn, “Virtual.”} \footnote{560}{Acting coaches are beginning to train actors to audition online; see Healy, “Hopefuls.”} \footnote{561}{Kuhn, “Virtual.”} \footnote{562}{Kuhn, “Virtual.”}
without meeting the actor in person. Hence, even those casting directors who accept virtual auditions are reluctant to hire unknowns sight unseen.

Casting directors also prefer to audition actors live because they feel that they can gage an actor’s presence more successfully if the performer appears in person. As Beach recalled:

I still remember auditioning Anne Heche a few years ago and being blown away by her presence…to have that kind of extraordinary talent in the room is indescribable and inimitable. I think you won’t be able to get that on the Internet.563

Beach’s reaction to Heche’s audition (“being blown away”) emphasizes the actress’s physical presence – her temporal and spatial (“the room”) co-existence with her audience (Beach). Art critic and historian Michael Fried defines presence as a quality that “demands that the beholder take it into account, that he take it seriously.”564 The most effective actors command audience attention – a talent casting directors equate with liveness. However, how important is liveness to the audition process? Is it media-specific: more necessary, for example, for theatre, which distinguishes itself from other arts primarily through this quality, than for film and television auditions, when the two are already mediated? Or, rather, should a film or television casting director analyze a performer’s presence electronically, given that that is how the actor will appear to audiences?

Whether or not live performances are superior to mediated ones is the subject of much critical argument, and a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter.565 One aspect of

563 Serjeant, “Casting Couch.”
565 For scholarly debates over live vs. mediated performance, see Philip Auslander, Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008); Bruce Barton, “Paradox as Process: Intermedia Anxiety and the Betrayals of Intimacy,” Theatre Journal 61, no. 4 (December 2009): 575-601; Susan Broadhurst and
this debate, however, is relevant here: Peggy Phelan’s concept of “co-presence.” Phelan, who privileges the live over the digitized, argues that while both mediated and live performances allow the spectator to respond, only the latter has “the potential…to be transformed by those participating in it.”\textsuperscript{566} In live auditions, the actor’s performance is affected by others in the room, most notably by the casting director who simultaneously acts as audience member, co-performer as she usually reads with the actors, and director when she adjusts the performer’s delivery. For casting director Deborah Aquila (\textit{The Shawshank Redemption}, 1994), reading with an actor is analogous to acting with him or her and allows her to better judge that performer’s energy.\textsuperscript{567}

Consequently, the casting director has authority over an actor’s performance as long as both of them share time and space, an important influence absent from virtual auditions.\textsuperscript{568}

Casting directors’ preference for live auditions means that – for the moment – digital content complements rather than replaces face-to-face auditions: virtual auditions occur


\textsuperscript{567} Kuhn, “Talent Scout.”

\textsuperscript{568} One exception is the actor who auditions via Skype. Although the performer does not share the same space as the casting director, he or she is in temporal proximity. Therefore, despite the web’s mediation, the casting director can still guide the performer’s audition. For the increased use of Skype in auditions, see Jurgensen, “The Oscars.”
relatively infrequently for films and scripted series, and rarely for theatre. Casting directors do, however, record their live sessions, and have done so since the 1980s, when they relied on bulky VHS cameras. Taping auditions at that time was laborious: using several machines (cameras, tape decks, and monitors), casting assistants edited, copied, and labeled multiple VHS tapes, which they then mailed or messengered to directors and producers.

In contrast to their analog predecessors, digital cameras (introduced in the early 1990s) are less expensive, easier to operate, and more mobile. They also allow casting personnel to circulate auditions more efficiently. After recording the sessions, they simply save them to their computers and use iMovie or Movie Maker to edit and e-mail the auditions to other decision-makers.

Many casting directors turn to video-sharing websites to manage their mediated auditions. Some request particular auditions, usually from performers who live outside New York or Los Angeles. Breakdown’s Eco Cast, for example, allows casting personnel to arrange for select performers with whom they are unfamiliar to self-tape. Actors receive sides and instructions from the casting office via their agents, and post their auditions to a special account when done. Others use them as centralized depositories to store sessions for an entire project.

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570 The videotapes remain in a variety of hands: some casting directors gave the videos to the studio or network talent offices once the project was completed; others took the videos with them. A recent incident involving these tapes illustrates one peril of recorded auditions. Early in 2013, Jenkins and Hirshenson were forced to withdraw videotaped auditions they had offered for auction. SAG-AFTRA objected, noting that the tapes, which included sessions of a young Brad Pitt and Sandra Bullock, were not “public performances” and that the actors had a certain expectation to privacy. See Daniel Holloway, “Casting Directors Withdraw Audition Tapes from Auction,” Backstage.com, April 2, 2013, http://www.backstage.com/news/casting-directors-withdraw-audition-tapes-auction/ (accessed November 8, 2013).


572 See “Gary Marsh.”

Cast It, launched in the early 2000s, is the most successful of these: in 2008 the company worked on nearly one thousand film and television projects; more recently, it hosted an online talent search for the film version of the musical Annie, starring Will Smith.\textsuperscript{574} Its users include major Hollywood studios and networks – Steven Spielberg’s Munich (2005) was an early client – and several international media companies, such as the BBC. Casting directors who employ Cast It record their auditions with the Sanyo digital camera the service provides. Its removable storage chip allows users to upload the auditions to their personal computers and, after editing them, to the password-protected website. Other production team members can view the auditions instantly by logging on to the website.

Cast It has several major advantages. It permits actors based around the world to try out for any role, cuts down on waste and the costs associated with distributing multiple hard copies, and stores the auditions for an indefinite period. It also saves time by making auditions available in minutes, and its interactivity allows decision-makers to post their input for others to see, creating what Cieply calls a “rolling conversation.”\textsuperscript{575} This dialogue among an online community does, in part, allow for personal interaction similar to that of an embodied community – a connection that casting directors such as Manning complain has been lost with the advent of digital media. Finally, Cast It takes over many time-consuming clerical casting duties by functioning as a general knowledge-storage site: it generates lists of agency and production contact numbers; schedules auditions (including actors who wish to self-tape); creates session sheets; formats cast lists (contact information for every actor cast); and designs, builds, and

\textsuperscript{575} Cieply, “Digital Casting.”
maintains websites for open calls. By pro-rating fees, the company attracts numerous accounts that range from big-budget television series to small independent films.\footnote{The site’s founders, Eric Hayes and Chris Gantos, claim to earn millions from the production companies who pay to use their service; see Cieply, “Digital Casting.”}

Despite these benefits, casting and other production personnel expressed several concerns over the site, particularly its safety. The website claims that it is “the only system to pass a major studio security audit.”\footnote{See Castit (accessed June 27, 2011).} While the passwords alleviate some anxiety over privacy and security issues, some worried that the auditions – and corresponding critiques – might fall into the hands of rival studios or networks. Others mentioned that the site’s ability to store auditions open-endedly could be detrimental as casting directors may refer to an out-of-date audition when considering the performer for a very different or more current project.\footnote{See Cieply, “Digital Casting.”} This last is highly unlikely: part of a casting director’s job is to be aware of actors’ current work and appearance; in addition, most try to cast against “type” by auditioning performers for diverse roles.\footnote{Of course, the dated auditions – less likely to disappear if they are stored on a website like Cast It – may come back to haunt the actors.} In spite of these apprehensions, Cast It proved popular and several other online audition sites have appeared over the last fifteen years.\footnote{Iam.com (founded by Tom Epley in 2000) allows non-union actors to self-tape and send their auditions to interested casting directors; see Serjeant, “Casting Couch.”}

These audition websites – especially those that allow actors to self-tape – appear to diminish the casting director’s authority over the audition process. In fact, however, they give the casting director unprecedented influence because, as casting personnel admit, an increasing number of other decision-makers rarely see an actor in person. As Lippin noted:

Producers are looking more at audition tapes and making decisions based on those tapes. You miss the personal contact the producers used to have, but as a casting
director, at least you feel like you can give the actor a good shot. You can work with them; you don’t have to feel like there’s a time constraint. Lippin recognizes the taped audition’s value for actors: she can “work with them” as long as she sees fit; the performer is not rushed through the process by a busy producer or director needed elsewhere.

However, she does not comment on the amount of power the recorded audition gives the casting director. While others (directors, producers, executives) are said to have final say as to which actor is cast, in a mediated audition process the casting director is often the only production team member who controls the material upon which that decision is based. She not only directs the auditions, but also edits them, sending the best take(s) to the production team. As Paul Weber, a casting consultant for MGM, explains:

The director usually isn’t with the casting director during auditions, so casting directors have more time to work with the actors and get their performances to a level they feel good about sending to the director. They edit the tape to make the actors look as good as possible by cutting scenes together the right way, or by cutting out scenes. Casting directors record everyone, but… the casting director will send in [their] favourites, with notes and rankings.

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581 Kuhn, “Risk.” Some executives still value live auditions, arguing that an actor’s energy may be dissipated on tape. While these decision-makers rarely attend the initial auditions, they will go to callbacks or pilot tests; see Nellie Andreeva, “Fox Changing Its Pilot Casting Process,” Back Stage, October 23, 2009, http://www.backstage.com (accessed June 24, 2011).

582 See Longwell, “Cast Away.”

As one feature film casting director remarks, however, this method of casting can “backfire” if a
director later fails to elicit a similar performance from the actor on the set. “The audition,” she
emphasizes, “might be the best this actor can do.”

Despite this risk, mediated auditions give casting directors unprecedented power for, as
Cieply stresses, while the director, producer, and executives can access Cast It and provide
critiques, they see only what the casting director provides for “nobody but the casting
professional gets everything.”

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584 Anonymous Studio Casting Director, Interview by Diana Jaher, February 21, 2014.
585 Cieply, “Digital Casting.”
CONCLUSION

“A lot of film acting is internal; it’s in the eyes, face, and subtleties…In motion capture, you’re looking for a full body performance.” Victoria Burrows, casting director

“[I]t is my performance, this walks, and talks and acts like me. It’s my interpretation.” Sam Worthington, actor, on his performance in Avatar (Cameron, 2009)

“‘Painting with Faces’: The Casting Director in American Theatre, Cinema, and Television” examined the rise of casting as a profession by concentrating on its oft-debated status (clerical vs. creative), and adaptations to diverse organizations of labor (in-house vs. independent) and production conditions (pre-digital vs. digital). I want to conclude by briefly imagining casting’s future. What kinds of organizations of labor and production practices are on the horizon and how will they affect the profession? In answering these questions, I concentrate on two relatively recent casting innovations: the virtual actor and reality shows as casting platforms.

In the past decade, at least five West End or Broadway musicals have cast important roles via reality program casting contests: Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Oliver, The Sound of Music, Spamalot, Grease, and Legally Blonde. The corresponding reality shows were: Any Dream Will Do (BBC, 2007), I’d Do Anything (BBC, 2008), How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria? (BBC, 2006), West End Star (TV3, 2008), Grease: You’re The One That I Want (NBC, 2006), and Blonde: The Search for the New Elle Woods (MTV, 2008). As Douglas Santana notes, the purpose of these series, in which viewers voted for their favorites, was to provide publicity, create a synergy between mediums (television and theatre), and attract

588 This trend is not limited to theatre. In June of 2011, Oxygen aired The Glee Project, in which twelve contenders competed for a role on the popular series.
younger and more ethnically and economically diverse audiences for these musicals.\textsuperscript{589} Despite the hype, this strategy has not impacted the casting profession significantly. This casting method is still rare – time and money preclude using either reality shows or other types of contests to cast the majority of projects. Furthermore, casting-by-contest did not circumvent the casting director: Telsey was one of the judges for Elle Woods.

A potentially greater influence on the casting profession is the figure of the “vactor,” or computer-generated actor. Most critics agree that the new cyberstars will not replace human performers, at least not imminently.\textsuperscript{590} While their technical virtuosity appeals to some audiences, movies starring all-synthespian casts, including Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within (Sakaguchi, 2001), rarely succeed at the box office.\textsuperscript{591} Thus far, state-of-the-art digital technology has produced neither virtual bodies that can simulate those of flesh and blood nor virtual faces capable of complex emotions.\textsuperscript{592} These are challenges, Lisa Purse suggests, to audiences still largely invested in cinematic realism and identification.\textsuperscript{593}

\textsuperscript{589} See Santana, “Box Office Effects.”


\textsuperscript{591} Final Fantasy’s estimated budget was $137,000,000; the film made only $85,131,830 worldwide. See “Final Fantasy,” IMDB.com, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0173840/ (accessed July 13, 2011).


\textsuperscript{593} See Purse, “Digital Heroes,” 12; see also Creed, “Cyberstar,” 82; and North, Performing Illusions, 2-3.
for this specific visual effect are prohibitive for all but the highest-budget features. But if “vactors” do not threaten current casting practices, then the critical debate surrounding situations like Andy Serkis’s performance as Gollum in the Lord of the Rings (Jackson, 2001-03) trilogy and subsequent Oscar bid raises questions about the future of casting and the casting director. If, as some claim, acting will look different in the digital age, how does this affect the casting director and casting praxis?

I must distinguish between two kinds of vactors: those that are entirely computer-generated and those modeled on human actors using motion capture (mo-cap) – what Ivan Askwith terms “human-digital hybrids.” Most high-profile synthespians are embodied by live actors in motion-capture suits who supply the characters’ vocal and physical qualities. Although Serkis is the most prominent example, cyberstars performed as early as 1991, when “Ray Tracy,” created by Digital Vision Entertainment (DVE), appeared in a California public

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596 Askwith, “Gollum.”
service announcement. Serkis, however, was the first to play his role while interacting with other cast members in real time. As director Peter Jackson noted:

What was important…is that there was one person, an experienced, skilled actor, making all of the decisions on behalf of Gollum. [Andy] would decide how Gollum would move, how he would act, what emotion he would show, what pauses he would put where, what weight he’d put into a particular scene – just as any actor…would be doing for their characters.

John Malkovich, who donned a motion-capture suit to play Unferth in *Beowulf* (Zemeckis, 2007), made similar claims. Because the virtual actor is constructed from the human performer’s voice, facial expressions, and body movements, vactors do not substantially alter the audition process. Victoria Burrows and Scott Boland, casting directors for *A Christmas Carol* (Zemeckis, 2009), auditioned actors for the animated roles in the same way they do for live-action features.

Some scholars argue that digital cinema will lead to fragmented acting or what Mark Wolf calls “divisibility of performance,” where a single character’s voice, expression, and

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599 Askwith, “Gollum.”

600 See Montgomery, “Beowulf.”

movement are provided by different performers. Yet, they believe that those actors inhabiting the amalgamated role will be human rather than computer-generated. As Bode points out, composite acting will resemble, in some ways, pre-digital cinematic acting, where it was not uncommon for actors to have body doubles or their voices dubbed. Glenn Close, for example, dubbed the young Andie MacDowell’s voice in *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes* (Hudson, 1984). This strategy, however, still demands a casting director who will find the human actors to play various aspects of a single role.

Ultimately, as Askwith notes of Serkis’s role, “computer-generated performance [is] not...a replacement for human performance, but...an extension of it.” Indeed, using Serkis was so important to Jackson that his special effects team remodeled the original Gollum CGI model (completed before Serkis was cast) to more closely align with Serkis’s own unique physicality. As Jackson, originally only interested in hiring Serkis to voice the character, explained:

…in order to create the voice he was having to…put all his expression in his face and that’s where he found the voice. He was actually doing the character…It was really in that audition that I came to realize…that the voice and the facial expressions and the energy are related. Despite the technological aspects of his performance, Serkis embodied Gollum as fully as he has his other, live-action roles. Indeed, he recently reassured the acting community that performance capture will not replace actors; rather, it “is a tool that allows actors to transform themselves into many different characters.”

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602 Wolf, “Technological,” 55.
603 See Bode, “No Longer,” 46-70; and also North, *Performing Illusions*, 150.
casting process will certainly affect actors and casting directors, but neither is in danger of being replaced quite yet.

Ultimately, no technological innovation has either drastically altered or diminished the casting profession’s basic functions. “The tools have changed,” acknowledged one studio casting director, “but I do what I always did: make lists and see actors.”607 Indeed, casting directors’ status as an integral member of the production team has never been stronger, as the Academy’s recent elevation of the profession to branch status attests. Hopefully, Oscars and Tonys will soon follow when AMPAS and the Theatre Wing finally recognize what I have argued throughout this project are the casting director’s agency and artistry or, as, casting director Ronnie Yeskel (Pulp Fiction, 1994) succinctly, but powerfully, declares, “I control the creative element of matching a character…and an actor.”608


607 Anonymous Studio Casting Director, February 21, 2014.

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