Choosing Silence: Robert De Niro and the Celebrity Interview

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The celebrity interview seems to offer the fan fairly unproblematic access to the real person behind a film star's image. Yet when Robert De Niro refuses to answer questions or even to give interviews at all, the assumptions regarding access to the "real" De Niro are called into question. Who is Robert De Niro? Why is he so reticent about interviews? Is he merely shy, or is he trying to hide something? Or is it that there is nothing inside, that there is no Robert De Niro outside of his roles? The titles of articles in the popular press about De Niro often foreground the problem this star presents: "You Talkin' to Me? No!" "Man of Few Words," "The Phantom of the Cinema," "The Return of the Silent Screen Star." It seems that the voice least heard from about De Niro is the actor's own voice. Robert De Niro becomes a structuring absence in the discourse about himself.

This chapter investigates the articles in the popular press that specifically feature Robert De Niro and seeks to explain the significance of this silence. This breakdown in the interview process helps us to see some of the assumptions underlying the normally transparent workings of the system of film publicity. This silence has bearing on the nature of the film star, his or her status, and the literature concerning Western conceptions of the self.

Several important trends in celebrity publicity date back to the first constructions of film stars in the early 1910s. Richard de Cordova's (1985) work on the emergence of the star system reveals that players were first individuated as "picture personalities," coherent personae that could be read from actors' appearances across several films without reference to their off-screen life. When the player's existence outside the film was acknowledged, it was briefly depicted (according to de Cordova) as "merely an extension of an existence al-
ready laid out within films. The illusion that was operative was that the player's real personality (as presented in magazines) preceded and caused the representation of personality on the screen. . . . But actually the represented 'real' personalities were not primary; they were reduplications of a more basic representation of character within films” (p. 88). The filmic and extrafilmic texts maintained a careful redundancy.

Movie stars in the more modern sense began when the player's existence outside the film became the emphasis of the popular press. Fans began to gain access to information about the star's so-called private life, making explicit the distinction between the actors and the characters portrayed on screen. However, the two categories were still portrayed as being analogous, with no moral discrepancy between the professional and private selves.

Such portrayals of stars seem to be rooted in the prevailing understanding of the film medium's "realism." The mechanical nature of the film process is considered to decrease the effects of human intervention; therefore, film presents people "as they really are." The American film industry realized the necessity of maintaining continuity between the on-screen image and the "real" person depicted in magazines. To do otherwise would be to emphasize the apparatus's potential to lie.

But what about the actor, the professional liar? Not surprisingly, film realism has traditionally shown a preference toward what Barry King (1987) calls "personification" (limiting actors to parts consonant with their personalities and physical attributes) rather than "impersonation" (in which actors suppress the markers of their "real" personalities and take on the role's characteristics) (p. 130). King suggests that this tendency has an economic basis in the oversupply of actors available for Hollywood productions. The rational response to the actor oversupply (given naturalistic conventions) is "an emphasis on what is unique to the actor, displacing emphasis from what an actor can do qua actor onto what the actor qua person or biographical entity is" (p. 146).

A minimum level of acting ability is assumed to be present among Screen Actors Guild members; therefore, significant differentiation between members tends to be based on unique combinations of personal and physical traits. In King's terms, acting ability becomes a continuous variable (a criterion that is shared, however unevenly, by all members of a work force) and psychological/physical qualities are discontinuous variables (present in only some workers). The economics of oversupply favors choices based on discontinuous variables, which supports a preference toward personification. Because Hollywood is oversaturated with actors, casting directors can make choices based as much on physical characteristics, life histories, and personality traits as they do on acting ability.

Another widely held notion about acting emphasizes the opposite trend: impersonation, suggesting that only relatively unskilled actors have to be limited to playing parts similar to their own personalities. In this discourse film is generally considered to be less an actor's medium than theater. Film's editing capabilities can piece together a cohesive performance out of many different takes of a relatively unskilled actor. Editing can eliminate a performance entirely, leaving an actor's work on the cutting room floor. Control over the camera gives power over much of the signification of performance in the cinema, and this control is out of the actor's hands. In the theater the actor's control over pacing and so forth is perceived to be more direct and less mediated, putting an emphasis on the actor's skills.

These notions concerning acting and film remained fairly stable until the revolutionary arrival of Method acting on the screen, most importantly in Elia Kazan's and Marlon Brando's works. When American practitioners adapted Constantin Stanislavski's Method, they emphasized how actors should call on their life histories to provide source material to use in creating characters. This technique grounds the acting in a real-world base, purportedly giving the actor's performance a new realism and emotional truth. At first glance it would seem that the Method as it appeared in film emphasized personification over impersonation. Lee Strasberg, the primary popularizer of the Method in America, describes Kazan's strategy in selecting his actors: "He casts people who he thinks have a certain something deep inside them—which if it could come out would be essential to the role. To succeed, then, he would have to find some way of bringing this something to the surface" (Cole and Chinoy, 1970, p. 623).

The Method emphasized the unique set of experiences that each actor as an artist could draw upon as affective memories. Awareness of these memories gave the artist access to the materials of his or her trade. Stella Adler, De Niro's primary teacher, says: "The first idea [at the Group Theatre] asked the actor to become aware of himself. Did he have any problems? Did he understand them in relation to his whole life? To society? Did he have a point of view in relation to these questions?" (Cole and Chinoy, p. 602). The Method could be seen as an economic strategy to emphasize the qualities that make personifying actors unique. If an actor has a "certain something" inside, he or she can market his or her unique appeal.

But the Method is not simply a reassertion of personification. Stanislavski's Method is a complex combination of the physical and the psychological, with the intent of bringing these factors under the actor's conscious control. Actors develop physical and psychological discipline so that they can use the raw material of their experiences to create a variety of characters. "Craftsmanship," the artistic ability to forge characters consciously using one's memories instead of merely duplicating those memories, is the other central idea of the Group Theatre's American Method (in addition to the artist's individual self-awareness mentioned above), according to Adler. The Method's emphasis on an actor's memories is not intended to limit the actor to a simple reenactment of personality but is meant to give the actor a means of consciously reworking his or her affective memories into different characters.
Though discussions of the American Method have perhaps shown somewhat of a personifying emphasis (after all, Adler says that the actor's self-knowledge is the first step in the Method), the Method contains a counterbalancing influence foregrounding impersonation. Strasberg admits that the American Method has been construed as overly psychoanalytic when he says: "The emotional thing is not Freud, as people commonly think. Theoretically and actually, it is Pavlov" (quoted in Roach, p. 216). But this quote also points out a significant oversight in the American version of Stanislavski's Method. Partly because of the English publication history of Stanislavski's works, the American Method focuses more on earlier Stanislavski ideas and shares his early emphasis on psychological work rather than his later stress on physical work. This causes the misconception that the Method is rooted in a psychology of the mind (like Freud's) rather than a mind/body theory (like Pavlov's). As Joseph Roach notes, "[I]t has been assumed that the process begins with work on the psychological aspect of the instrument, then emphasizes the preparation of its physical aspect, and finally brings both together in the creation of a role" (p. 205, emphasis added). The version of the Method discussed in pop culture publications generally shares this relative emphasis on the psychological, rarely getting to the second step of the actor's preparation (the physical).

Barry King cites De Niro as "an interesting case in this regard, since he appears, paradoxically, to combine a stunning level of virtuosity the capacity for impersonation with a drive, role by role, to transform himself physically into the substance of the signified, e.g., Jake LaMotta in Raging Bull" (1987, p. 144). De Niro has come to represent an extreme of both impersonation (foregrounding his versatility) and personification (foregrounding his body). Though the writings on later Method film actors (like Dustin Hoffman, Robert Duvall, and De Niro) have emphasized the virtuosity of their impersonations, "the self-referentially of Method acting—the so-called personal expressive realism of Brando, for example—rather than representing the triumph of the actor as impersonator can be seen as a successful adaptation of impersonation to the pressures of personification, deploying impersonation to refer back to the person of the actor, the consistent entity underlying each of his or her roles" (King, p. 147). Thus the focus of acting that foregrounds impersonation points us back to the "real" personality of the actor just as surely as personification does. The question of the "real" personality of a virtuosic actor like De Niro becomes even more fascinating because it contains the variety of characters he depicts. This is the promise proffered by De Niro interviews in the popular press: that we can get to know a personality rich and varied enough to produce such a wide range of characters.

The central difficulty with getting to know this "real" personality through the print medium, however, seems to be De Niro's reluctance to be interviewed unless "pressured" (always by unnamed forces) to do so. When he does submit to an interview, his reticence to disclose private information and his dis-
establish the verisimilitude of his performance. A member of the audience who
knows about De Niro's extensive preparation for a role is predisposed to
evaluate his performance as being really "real." Whether De Niro's research
methods actually affect his on-screen performance is open to question, but the
importance of this information about De Niro rooting his acting in real life can
strongly affect viewer impressions. Note that the preparation that De Niro
emphasizes is not psychological preparation but physical preparation, exemplified
by the boxing training and weight gain for Raging Bull. To say that De Niro is
silent in the discourse about his own stardom is to overlook the fact that De
Niro offers his body fairly freely into the discourse.

De Niro is not portrayed as being notably camera shy to reporters, though
there is a tradition of actors who dislike being photographed in situations be-
Yond their control (from Katharine Hepburn, Greta Garbo, and Marlene
Dietrich to Sean Penn).5 Instead, De Niro is shown as being blatantly tape
recorder shy, as being reluctant to have his voice captured.5 Celebrity inter-
viewers are accustomed to actors expressing themselves vocally, not bodily. Some
respond to De Niro's vocal silence by offering a fairly detailed transcription of
De Niro's body language, further asserting that De Niro's participation in the
discourse is done bodily, not vocally.

However, having access to an actor's body is assumed to be a given by the
dominant conception of the celebrity interview, and it is not enough. After all,
we have access to images of the actor's body in the films themselves. The fan
requires the celebrity body to speak, to reveal the inner truths it contains. Obvi-
ously the celebrity interview operates as part of the modern Western pursuit of
the secret truths held by the body, as described by Michel Foucault. The desire
for scientific knowledge of sex is the desire to make the body speak, to elicit its
confessions.6 De Niro's body clearly is communicating both in films and in in-
terviews, but it does not give the satisfying answers we seek because it does not
provide us with interior access.

The relatively free access we are given to De Niro's physical preparations is
emphasized when compared to the little information we glean about psycholog-
ical preparation. We are told that he prepares for a part by asking real people
inexistant questions, but we never learn what kinds of questions he asks. Jake
LaMotta says that De Niro learned so much about his inner psychology that he
told him things he never knew about himself, but he never revealed what those
things are (Kroll, p. 86). De Niro's silence extends not only to private information
about his personal life but also to the psychological methods of prepara-
By telling us that he talked to real people but giving us no more information,
De Niro further imbues his acting with "realness" while simultaneously mystifying the process.

The discussion on De Niro, therefore, may be seen as an attempt to reassert
the importance of the actor's physical preparation to the American Method.
Actor Chazz Palminteri says, "Marlon Brando changed acting when he walked
across the stage in A Streetcar Named Desire. De Niro changed it with Raging

Bull. At that time, no actors transformed themselves the way he did. They do it
now. But they do it because of him" (Cortina, p. 85). De Niro's assertion of his
body, but not his psychology, into the discussion is at odds with the psycho-
logical orientation of pop culture's version of the Method. De Niro's refusal to
give us psychological insight may be seen as an attempt to reclaim the body of
the actor as the basis for impersonation, not mere personification. His silence
regarding psychological preparation forces us to renegotiate the dominant con-
ception of an actor's tools.

This silence extends even to the psychological processes of characters. De
Niro talks about the process of developing the characterizations for Raging
Bull with Martin Scorsese: "We did not feel a need for the old cliched psycho-
logical structure. He hated his brother so therefore he did . . . that sort of
thing. Why should anybody say anything came from anywhere? Reasons? We
ever discussed reasons" (Ferretti, p. 28). According to Hal Hinson, "De Niro
is the least psychological of Method actors. He doesn't appear to be as inter-
ested in puzzling out a character's inner life as he is concerned with expressing
the mystery of personality. In Raging Bull, De Niro tells us that a man like Jake
LaMotta is impossible to know, and that we are wrong to expect to unders-
stand a character's drives and motives" (p. 203).

When asked at a seminar for filmmakers what he was thinking at a pensive
acting moment in New York, New York, De Niro replied: "I hate to disappoint
you—I don't know. You probably thought I was really working. That's what I
mean: It's very simple. . . . The audience knows how you feel. The less that you
show the better" (quoted in "Dialogue," p. 43). De Niro's advice to actors
tends to emphasize simplicity. While this may seem to be an attempt to make
Method acting less intimidating and less mystical, the vague advice to "sim-
plicity" is more mystifying than it is instructive, particularly when balanced
against a sizable publicity about De Niro's very complex preparations. Such
mystification gives power to those who already have achieved "simplicity." Even
De Niro's advice may be construed as giving more power to his own im-
posing stature.

De Niro passes along only one piece of advice from either of his well-known
acting teachers, Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg. Several times he quotes Adler
as saying, "Your talent lies in your choice" (quoted in "Dialogue," p. 40;
Grobel, p. 85). This quote has a very specific meaning in acting contexts, but
De Niro also seems to be using it in a larger sense, positing an ego that makes
life choices. De Niro portrays himself as making choices as to who has access to
what kinds of information. Reporters and fans can have access to data about his
body, but he denies access to information about his private life, his psychologi-
cal preparation, and his characters.

His extraordinary physical preparation becomes a discontinuous variable
that distinguishes him from other actors, giving him what Robert Brady calls a
"personal monopoly" (p. 129) with the accompanying economic power. Arti-
cles consistently emphasize his hard work, and this entitles him to a kind of sta-
tus traditionally denied to film stars in a capitalist country founded on the Protestant work ethic. Film acting is not considered to be “real work” because of the tendency toward personification acknowledged in the pop song: But De Niro sweating and punching is a man obviously at work.

These attributes work in conjunction with the silent psychological discourse to make De Niro a more valuable commodity, one that allows him to exert a kind of control rarely extended to film actors. His hard work differentiates him from other actors, while his silence creates a mystery that this entire discourse wishes to solve. Normally film stars have to trade privacy for control. Stars like Clint Eastwood become producers of their own images, but they must follow the traditional rules of star publicity to do so. De Niro’s choices have given him a collaborator’s status with Martin Scorsese and more recently as head of an ambitious Lower Manhattan film collaborative. Elizabeth Kaye situates De Niro’s recent interest in directing and producing as “an extension of the interests and skills that preoccupied him from the start, when he sat through long production meetings, paying rapt attention to discussions on where to store the costumes, where the trucks should be parked” (p. 45). Stars usually have to trade increased public visibility for the power of directing, but De Niro has used his silent acting mystique to gain status as a director (A Bronze Tale).

His strategy has given him power over things that are outside the normal film actor’s control, but it also seems to imbue De Niro with discursive power over portions of the self that are traditionally considered very difficult to change. His refusal to discuss his past in detail allows us to assume one that seems to fit his persona. He is often believed to have grown up in a lower-class New York environment, but actually his father was a fairly successful modern artist (Dickey, p. 70). An emphasis in the popular press on the cultural capital of his upbringing might make playing Johnny Boy in Mean Streets difficult, but his silence frees him discursively from the class constraints of his past. Usually the actor’s body is thought to provide the actor’s basic “look,” a given that can only be recast slightly through cosmetics. However, De Niro demonstrates an ability to break free of the traditional restraints of the body, reshaping it for different roles.

De Niro’s ability to change the unchangeable (his past, his body) functions as part of a larger set of present-day discourses on altering one’s own past (recasting it through psychotherapy) and one’s body (through exercise and dieting regimens). These discourses acknowledge that society makes judgments based on the very assumption underlying personification in actors: that there is a unity between the body/personality and the social identity/role. People judge you when they see your body or when they detect traces of your past in your personality. Modern society posits that we, like De Niro, can change our pasts and our bodies, and therefore we can choose a different social identity: “In America it is almost as if, democratically, any actor can play any role naturally, just as any citizen can aspire to be President” (Le Fanu, p. 49).

The posing of some entity who is following Stella Adler’s advice, choosing to speak or to be silent, choosing discursively a past or a body, still leaves the principal celebrity interview question open: Who is the “real” Robert De Niro? Who is doing the choosing? One common answer is distressing for reigning Western conceptions of the self, even ones that acknowledge the possibility of reshaping a modern social identity. The explicit answer provided by some interviewers is that there is no “real” Robert De Niro, that there is no one at the wheel choosing life directions. An old girlfriend suggests: “The thing is, once you penetrate all the paranoia and secrecy that Bobby surrounds himself with, you’ll find out that at the bottom of Bobby is really . . . nothing” (Brenner, p. 118). This De Niro is perhaps nothing but the roles he portrays. Shelley Winters says, “In between pictures, Bobby doesn’t exist. I don’t know where the human being is” (Brenner, p. 121). Michael Moriarty, who worked with De Niro on Bang the Drum Slowly, passed up an opportunity to speak to De Niro on the Taxi Driver set: “I don’t know that guy at all. I knew Bruce Pearson [De Niro’s Bang the Drum Slowly role]. I don’t know Travis Bickle or Bob De Niro.” Elizabeth Kaye suggests, “No one, perhaps, is better suited to being an actor and less suited to being a personality” (p. 45). Interviewer Paul Gardner muses: “The Method school uses acting for self-knowledge. De Niro’s acting runs closer to self-escape” (p. 34).

This silence poses a threat for one of the founding Western beliefs: the utilitarian egolism of the individual. According to the philosophical tradition of Hume and Hobbes, a person’s identity can be determined without reference to roles and social positionings, and this person can be trusted to act to promote his or her own best interests. The possibility that De Niro is nothing but his roles, that there is no central agent making decisions based on his own self-interest, is a very modern phenomenon. Clearly this is where De Niro’s celebrity differs from that of other reclusive film stars to whom he is sometimes compared (Garbo, Brando). In the publicity about these stars, the existence of a “real” though elusive personality is never brought into question. With De Niro the silence is portrayed as a lack of an ego at the center of the individual.

On a somewhat less earth-shaking scale, the silence also calls into question the normally invisible workings of the Hollywood film industry publicity apparatus. When denied access to De Niro himself, the reporter often has to put secondary communications at the center of the piece. Several articles have more quotes by other people about De Niro than they have quotes by De Niro. When De Niro refused to talk to Vanity Fair, the interviewer (Bosworth) pieced together a portrait, “The Shadow King,” from interviews with 50 of De Niro’s associates and friends. For an Esquire article, Mike Sager prowled the Tribeca area, asking residents about their famous neighbor, some of whom were about as forthcoming as De Niro himself (“’Whaddya, stalkin’ him?’ . . . Why don’t you fucks just leave him alone? Everybody knows: Bobby
De Niro don’t do interviews.”). This strategy further emphasizes the absence of the star’s voice as it tries to fill that absence with other voices.

Another strategy is to focus on the difficulty of the De Niro interview process. One article in Gentlemen’s Quarterly (Richman) consists of a long discussion of the reporter’s trepidation at the task of interviewing such an elusive figure, followed by a brief chat with De Niro in which the star auditions the interviewer and turns him out. In his Playboy (Grobel) interview, De Niro turns off the tape recorder 11 times, looks at his watch seven times, and indicates he wants to leave five times. Here the awkwardness spotlights the assumptions we carry concerning the celebrity interview. The reporter does not have to justify his or her right to ask questions, but De Niro must justify his right to refuse them.

A related strategy (briefly noted earlier) is to emphasize De Niro’s inarticulateness by delivering a fairly literal transcription of his words: “Yeah, well . . . I think that . . . umm . . . you know . . . uh-huh” (Schickel, p. 68). Usually a reply in such halting “naturalistic” speech would be cleaned up, and awkward false starts would be edited out. The inclusion of such markers of distinct speech patterns transforms the interview subject into an Other (for instance, when someone provides a phonetic transcription of Southern accents or African American speech patterns). Thus the considerably less-than-smooth interactions between star and interviewer emphasize the constructed nature of the seemingly seamless interview usually proffered by the film publicity apparatus. Even though De Niro’s silence problematizes both the film celebrity interview and Western conceptions of a unified utilitarian ego, these ideas still exert their power. It is possible to recoup much of the popular discourse on De Niro into a unified concept of self. In spite of the emphasis on De Niro’s versatility of impersonation, one can reconfigure his work as personification.

The prototypical De Niro role is an angry, violent, obsessive, urban, alienated, lower-class, repressed loner, epitomized by Taxi Driver’s Travis Bickle and Raging Bull’s Jake LaMotta. De Niro comments in some interviews on characters that he would not play, particularly historical figures (he turned down the part of Jesus in The Last Temptation of Christ). This acknowledges that, despite the discourse on versatility, there is a recognizable core to the De Niro persona. This on-screen persona bears great resemblance to the De Niro depicted in the interviews: a silent, brooding, obsessive loner. Paradoxically, De Niro’s off-screen silence, which supposedly allows him the freedom to remake himself into many different on-screen characters, also ties him to those characters in a rather straightforward personification manner.

The on-screen and off-screen De Niros differ from each other in a key way. In an off-screen situation, De Niro’s silence is read as nonsignifying, as a refusal to communicate. However, when De Niro is silent on screen, his silence speaks. The magnified scrutiny of close-ups allows a film actor to signify without words, with very subtle movements. “If De Niro’s silences tend to be a lit-

tle awkward at parties, they explode on the screen. . . . In his silences, I see storm clouds on the horizon” (Braudy, p. 13). Barry Paris notes:

Robert De Niro’s sentences—his thoughts—are like his acting. Grammar, syntax, and vocabulary are all there, but not always in words. . . . It’s ironic that the very thing that draws people to De Niro on the screen—this powerful, largely nonverbal projection of character, emotion, and meaning—is what baffles and annoys some people about him offscreen, particularly the scribes who create his “image." (pp. 30, 33)

De Niro, the man who will go to extraordinary lengths to make his character fit the dramatic situation, refuses to change in acknowledgment of the difference between the interview situation and the dramatic situation. The more cooperative interview subject helps the celebrity publicity apparatus maintain the fiction that the two situations are not that different. We are promised access into the actor’s psychology through interviews, and we seemingly get into the character’s psyche through close-ups. But the discourse hides the fact that the interview and dramatic situations call for very different forms of communication. De Niro maintains a quiet reserve in both situations, perversely refusing to impersonate a celebrity interview subject, and, by doing so, he spotlights the invisible expectation that an actor will transform into a unified speaking subject during an interview.

Here is where the signifier “De Niro” takes on one of its most radical critiques of modern society. The silent De Niro, not a utilitarian agent yet not purely reducible to situational roles, acknowledges the omnipresence of impersonation in our society. In order to survive, one must be able to adapt oneself to an increasingly varied set of situations. In such a society, older conceptions of self-interested agency may get lost in the chaos. De Niro, by carving out a structuring absence in his own discourse, is “released, at last, from producing an identity card in an absurd world where, he knows, most lives are fraudulent anyway” (Gardner, p. 33).

NOTES

1. This chapter will only deal with De Niro’s interviews and celebrity profiles in print. Interviews in other media (which are quite rare) and reviews of his films would provide interesting insights into the phenomenon of De Niro’s stardom, and certainly they interact with the print discourses dealt with in this chapter, but they lie outside this chapter’s focus.

2. I do not wish to make the romanticized case that theater actors actually do have more control over their work than do film actors. To call theater an actor’s medium is to ignore the power of the director, who can occupy a dictatorial space in the theater just as he or she can in filmmaking. Obviously a range of ideologically and interpersonal power issues are at play in any theater or film process, and these factors can vary widely. I only wish to acknowledge the presence of a thread of discourse that romantically (though not always accurately) locates more control in the theater actor than the film actor.

4. There is some evidence about De Niro's anger toward unauthorized photographers. In 1995 he was charged with assaulting a cameraman outside a Manhattan bar. However, the tables turned when the photographer allegedly said he would drop the charges in exchange for money, and De Niro helped police set up a sting to trap the extortioner (Wulf, p. 102). There is no indication that De Niro is reticent to have his picture taken by reporters in interview situations. In fact, he has posed for several magazine covers, most notably dressing up as George Washington for the December 1995/January 1996 cover of George.

5. Notably, Julia Kristeva (1980) considers the voice to provide access to interior states.

6. According to Foucault (1985), Western societies seek to penetrate the external restrictions of the body, not only to gain sexual pleasures but also to gain the pleasure of knowing that body. Western cultures seek to know the truth about the body, and that knowledge then gives the feeling of power and control over what otherwise be unruly. He calls this desire to know scientia sexualis, allying this desire with the pursuit of scientific knowledge, and he locates this impulse in a range of discourses, including pornography, law, medicine, and psychiatry. The impulse to know the truth about De Niro, a truth that his body stubbornly withholds from us, is rooted in this broader context (pp. 51–73).

7. In a humorous sidebar in Entertainment Weekly, Jake Tapper (1997) presented a Robert De Niro quiz that asked readers to match De Niro's films with a brief description of his role. The joke is that they all sound the same (“Cutesy gangster, Satanic psycho gangster, Repentant gangster cop, Psycho messenger, Psycho boxer, Patchwork psycho”) (p. 66).

8. De Niro's refusal to employ different strategies when situations change flies in the face of Erving Goffman's (1959) theories of agency, where a social actor changes his or her role to fit a change in situation. The social actor tries to maintain what Goffman calls “synehichotic responsibility” (p. 51), which is both a consistency of manner and a fit between setting, costume, and behavior. By maintaining his core silence despite a change from dramatic to interview situation, De Niro refuses to play a role according to Goffman's (and society's) rules.

REFERENCES


Part II

The Cultural Impact of Star Images