

STARS

New Edition

With a Supplementary Chapter
and Bibliography
by Paul McDonald

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The aim of this book is to survey and develop an area of work within film studies, namely, film stars.

Although stars form the basis of probably the larger part of everyday discussion of films, and although the majority of film books produced are fan material of one kind or another, very little in the way of sustained work has been done in the area. No work, that is, that elaborates some kind of theory of the phenomenon and uses this theory to inform empirical investigation of it.

Within film studies, reasons for studying the stars have largely come from two rather different concerns that may broadly be characterised as the sociological and the semiotic. The former centres on the stars as a remarkable, and probably influential or symptomatic, social phenomenon, as well as being an aspect of film's 'industrial' nature. In this perspective, films are only of significance in so far as they have stars in them. The semiotic concern reverses this. Here, stars are only of significance because they are in films and therefore are part of the way films signify. This division of interest is reflected in the structure of this book, in that the first part deals primarily with sociological issues and the third with semiotic, and only the second very obviously combines the two. However, one of my assumptions in writing the book has been that this distinction, while useful in helping one to handle an otherwise unmanageably large topic, is essentially one of convenience, and that both concerns are mutually interdependent. Thus, on the one hand the sociological concern can only make headway when informed by a proper engagement with the semiotics of stars, that is, their specific signification as realised in media texts (including films, but also newspaper stories, television programmes, advertisements, etc.). This is because, sociologically speaking, stars do not exist outside of such texts; therefore it is these that have to be studied; and they can only be studied with due regard to the specificities of what they are, namely, significations. Equally, on the other hand, the semiotic concern has to be informed by the sociological, partly because stars are, like all significations, also and always social facts, but also because it is only on the basis of a proper theorisation of one's object of study that one is able to pose questions of it. Semiotic analysis has to make assumptions about how texts work before proceeding to analyse them; once it is granted that all texts are social facts, then it follows that these textual assumptions must be grounded in sociological ones. You need to know what kind of thing a text is in society in order to know what kind of questions you can legitimately pose of it, what kind of knowledge you can reasonably expect it to yield. Thus although this book is structured linearly, the actual enterprise is dialectical, a constant movement

Nice

1920s
1930s

between the sociological and the semiotic (and between the theoretical and the empirical).

The book is structured in three parts. In all three, it is assumed that we are dealing with the stars in terms of their signification, not with them as real people. The fact that they are also real people is an important aspect of how they signify, but we never know them directly as real people, only as they are to be found in media texts. The three parts of the book can then be seen as centring on the different questions we might pose of the stars as significations. Part One (Stars as a Social Phenomenon) – why do stars signify; i.e. what kind of social reality are stars? Why do they exist, in general and in particular? What is their relationship to other aspects of social structure and values? Part Two (Stars as Images) – what do stars signify; i.e. what meanings and affects do the image of stardom and the images of particular stars embody? Part Three (Stars as Signs) – how do stars signify; i.e. how do star images function within film texts themselves in relation to other aspects of the text, including those such as characterisation and performance which directly coincide with the star's presence?

All three sections involve the concept of ideology. As this is a widely and variously used word (and a subject of much controversy), I had better state briefly here what I understand by it.¹

Ideology is the set of ideas and representations in which people collectively make sense of the world and the society in which they live. It is important to distinguish between ideology in general and ideologies in particular. Ideology is a characteristic of all human societies, but a given ideology is specific to a particular culture at a particular moment in its history. All ideologies are developed in relation to the concrete, material circumstances of human life – they are the means by which knowledge is made out of those circumstances. There is no guarantee that this knowledge is true in an absolute sense – indeed, all ideology is by definition partial and limited (which is not at all the same thing as saying it is 'false'). At the same time, there is no way in which we can think outside of ideology and in this sense all analysis of ideology is itself ideological.²

def ideology

Our society is characterised by divisions of class and gender, and, secondarily but not reducible to them, by divisions between races and sexual, cultural, religious and other minorities/majorities. Within these divisions, which complexly cut across one another, sense is made out of the world, collectively but also differentially. That is to say, all ideologies are rooted in the life activity of given social groups within a given particular society, but that any group may produce several contradictory inflections of its ideology. In any society – and therefore in the ideas and representations of any society – one can always discern contradictions of two orders: *between* the ideologies of the various groups in conflict (potential or actual) and *within* each of those ideologies.

The primary concern of any attention to Hollywood must be with the dominant ideology of western society. Any dominant ideology in any society presents itself as the ideology of that society as a whole. Its work is to deny the legitimacy of alternative and oppositional ideologies and to construct out of its own contradictions a consensual ideology that will appear to be valid for all members of society. The operations of the dominant ideology are thus a ceaseless effort to mask or displace both its own contradictions and those contradictions to it that

arise from alternative and oppositional ideologies. The latter always enter into the account with a popular or mass medium, as the medium must engage with audiences not themselves situated within the dominant groups of society. These operations are always in process, an effort to secure a 'hegemony' that is constantly under threat from within and without. (For example, the contradiction within dominant ideology between its championing of equality and its necessary commitment to inequality, which has to be at least apparently resolved – through, for instance, universal suffrage, educational 'opportunities', access broadcasting – in the face of groups demanding that the promise of equality be realised for the working class, women, blacks, etc.) For our purposes much of the interest of Hollywood lies in this process of contradiction and its 'management' and those moments when hegemony is not, or is only uneasily, secured.

From the perspective of ideology, analyses of stars – as images existing in films and other media texts – stress their structured polysemy, that is, the finite multiplicity of meanings and affects they embody and the attempt so to structure them that some meanings and affects are foregrounded and others are masked or displaced. The concern of such textual analysis is then not to determine the correct meaning and affect, but rather to determine what meanings and affects can legitimately be read in them. How these are in fact appropriated or read by members of different classes, genders, races, etc. is beyond the scope of textual analysis (although various conceptualisations of this will be found throughout the book).

Ideological analysis of media texts does of course make the political implications of what we are studying inescapable. Since we often seek to avoid facing such implications, preferring to believe that what we do has no political consequences, this is reason enough for such an approach. It is, however, also intellectually more rigorous – as I have suggested above, all textual analysis has to be grounded in sociological conceptualisations of what texts are, and since what they are is ideology, with all its contradictory complexities, it follows that textual analysis is properly ideological analysis.

Where possible, reference to specific stars in this book has by and large been restricted to the following – Marlon Brando, Bette Davis, Marlene Dietrich, Jane Fonda, Greta Garbo, Marilyn Monroe, Robert Redford and John Wayne. In this way the same star can be seen within various perspectives. These stars were chosen to represent a cross-section according to certain considerations such as the contrast between 'classic' and modern stars and between various styles of performing in films, and an interest in stars who raise political issues directly (Fonda, Redford, Wayne) or indirectly through aspects of lifestyle (Garbo, Brando, Fonda) or sex-role typing (e.g. the notion that Davis, Monroe and Fonda 'resist' aspects of the stereotyping process).

As will be evident, this means that the examples relate to the cinema rather than television (or sport, theatre, fashion, etc.), and to the American rather than other cinemas. The specificities of these other places where stars are to be found would always have to be respected, although at the level of theorisation and methodology I believe most of what is elaborated here in relation to Hollywood film stars is broadly applicable to these other kinds of star.

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PART ONE

Stars as a Social Phenomenon

Notes

1. For a very general introduction to the notion of ideology, see Colin McArthur, *Television and History*, Chapter One. More detailed examination of the various approaches to ideology is to be found in *Working Paper in Cultural Studies* 10, 'On Ideology'. A serious gap in this last work is any consideration of the later work of Jean-Paul Sartre, notably his *The Problem of Method*. These texts are for the most part elaborated within a Marxist perspective but not a feminist one. For the latter, see *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* 11, 'Women Take Issue'.
2. For a consideration of these problems, see Janet Wolff, 'The Interpretation of Literature in Society: The Hermeneutic Approach', in Jane Routh and Janet Wolff (eds.), *The Sociology of Literature: Theoretical Approaches*.

(N.B. Publication details of all texts cited can be found in the bibliography.)

The stars are a reflection in which the public studies and adjusts its own image of itself . . . The social history of a nation can be written in terms of its film stars.
(Raymond Durgnat, *Films and Feelings*, pp. 137–8)

Far more than men, women [stars] were the vessels of men's and women's fantasies and the barometers of changing fashion. Like two-way mirrors linking the immediate past with the immediate future, women in the movies reflected, perpetuated, and in some respects offered innovations on the roles of women in society.
(Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, p. 12)

Take Robert Taylor, M. Boyer, Mr Laurence Olivier, and take Miss Durbin, Miss Garson and Miss Davis and a few more film actors and actresses, and you may be able to arrive at a complete anthropological typology of which no La Rochefoucauld, Pascal or Jung could ever dream.
(J. P. Mayer, *Sociology of the Film*, p. 262)

Stars . . . are the direct or indirect reflection of the needs, drives and dreams of American society.
(Alexander Walker, *Stardom*, p. xi)

Part One is concerned with the question – why do we get the phenomenon of stardom and, given that we do, why do we get the particular stars we do? How are we to account for the phenomenon in both general and specific terms?

It is organised as follows:

- discussion of the general social *conditions* favouring stardom
- the role of forces of *production* and *consumption* in shaping stardom and stars
- the *ideological* functioning of the star phenomenon.

1 Conditions for Stardom

Francesco Alberoni and Barry King have both suggested various social structures that must obtain for the phenomenon of stardom to exist. These conditions are necessary rather than sufficient – that is, they do not automatically produce stars but are the grounds on which stardom may be produced.

Alberoni is concerned with stardom as a general social phenomenon and not just with film stardom. His definition of stardom, already indicated in the title of his article ('The Powerless Elite'), centres on the fact that stars are a group of people 'whose institutional power is very limited or non-existent, but whose doings and way of life arouse a considerable and sometimes even a maximum degree of interest' (Alberoni, p. 75).

The basic conditions for this phenomenon, Alberoni suggests, are:

- a state of law
- an efficient bureaucracy
- a structured social system.

(These three factors ensure that social roles are delimited and judged according to 'objective' criteria (e.g. efficiency). In this situation, stars operate only in their own sphere and there is no 'danger' of their 'charisma' becoming important 'from a political point of view'.)

- a large-scale society (stars cannot know everyone, but everyone can know stars)
- economic development above subsistence (though this need not be very great development – cf. film stars in India)
- social mobility (anyone, in principle, may become a star).

Thus, argues Alberoni, stars are a remarkable social phenomenon – an elite, privileged group who yet on the one hand do not excite envy or resentment (because anyone may become one) and on the other hand have no access to real political power.

Alberoni's discussion is useful for suggesting explanations for such features of the star phenomenon as: why during the Depression starving people could hear and read of the high life of the stars without apparent resentment; why only minor stars have become politicians; why the socialist press has had far more pity than scorn for stars, stressing them more as victims than beneficiaries of capitalism.

However, because a star cannot become a crucial decision-maker (and remain a star), this does not mean that s/he is without political significance. Alberoni ignores the ideological significance of the stars. In his terms, the overt political

stands of a John Wayne or a Jane Fonda, or the implicit political meanings of a Bette Davis or a Marlon Brando, are irrelevant or insignificant. Whilst no one would claim that they have a direct political 'effect', surely these form part of the way by which values and attitudes are shaped? However, it is probably true to say that Wayne, Fonda et al. are widely believed to be politically insignificant and unimportant, and that the only 'real' politics is decision-making within the institutions of society. Because of this belief, the ideological significance of stars is masked or discounted. One might then suggest that just because it is so masked its real political power is all the greater for being less easily resisted.

King¹ takes up the argument with Alberoni by pointing out that stars have a major control over the representation of people in society – and how people are represented as being in the mass media is going to have some kind of influence (even if only of reinforcement) on how people are in society. Stars have a privileged position in the definition of social roles and types, and this must have real consequences in terms of how people believe they can and should behave.

King also suggests his own set of preconditions for stardom:

- production of surplus (i.e. commodities in excess of basic material needs)
- development of a technology of mass communication
- extensive penetration of the cultural sphere by industrialisation which leads to a separation between a system of action committed to instrumental goals (utilitarian and predominant) and a system of action committed to expressive goals (moralistic and subordinant)
- rigid separation of work and leisure: division of role structure between expressive and instrumental roles
- decline of local cultures and the development of a mass level of culture, transformation from specific to universalistic modes of evaluation
- organisation of the motion picture industry around commodity production and the progressive centralisation of control over production
- a relative increase of social mobility into expressive role positions unconnected with sacred institutions (which in feudal society constituted centres of power).

To some extent, King's preconditions cover the same ground as Alberoni's. King's instrumental–expressive distinction reworks Alberoni's distinction between effective (i.e. in his terms politically significant) roles and non-effective ones. The advantage of King's terms is that they allow one to see the political or ideological significance of expressive roles as well as of instrumental ones. Alberoni's terminology on the other hand does remind us, as suggested above, that expressive roles are not *believed* to be politically significant.

2 Production: Consumption

Both Alberoni, by default, and King, expressly, point to the need to examine stars in terms of ideology. However, in supplying a list of preconditions, neither explain why stars arise on the basis of those preconditions. This question can be approached first in terms of what Edgar Morin (in *New Trends in the Study of Mass Communications*) calls the 'production–consumption dialectic of mass communications'. That is, are stars a phenomenon of production (arising from what the makers of films provide) or of consumption (arising from what the audience for films demands)?

Origins of stardom

The problem of what determines what – production or consumption – is endemic to all discussions of the mass media, and emerges clearly from accounts of the origins of stardom in Hollywood. Looking at this is a good way of highlighting the issues and problems involved.

'The history of movie stardom as an institution is a familiar one', states Richard Schickel in *His Picture in the Papers*, and proceeds to provide a very useful summary of it:

how the producers had resisted giving billing to the actors who played in their little films; how the actors themselves, regarding appearance in a medium that robbed them of what they regarded as their prime artistic resource, their voice, had been glad to hide their shame in anonymity; how the public had begun singling them out of the crowds on the screen, demanding to know more about them, and, more important, demanding to know, in advance, which pictures featured their favourites; how a few independent producers, grasping at any weapon to fight the motion picture trust (composed of the major studios), had acceded to public opinion and had been rewarded by the most deliciously rising sales curves; how the demand for stars was quickly perceived as a factor that could stabilize the industry, since this demand was predictable in a way that the demand for stories or even genres was not; how, as feature-length films established their popularity and the cost of producing these longer films required bank loans, star names came to lead the list of collateral that bankers looked upon with favor when their assistance was sought; how certain actors achieved unprecedented heights of popularity and prosperity almost overnight in the period 1915–1920; and how this phenomenon, this beginning of a new celebrity system, destroyed or crippled almost everyone caught up in it ... (p. 27)

The key event in this history is usually taken to be Carl Laemmle's action of planting a story in the St Louis Post-Despatch to the effect that Florence Lawrence, up to then known as the 'Biograph Girl', had been killed by a trolley car in St Louis, and following it a day later with an advertisement in the trade press denouncing the story as a vicious lie. This event was the first occasion that a film actor's* name be-

*I have throughout used the term 'actor' to refer to both female and male performers, as the term 'actress' seems to me to have strong connotations that both belittle and trivialise women actors.

came known to the public. It is the first example of the deliberate manufacture of a star's image. Equally, runs the argument, it is the first example of the producers of films responding to public demand, giving the public what it wanted. It is thus at the point of intersection of public demand (the star as a phenomenon of consumption) and the producer initiative (the star as a phenomenon of production).

Left at that, within the confines of the film industry and market, there can be little argument that films stars were a phenomenon of consumption that had even been strenuously resisted by the producers in the first instance, although they mightily capitalised upon it once it was under way. There are, however, a couple of problems with the history as it stands. First, the notion of 'demand'. Stars have not existed in all societies at all times. Where does the demand for them stem from? Who defines it? Second, the star system was already a well-developed feature of the popular theatre (especially vaudeville, from which the cinema took its first audiences). Stars were part of the business of show business. If the public demanded it of the cinema, then this was because the public had come to expect it of the entertainment industry as a whole. This then forces us back to the question of why it was part of all entertainment.

A look at how the origins of stardom have been discussed is useful because it orchestrates and concretises the more general issues involved in this section. Let me now turn to some of the explanations of the star system, all of which could be considered in relation to the early period, although they are discussed below in general terms.

Stars as a phenomenon of production

Stars are images in media texts, and as such are products of Hollywood (or wherever). Discussion of Hollywood production generally takes place between two polar views. The first considers Hollywood production as a capitalist production like any other, and in this perspective stars are to be seen in terms of their function in the economy of Hollywood, including, crucially, their role in the manipulation of Hollywood's market, the audience. At the other extreme come views that seem innocent of any consideration of Hollywood in terms of profit, and account for the star phenomenon in terms either of some intrinsic property of the film medium or else the special magic of the stars themselves. (For discussion of stars as the producers of their own images, see Chapter 9.)

Economics

Stars are widely regarded as a vital element in the economics of Hollywood in terms of:

- *capital*. Stars represented a form of capital possessed by the studios. Robert A. Brady sees this as part of the 'monopolistic' character of the Hollywood industry: 'each star is to some extent a holder of a monopoly, and the owner of contracts for the services of a star is the owner of a monopoly product. The majors dominate the employment of this individual monopoly talent' ('The Problem of Monopoly', pp. 131–2).

- *investment*. Stars were a guarantee, or a promise, against loss on investment and even of profit on it.
- *outlay*. Stars were a major portion of a film's budget – hence their handling, in filmic terms, had to be careful and correct.
- *the market*. Stars were used to sell films, to organise the market. Alexander Walker talks of 'the use of a star to stabilise audience response' (*Stardom*, 1974, p. 15). Alice Evans Field writes: 'Star names on the theatre marquee, above the title of the picture, draw great audiences not only because of their personal magnetism but also because they are symbols of certain types of entertainment and because they assure production efforts far above average' (*Hollywood USA*, p. 74.) This suggests how stars both organise the market and act back upon the 'quality' of the films they are in.

Hortense Powdermaker in her 'anthropological investigation' of Hollywood, the Dream Factory, sums this up:

From a business point of view, there are many advantages in the star system. The star has tangible features which can be advertised and marketed – a face, a body, a pair of legs, a voice, a certain kind of personality, real or synthetic – and can be typed as the wicked villain, the honest hero, the fatal siren, the sweet young girl, the neurotic woman. The system provides a formula easy to understand and has made the production of movies seem more like just another business. The use of this formula may serve also to protect executives from talent and having to pay too much attention to such intangibles as the quality of a story or of acting. Here is a standardised product which they can understand, which can be advertised and sold, and which not only they, but also banks and exhibitors, regard as insurance for large profits ... (pp. 228–9)

The economic importance of stars can be highlighted by certain moments in film history: for example, it was the development of the star system by the independent producers (especially Adolph Zukor, but also Laemmle, Fox, Loew, Schenck, Warner) which broke up the monopolistic hold the MPPC (Motion Pictures Patents Company) had on the industry. Also, in 1933 'Paramount ... went into unexpected receivership in January ... Only a break in the European market and the unexpected success of Mae West's films at home enabled Paramount to refloat itself with its own resources at the end of the year' (Walker, *Stardom*, p. 235). Similarly Deanna Durbin 'saved' Universal in 1937, and Edgar Morin argues that Marilyn Monroe (and wide screen) were the industry's answer to the threat of television in the 50s.

Against this, however, it must be pointed out that, even in Hollywood's heyday, stars did not absolutely guarantee the success of a film. Stars move in and out of favour, and even at the height of their popularity may make a film that nobody much goes to see. If some of the careers charted by David Shipman in his two books² are brought down by ill-health or sheer lousy pictures, the majority rise and fall for reasons unconnected with either of these (e.g. Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, John Wayne). For this reason, stars were a very problematic necessity from an economic point of view.

I. C. Jarvie suggests in *Towards a Sociology of the Cinema* that 'stars are neither necessary nor sufficient for success' (p. 188), basing this on a comparison of the failure of the star-studded *Cleopatra* and the success of *Dr No*, *The Sound of Music* and

The Graduate, whose stars were at the time little known. This is fair enough, but it does not demonstrate that stars do not sell films, simply that films do not have to have them for success. (The recent-ness of the examples may also be worth bearing in mind; stars may be less crucial than they were twenty, thirty or forty years ago.)

The economic importance of the stars is of aesthetic consequence in such things as the centring of spectacle on the presentation of the star, and the construction of narratives which display the star's image, and so on. However, the rise and fall of the stars indicates that economics alone cannot explain the phenomenon of stardom.

Manipulation

The success of stardom and stars has been attributed to the manipulation of the market, an analogy with the 'manipulations' of advertising. This is an extension of the economic argument about the stars, although it need not be developed in a Marxist direction (i.e. one can be against manipulation, without being against profits; the question of manipulation can be treated as a question of ethics, unless, following Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy in *Monopoly Capitalism*, for instance, you argue that manipulation of the market is the inevitable consequence of the development of monopoly capitalism). Manipulation arguments in relation to the stars have in fact tended to stress the social-ethical aspect of the question rather than the economic.

The star system lends itself particularly well to the manipulation thesis because of the enormous amount of money, time and energy spent by the industry in building up star images through publicity, promotion, fan clubs, etc. Thomas Harris has described this process in relation to Grace Kelly and Marilyn Monroe. The basic mechanisms for promoting the stars include:

a preliminary publicity buildup starting months or even years before the star is seen on the screen. Frequent devices used in such a buildup are a 'discovery' usually concocted by studio publicists, a series of glamour pictures sent to all the print media, a rumoured romance with another star already well known to the public, or a rumoured starring role in a major film. This publicity finds a primary outlet in syndicated Hollywood gossip columns and movie fan magazines. When the actor or actress is actually cast in a film, the studio assigns a 'unit man' to 'plant' items about the personality in these places as well as national magazines and Sunday newspaper supplements. A network television appearance is also a highly coveted plum in the studio 'pre-sale' campaign for both the picture and the personality. Prior to and during the filming of a picture all publicity emanates from Hollywood. The New York publicity office of the studio then take over the film and continue to handle publicity through the distribution-exhibition phase. New York is also charged with the development of national advertising and the creation of stunts and merchandise tie-ins to exploit the picture. Especially important in this total process is the perpetuation of the star stereotype. It is the publicist's job to interpret the new film role in terms of the pre-established stereotypes and to communicate through the variety of means at his [sic] disposal. ('The Building of Popular Images', p. 46)

Given the sheer elaboration of this apparatus, it is not surprising that the notion of stars as manufactured has developed. Edgar Morin observes:

The internal characteristics [of the star system] are the very ones of grand-scale industrial, mercantile and financial capitalism. The star system is first of all fabrication. This

is the word chosen instinctively by Carl Laemmle, the inventor of the stars: 'The fabrication of stars is the fundamental thing in the film industry'. (*The Stars*, 1960, p. 134)

[this merchandise] is the very type of grand scale capitalism: enormous investment, industrial techniques of rationalisation and standardisation of the system have effectively made the star a merchandise destined for mass consumption. (p. 135)

Out of this emphasis on manufacture, there develops an account of the star system as 'pure' manipulation. That is, both stardom and particular stars are seen as owing their existence solely to the machinery of their production. Not only are they not a phenomenon of consumption (in the sense of demand); they do not even have substance or meaning. This is the essence of Daniel Boorstin's argument in his book *The Image*. According to Boorstin, stars, like so much of contemporary culture, are pseudo-events. That is, they appear to be meaningful but are in fact empty of meaning. Thus a star is well-known for her/his well-knownness, and not for any talent or specific quality. They are an example of the 'celebrity', marketed on the strength of trivial differences of appearance. Stars do not have a 'strong character, but a definable, publicizable personality: a figure which can become a nationally-advertised trademark' (p. 162). 'The qualities which now commonly make a man or woman into a "nationally advertised" brand are in fact a new category of human emptiness' (p. 58).

Boorstin's argument is close to that of Herbert Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man*, where the culture of late capitalist society is characterised by just such thin, pseudo, fabricated elements as Boorstin describes in *The Image*. Marcuse gives this a more intellectually tough argument than Boorstin. He maintains that in previous periods culture (including technology and the sciences as well as the arts and philosophy) acted as a 'negation' of the existing society, pointing to an Other or an Absolute to set over against the *status quo*. (Art he calls a *promesse de bonheur*.) In contemporary society, however, culture has become 'positive', that is, it merely reproduces the *status quo*. This does not mean that art is affirmative of bourgeois values, for to affirm those values, however limited they are, is still to affirm a value, a positive quality, to set against the tawdriness of the achievements of bourgeois society. Rather, art has been drained of meaning, of values, is simply a sideshow. It does not affirm values, merely that which is. The typical becomes the ideal, the average the best. The 'cultural predecessors' of stars can be seen as 'disruptive-characters [such] as the artist, the prostitute, the adultress, the great criminal and outcast, the warrior, the rebel-poet, the devil, the fool', but the tradition has been 'essentially transformed'. 'The vamp, the national hero, the beatnik, the neurotic housewife, the gangster, the star, the charismatic tycoon perform a function very different . . . They are no longer images of another way of life but rather freaks or types of the same life, serving as an affirmation rather than negation of the established order' (p. 60).

This is not the place to discuss all the problems of Marcuse's work (see Paul Mattick's *Critique of Marcuse*). One can see the stars as a manifestation of the one-dimensionality of advanced capitalist society, although I would prefer to see it as a *tendency* of the society rather than a fully worked-through process.

The following objections can be raised against the view of the star phenomenon as sheer manipulation:

- Not all manipulation works. There are many cases of stars who are given the full promotion treatment, but do not make it. (See, for instance, David Shipman's account of Anna Sten in *The Great Stars – the Golden Years*, pp. 505–6.) The fluctuating careers of stars also indicate that audience control was a problem for the studios. This does not mean that the analogy with advertising does not hold, but, equally, not all advertising works – one needs to conceptualise why some advertisements/stars catch on and some do not.
- Boorstin and Marcuse do not examine the content of star images. Indeed, their argument rests upon the idea that there is no content to star images, only surface differences of appearance. But differences of appearances are not, in a visual medium, necessarily superficial, and stars need also to be seen in the context of their roles and their filmic presentation. Examination of stars' images reveals complexity, contradiction and difference. (It might still be legitimately argued that the complexity, etc. is all part of the beguiling, empty spectacle of capitalism. In the end it all depends on how closed (and hopeless) you see society and people as being.)
- In a sense, both Boorstin and Marcuse treat society as a vast mechanism in which human consciousness plays no part except to be used. Manipulation arguments (although it is unfair in the final analysis to lump Marcuse with Boorstin here) depend upon a behavioural concept of human beings. That is, media 'input' has a given 'effect' (in this case, passive acceptance) on the human subject without the intervention of that subject's mind or consciousness. Where the semiotic model of communication stresses the human practices of encoding and decoding, behavioural/manipulation models stress the mechanics of human 'response'. One's position on the stars-as-manipulation will then depend upon one's position on behavioural models of the media and indeed of communication in general.

Fashion

Fashion can be seen as a variation on the manipulation thesis, which takes one of the objections to that thesis, namely the rise and fall in a star's popularity, as a question of the star coming in as a novelty and going out as a has-been. This can be seen as a pure phenomenon of manipulation, and as such is open to the same objections detailed in the previous paragraphs. A further point may be made. Fashion is often assumed to be the ultimate in manipulation because it is so superficial. However, as Jarvie suggests: 'One function a star serves is to fix a type of beauty, to help a physical type identify itself.' Clearly types of beauty define *norms* of attractiveness. Fashion in this sense is a much less superficial or trivial phenomenon than it appears. Seen in this perspective, a change in physical style is also always a change in social meaning. (For further considerations on fashion and social meaning, see Mary Ellen Roach and Joanne Bubolz Eicher (eds.), *Dress, Adornment and The Social Order*.)

The nature of the medium

The economic and manipulation arguments outlined above all tend to come from a perspective hostile to the cinema. From a more friendly perspective comes the

argument that there is something inherent in the film medium that creates stars. Some writers stress the role of the close-up in the creation of stardom. Says Alexander Walker:

until the camera got close enough to record the player's own personality, the film star could not emerge from the stage group. The close-up was the first step to this ... by isolating and concentrating the player's looks and personality, sometimes unconnected with his or her abilities, it was to be the decisive break with stage convention, the most potent means of establishing an artist's uniqueness and the beginning of the dynamic psychological interplay of the filmgoers' and the film actors' emotions. (*Stardom, the Hollywood Phenomenon*, p. 5)

Similarly Richard Schickel compares film and theatre:

the stage is a less intimate medium (even though the audience is physically in the presence of the actors) because the proscenium has a profoundly distancing effect – no close-ups here. (*His Picture in the Papers*, p. 6)

In this way, the star process already under way in the theatre could be intensified by film's supposed inherent intimacy.

This view of the importance of the close-up has been more philosophically considered by Bela Balazs.³ He sees the close-up as a fundamental aspect of the film medium which reveals 'the hidden mainsprings of a life which we had thought we already knew so well', for instance, 'the quality in a gesture of the hand we never noticed before when we saw that hand stroke or strike something' (p. 185). The close-up led to 'the discovery of the human face':

Facial expression is the most subjective manifestation of man [sic], more subjective even than speech, for vocabulary and grammar are subject to more or less universally valid rules and conventions, while the play of features, as has already been said, is a manifestation not governed by objective canons, even though it is largely a matter of imitation. This most subjective and individual of human manifestations is rendered objective in the close-up. (p. 188)

Close-ups are a kind of 'silent monologue' in which:

the solitary human soul can find a tongue more candid and uninhibited than in any spoken soliloquy, for it speaks instinctively, sub-consciously. The languages of the face cannot be suppressed or controlled. (p. 190)

Quite apart from notions of the soul, and Balazs' emphasis on the 'solitariness' of human individuals, this account of the role of the close-up does raise problems. Balazs is essentially treating film as transparent, just 'capturing' the face and the soul it reveals. However, we know that how we read (and produce) facial expressions is deeply dependent on conventions of various kinds: filmic (e.g. Kuleshov's experiments with editing; the role of lighting in highlighting different facial features and so changing expressions), artistic (i.e. the iconography of expressions developed in painting, etc.), and cultural (i.e. facial expressions are coded; cf. Polhemus, *Social Aspects of the Human Body*). However, Balazs is important because he gives expression to a widely held view, namely that the close-up reveals the unmediated personality of the individual, and this belief in the 'capturing' of the 'unique' 'person' of a performer is probably central to the star phenomenon.

Further differences between film and theatre that relate to the star phenomenon are the fact that 'stars of the popular melodramatic and spectacular stage tended to submerge themselves in one or two or three roles' and that the popular press before the arrival of the movies was less interested in entertainers than in 'political and business leaders and inventors' (Schickel op. cit., p. 6). However, all these aspects of film, though they have come to be virtually inseparable from the medium, are not intrinsic to it. As Edgar Morin puts it, 'The stars are typically cinematic and yet there is nothing specifically cinematic about them' (*The Stars*, p. 6). Another way of putting this is to say that stars are not inherent in film as a medium but they are inherent in the cinema as a specific social institution. The change of interest on the part of the popular press related to a wider phenomenon, discussed by Leo Lowenthal in 'The Triumph of Mass Idols', in which hero figures that make the world ('heroes of production') have been displaced by figures who simply enjoy the fruits of the world ('heroes of consumption'). (For further discussion of this see Part Two of this book.) The notions of the importance of the close-up, and of the role being less important than the performer in the cinema, can be related to the aesthetic of realism with which the cinema has predominantly been burdened, the belief that film, like photography, 'captures' or 'reflects' reality. That is, despite their extravagances and extraordinariness, the stars are an aspect of realism because what is foregrounded is their person as much as the characters they play. (See Part Three.)

Magic and talent

The examinations of the star phenomenon so far discussed tend to explain it away, accounting for it by reference to something else (economics, the medium). A very common view, however, though not intellectually very respectable, is that stars are stars because they are exceptional, gifted, wonderful. An extreme version of this view was expressed by Samuel Goldwyn: 'God makes the stars. It's up to the producers to find them' (quoted in Richard Griffith, *The Movie Stars*, p. 25). But even a sociologist, I. C. Jarvie, ultimately comes up with the same sort of notion, maintaining that stars are stars because of 'talent', which includes, according to him, 'striking photogenic looks, acting ability, presence on camera, charm and personality, sex-appeal, attractive voice and bearing' (*Towards a Sociology of the Cinema*, p. 149). Again, Molly Haskell, in discussing the way some women stars counteracted the demeaning roles they had to play, points to their 'special' qualities: 'in the midst of mediocre material, they rose to the surface and projected, through sheer will and talent and charisma, images of emotional and intellectual power' (*From Reverence to Rape*, p. 8).

How much credence you give to such ideas will in the end depend on how much you believe in 'great unique individuals' as opposed to famous people being 'the right type in the right place at the right time' (always remembering that type, place and time are shaped by the same society). However, there are also more immediate, less 'heady' objections to the 'magic' explanation of stars. First, there is the empirical observation that not all highly talented performers becomes stars, nor are all stars highly talented. I imagine anyone can supply their own examples

of both these categories. Second, the notion of 'talent', especially as defined by Jarvie, is historically and culturally specific. Even if one simply meant talent as skill, one would have to ask, skill at what? Not 'acting' in the classic sense, as innumerable examples show. Skill then at being a certain sort of person or image. This may be right, but then the key question is, why does that sort of person become a star? A question once again of culture and ideology. Third, Haskell's positing of a gap between role and performance in the case of certain stars need not be discussed in terms of those stars' magic powers. One can see it either as a contradiction in the film text between the role-as-written and the star image (see p. 129), or else as a question of authorship (i.e. the star's authorial concerns being in conflict with those of a film's other authors; see p. 155).

The enormous economic importance of the stars, the elaborate machinery of image-building and film's importance in establishing character-types all suggest the potential power of the forces of cinematic production for creating the star phenomenon. However, these explanations of the star phenomenon are not sufficient in themselves, and we need to see the phenomenon in its cultural, historical and ideological context to understand where the producers' ideas and images of stardom and of specific stars themselves come from. This will be returned to after a consideration of the stars in terms of consumption.

Stars as a phenomenon of consumption

Looking at the stars from the point of view of production puts the emphasis on the film-makers (including the economic structures within which they work and the medium they use) who make stars, or cause them to exist. However, it has been argued that a more determining force in the creation of stars is the audience – that is, the consumers – rather than the producers of media texts.

Andrew Tudor has suggested a typology of audience/star relationships, drawing on Leo Handel's work and reinforced by the latter's finding that people's favourite stars tend to be of the same sex as themselves, which Handel and Tudor take to indicate that star/audience relationships cannot be based on sexual attraction. (One could of course argue that attraction to one's own sex is also sexual, and that, as homosexuality is taboo in this society, the cinema has provided through the star phenomenon the vicarious and disguised experience of gay feeling for non-gay audiences.) Tudor's model (as given in *Image and Influence*, p. 80) is as follows:

		Range of consequences	
		Context specific	Diffuse
Range of star/individual identification	High	Self-identification	Projection
	Low	Emotional affinity	Imitation (of physical and simple behavioural characteristics)

TYPES OF AUDIENCE/STAR RELATION

The distinction between specific and diffuse consequences is not hard and fast, but is intended to catch the difference between a response that is limited to the 'watching-the-movie situation' and one that has 'consequences for a diffuse range of aspects of the fan's life'.

The four categories of star/audience relationship that emerge in this classification are thus:

- *emotional affinity*. This is the weakest category and 'probably' the most common. 'The audience feels a loose attachment to a particular protagonist deriving jointly from star, narrative and the individual personality of the audience member: a standard sense of involvement' (*Image and Influence*, p. 80).
- *self-identification*. This happens when 'involvement has reached the point at which the audience-member places himself [sic] in the same situation and persona of the star' (p. 81). He quotes one of the women interviewed by Handel as an example of this: 'These actresses I mentioned are great. They make me feel every emotion of their parts. I feel as if it were myself on the screen experiencing what they do' (p. 81).
- *imitation*. This is apparently commonest among the young and takes the star/audience relationship beyond cinema-going, with 'the star acting as some sort of model for the audience' (p. 81).
- *projection*. Imitation merges into projection 'at the point at which the process becomes more than a simple mimicking of clothing, hairstyle, kissing and the like' (pp. 81–2):

The more extreme the projection, the more the person lives his or her life in terms bound up with the favoured star . . . In asking themselves what the star might have done in this situation the star-struck are using the star as a way of dealing with their realities. At the extreme the whole range of life experiences are mediated in this way. The 'real world' becomes constituted in terms derived from the 'star-world'. (pp. 82–3)

(Tudor warns against our taking examples of extreme projection as being widespread.)

What is clear from this account of the star/audience relationship is that the audience's role in shaping the star phenomenon is very limited. That is, the account tells us what audiences do with the star images that they are offered and hence indicates the sources of the success of stardom, but it does not tell us why the offered images take the form they do.

Needs, dreams and the collective unconscious

Many writers see the stars, in general and in specific instances, as giving expression to variously conceptualised inner wants on the part of the mass of the people. Richard Griffith states: 'no machinery ever of itself and by itself made a star. That takes place in the depths of the collective unconscious' (*The Movie Stars*, p. 23). The notion of the collective unconscious is suspect on several counts. It tends to suggest a supra-individual, quasi-metaphysical human consciousness (rather than people having in common the codes of the culture they live in); it is presented as being beyond determination, an essence that precedes existence.

Edgar Morin and Robert K. Merton in their use of 'dreams' and 'needs' do not perpetuate the problems just outlined, but their formulations have their own drawbacks. Morin quotes from some of J. P. Mayer's correspondents who speak of their dreaming about stars, and concludes:

The star thus becomes the food of dreams; the dream, unlike the ideal tragedy of Aristotle, does not purify us truly from our fantasies but betrays their obsessive presence; similarly the stars only partially provoke catharsis and encourage fantasies which would like to but cannot liberate themselves in action. Here the role of the star becomes 'psychotic': it polarises and fixes obsessions. (*The Stars*, p. 164)

It is not clear where Morin gets these ideas of how dreams work from, nor whether they have any theoretical support or validity. Why should one assert that dreams are necessarily more obsessive than cathartic? The way Morin writes does suggest that he sees this 'polarising' effect as in some sense an ideological – or simply 'bad'! – function of the star system, but he does not question where the imagery of dreaming comes from. Finally, he does not examine the problems of the analogy between the dream as a sub- or unconscious individual mental process and films as an at any rate part conscious, rule-governed (the codes of art, etc.), collective/corporate form of cultural production. (This could be said, of course, of other celebrated uses of the film/dream analogy, including Kracauer and Wolfenstein and Leites.)

Robert K. Merton, in his study of the success of Kate Smith's war-bond drive (*Mass Persuasion*, described below, p. 29), stresses her embodiment of 'sincerity' and links this to the experience in the audience of feeling that they are endlessly being 'manipulated' by contemporary society. Smith then responds to a need. This seems to me to be acceptable enough, provided that one puts it (as Merton only partially does) in the context of ideological questions. That is – where does that need itself, and the response to it, come from? What shapes them? Every society (and each class/group at each period of that society) foregrounds certain needs (which may or may not be innate – see Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*), by virtue of both what it promises and what it fails to deliver. Likewise agencies in those societies (e.g. the cinema) provide and/or define answers to those needs. For this reason then I discuss the detail of analyses such as Merton's in the next chapter, under the rubric of ideology.

Alberoni, in arguing against the manipulation thesis of the mass media, comes up with this formula for understanding the production/consumption dialectic: 'the star system . . . never creates the star, but it proposes the candidate for "election", and helps to retain the favour of the "electors"' ('The Powerless Elite' p. 93). This seems to me to be a very useful statement provided one remembers that organising an election is a way of defining and delimiting choice, and that both those who propose candidates and those who elect them are shaped by the particular ideological formations of their situation in society.

3 Ideology

Production and consumption are differentially determining forces in the creation of stars (producers always having more power over commodities than consumers), but both are always mediated by and in ideology. This chapter is not concerned with the ideological content of the star phenomenon (see Part Two), but with what specific kind(s) of ideological work it does, or tries to do, the nature of its 'ideological effect'.⁴

Star versus character (*see also Part Three*)

Stars are, like characters in stories, representations of people. Thus they relate to ideas about what people are (or are supposed to be) like. However, unlike characters in stories, stars are also real people. This point is suggested time and again in writing about stars: 'The people of the movies [come] before us first of all as people, and only secondarily as actors – artists – if at all' (Griffith, *The Movie Stars*, p. xiii). Because stars have an existence in the world independent of their screen/'fiction' appearances, it is possible to believe (with for instance ideas about the close-up revealing the soul, etc.) that as people they are more real than characters in stories. This means that they serve to disguise the fact that they are just as much produced images, constructed personalities as 'characters' are. Thus the value embodied by a star is as it were harder to reject as 'impossible' or 'false', because the star's existence guarantees the existence of the value s/he embodies.

This is to position it at its extreme, and put like this it implies an extreme gullibility on the part of the audience. I do not mean to imply that audiences did not realise that stars had different lives from those of the characters they played. It would be a sign of mental disorder to believe that Greta Garbo actually was Queen Christina. What I think is the case, however, is that the roles and/or the performance of a star in a film were taken as revealing the personality of the star (which then was corroborated by the stories in the magazines, etc.). What was only sometimes glimpsed and seldom brought out by Hollywood or the stars was that that personality was itself a construction known and expressed only through films, stories, publicity, etc. (It is not clear to what extent this elision of star as person and star as image is current today.)

Life-as-theatre

This process was perhaps aided by the growth of notions of life-as-theatre. As Elizabeth Burns points out in her book *Theatricality*, the analogy between life and drama or theatre has been in use from Plato onwards. However, where in earlier

times the analogy derived from 'a view of life directed by God, Providence or some less anthropomorphic spiritual force', current usage derives from 'a growing awareness of the way in which people compose their own characters, contribute to situations and design settings': 'the commonplace analogy is of the world itself as a place where people, like actors, play parts, in an action which is felt obscurely to be designed by "social forces" or the natural drives of individual men' (p. 11). One of the consequences of the growth of this notion is that we have two distinct conceptions of what we are, of our 'selves'. On the one hand, we can believe in the 'existence of a knowable and constant self', which is theoretically distinct from the social roles we have to play and the ways we have of presenting our 'personality' to others. On the other hand, as Burns stresses, there is increasing anxiety about the validity of this autonomous, separate identity – we may only be our 'performance', the way in which we take on the various socially defined modes of behaviour that our culture makes available. Clearly this is not the place to tease out all the philosophical consequences of this, but if we accept for the moment the fact of uncertainty with regard to notions of a separate self and public self-presentation, performance, role-playing, etc., we can I think see a connection with the star phenomenon.

Burns stresses the shared conventions of performance in the theatre, whereby the actor performs and interprets a role and thereby constructs a character. The actor 'intervenes . . . between the *authenticity* of his own life, of his own self and its past as known to himself (and as known or assumed at least in part to the audience) and the *authenticated* life of the character he is playing' (pp. 146–7). ('Authenticated' refers to the way an actor establishes a correspondence between the character as played and the social norms of the time – or the way s/he embodies a social type; see Part Two.) Stars, as I've already suggested, collapse this distinction between the actor's authenticity and the authentication of the character s/he is playing. While in some cases (John Wayne, Shirley Temple) this collapse may root the character in a 'real', 'authentic', 'true' self (the star's), in others (Bette Davis, Lana Turner) the gap between the 'self' and the performance, appearance, constructed persona may be part of the meaning of those stars. That is to say, whereas Wayne and Temple point to a belief in a separate identity, Davis and Turner point to the anxieties surrounding the validity of that notion of individual identity. (Wayne and Davis are discussed below; on Temple see Charles Eckert's article in *Jump Cut*, 2; on Turner refer to my article in *Movie*, no. 25.) The star phenomenon orchestrates the whole set of problems inherent in the commonplace metaphor of life-as-theatre, role-playing, etc., and stars do this because they are known as performers, since what is interesting about them is not the character they have constructed (the traditional role of the actor) but rather the business of constructing/performing/being (depending on the particular star involved) a 'character'.

A historical paradigm – from gods to mortals

A third aspect of the question of how the star phenomenon works ideologically emerges from the historical paradigm of the development of stardom, found in Morin, Walker, Schickel, Griffith and others. This is that in the early period, stars

were gods and goddesses, heroes, models – embodiments of *ideal* ways of behaving. In the later period, however, stars are identification figures, people like you and me – embodiments of *typical* ways of behaving.

Some take the transition point as being the coming of sound. Walker writes:

A 'loss of illusion' was certainly one of the first effects that the talkies had on audiences. Richard Schickel defined 'silence' as the most valuable attribute of the pre-talkie stars. 'A godhead is supposed to be inscrutable. It is not expected that he speaks directly to us. It is enough that his image be present so that we may conveniently worship it.' (Schickel and Hurlburt, p. 13) Once they had dialogue on their lips, the once-silent idols suffered a serious loss of divinity. They ceased to be images in a human shape personifying the emotions through the delicately graded art of pantomime. Their voices made them as real as the audience watching them. (*Stardom*, p. 223)

Alexander Walker sees sound itself as creating de-divinisation of the stars, partly because it enhanced the naturalism of the medium. Edgar Morin on the other hand sees the progress from gods to identification figures as part of the 'embourgeoisement' of the medium. He suggests 1930 as the turning point, but maintains that sound is only one of the elements in the process. Sound brought a certain realism ('the concrete truth of noises, the precision and nuances of words', *The Stars*, p. 15), but the search for 'realism' was also marked by the growth of 'social themes' in Hollywood cinema (Vidor, *Fury*, *Mr Deeds Goes to Town*, etc.). Concurrently, the Depression caused Hollywood to commit itself to the 'dogma' of the happy end: 'The new optimistic structures favoured the "escapism" of the audience and in this sense departed from realism. But in another sense, the mythic content of films were "profaned", brought down to earth' (p. 16). This, Morin argues, constitutes the embourgeoisement of the cinematic imagination. The cinema was a 'plebeian spectacle' at first, drawing on the melodrama and penny-dreadful, characterised by magic, extraordinary adventures, sudden reversals, the sacrificial death of the hero, violent emotions, etc. 'Realism, psychologism, the "happy end" and humour reveal precisely the bourgeois transformation of this imagination' (p. 16). Chance and occult possession are replaced by psychological motivation. Bourgeois individualism cannot take the death of the hero, hence the insistence on the happy end. So stars become more usual in appearance, more 'psychologically' credible in personality, more individuated in image (and hence less obviously standing for a given virtue or, as Janet Gaynor said of herself, 'essence'⁵). The star does not cease to be special, but now combines 'the exceptional with the ordinary, the ideal with the everyday' (p. 19).

In Morin's formulation, this combination of the ideal and the typical is a product of the mingling of the proletarian and the bourgeois imagination. (There are, it needs to be said, considerable problems with identifying early cinema with proletarian culture/consciousness – since it can hardly be said to have been a *product* of the proletariat – and with the apparent valuation, simply because 'proletarian', of notions of chance, the occult and violent emotion.) The same combination could be seen as another aspect of the wider process (affecting all levels of art and culture) of one-dimensionality described by Marcuse. Thus the early stars maintained the distinction between the ideal (what should be) and the *status quo* (what is) – they were a 'negation'. However, the later, demystified stars closed the gap

between the ideal and the *status quo*, and can be seen as part of the process whereby the type, the average, has become the ideal.

Another way of looking at this process is suggested in the discussion by Orrin E. Klapp and Leo Lowenthal of the 'deterioration of the hero'. Morin and Marcuse both work within forms of Marxist thought; Klapp and Lowenthal on the other hand work within a context of liberal thought, seeing the deterioration of the hero as the corruption of bourgeois ideals.

Klapp's account of the deterioration of the hero, in *Heroes, Villains and Fools*, focuses on the following points in contemporary images: the fact that the hero as a model is not much (if any) better than the average; that high 'character' is not stressed; that the 'goodfellow' quality so currently valued is easily simulated; that models are diverse and contradictory. Klapp does not suggest what should have caused this change, nor does he link this account to specific earlier ideals, just to 'ideal' in general.

Lowenthal's account is based on an analysis ('The Triumph of Mass Idols', described below, in Part Two) of biographies of heroes/celebrities in popular magazines, in which he sees a shift away from heroes who embody the ideals of what he calls an 'open-minded liberal society' (p. 113) to those who are 'adjusted to a closed society'. Thus success is shown as based not on work but on luck: 'There is no longer a pattern for the way up. Success has become an accidental and irrational event' (p. 126). Everything in the biographies points towards a conception of the hero as 'passive': s/he is a 'product' of her/his background (by virtue of 'a kind of primitive Darwinian concept of social facts', p. 119); there is no 'development', i.e. progress from childhood to adulthood, for the child is just seen as 'a midget edition' (p. 124) of the adult: 'people are not conceived as the responsible agents of their fate in all phases of their lives, but as the bearers of certain useful or not so useful character traits which are pasted on them like decorations or stigmas of shame' (p. 125). There is an emphasis on co-operation, sociability, good sportsmanship as against unrestrained 'emotional' behaviour, hence 'it is a world of dependency' (p. 129).

Lowenthal, like Klapp, writes within the context of liberal discontent. This view is concerned with the erosion of liberal values such as individualism and freedom by the large-scale development of industrial, urban society, and in particular by such pressures towards conformism as production-line goods, the mass media, the centralised organisation of education and government, etc. The key concept of this view is the 'mass', as in 'mass society', 'mass communications', 'mass culture', etc. Social issues are then posed in terms of the individual versus society/the mass, rather than class struggle, and inevitably, as with Lowenthal, notions like sociability and dependence are devalued. Nevertheless, Lowenthal's analysis does suggest a further possible way of conceptualising the work the star phenomenon performs for ideology, namely the suppression of notions of human practice, achievement, making the world.

Stars and the status quo

Discussion of Marcuse and Lowenthal has already pointed to possible ways of conceptualising the ideological function of the star phenomenon – as negation of

negation (Marcuse), as concealer of the humanity which makes history (Lowenthal): functions which serve to preserve the *status quo*. The majority of accounts of the star phenomenon are concerned with this 'conservative' function, but conceptualised in different ways.

In his *Collective Search for Identity* Klapp suggests that stars (and other celebrities) can have one of three different relationships to prevalent norms – *reinforcement, seduction and transcendence*.

'To reinforce a person in social roles – encourage him [sic] to play those which are highly valued – and to maintain the image of the group superself are presumably the classic functions of heroes in all societies' (p. 219). Given Klapp's alternative, but necessarily exceptional, categories of seduction and transcendence (see below), this is acceptable. His elaboration of the concept is more problematic:

The beauty of heroes as a character-building force is that the individual, daydreaming, chooses for himself [sic], within the opportunities the available models provide – which, fortunately for the social order, usually 'just happen to be' more supporting than erosive or subversive. (p. 220)

We might want to question here the extent to which the individual is not so shaped by the ideologies of her/his culture, or so structurally placed within her/his society, that choice becomes very delimited and predefined indeed. Equally, Klapp does not explore the implications of his view that models 'just happen to be' supportive of the *status quo* – his inverted commas show he is aware of the problem, but his liberalism does not allow him to ask who fashions the *status quo* or who controls the provision of models.

In the seduction scenario the hero breaks the rules or norms, but in a charming way. Klapp's examples are Mickey Spillane or James Bond, who demonstrate that 'it is possible, permissible, even admirable, to romp in the forbidden pasture' (p. 227). Klapp points out that:

the main shortcoming of the seductive hero as teacher is that he [sic] leads a person into experience felt traditionally to be wrong, but does not redefine and recreate standards by which experience is to be judged. He [sic] eludes and confuses morality, but makes little contribution to it in terms of insight. (p. 228)

In the case of transcendence, the hero 'produces a fresh point of view, a feeling of integrity, and makes a new man [sic]' (p. 229). This is more than just getting away with something, as in the previous category, since it does 'redefine and recreate standards by which experience is to be judged'. One of Klapp's examples in this category is Jean-Paul Belmondo, whose popularity with college students he sees as epitomising their discovery of a radical new lifestyle. Another example is I think more interesting, since it suggests the possibility of transcendence in a much less intellectually respectable instance. He quotes an account by a woman student recalling her enjoyment of Sandra Dee in *Gidget*, particularly her perseverance in learning to be a surfer, despite mockery, setbacks, etc. Here is an example, Klapp suggests, of a star offering 'a springboard by which a girl can vicariously leap from femininity into a role usually reserved for boys' (p. 234). There are problems with Klapp's categories of seduction and transcendence. How, for instance, can one

actually distinguish with any rigour between the two? Can one not see both, and especially transcendence, as simply providing a 'safety-valve' for discontent, and by providing expression of it siphoning it off as a substantial subversive force? The answer to that depends on how hermetic your conception of the mass media, and of ideology, is. My own belief is that the system is a good deal more 'leaky' than many people would currently maintain. In my view, to assert the total closure of the system is essentially to deny the validity of class/sex/race struggles and their reproduction at all levels of society and in all human practices. I find the Sandra Dee/*Gidget* example particularly suggestive because it stresses both the possibility of a leak at a very unprestigious, ordinary, exploitative part of the system, and the role of the spectator in making the image subversive for her.

The notion of subversion is discussed elsewhere in this book (see p. 52), but most examinations, of the star phenomenon, other than this brief section in Klapp, discuss stars as in some sense or other reinforcing of dominant values.

Reinforcement of values under threat

Klapp's category of reinforcement suggests only that heroes reinforce by embodying dominant values. Two studies of individual stars, William R. Brown on Will Rogers and Charles Eckert on Shirley Temple, suggest that stars embody social values that are to some degree in crisis.

In *Imagemaker: Will Rogers and the American Dream* Brown shows how Rogers embodied the four strands of the American Dream (the dignity of the common individual, democracy as the guarantee of freedom and quality, the gospel of hard work and the belief in material progress) at a point in time when the dream was becoming increasingly hard to believe in. Thus the 'dignity of the common individual' strand of the dream was linked in Rogers's image with that of the 'sturdy yeoman' at a time when farmers were suffering from a decline in their purchasing power as compared to other groups in the economy and from their gradual incorporation into a vast market economy. There was concurrently 'governmental corruption, financial greed, crime and a revolution in morals' (p. 60) and the emergence of anti-heroes, notably Al Capone:

Thus, during the twenties, the times called for an embodiment of the dream of the worth and dignity of the individual. During the thirties, when the great famine came, citizens cried out for such affirmation. Where were the dignity and worth as the hungry in the cities stood in line for bread or soup; as lonely men left families and walked or rode forth on the quest not for the holy grail but for gainful employment – only to be lost or followed later by wives and children with nowhere to go except to look for the father ... as there seemed no end to the suffering in the winters and no way of countering human misery? (p. 61)

In the face of this experience, Brown argues, Rogers reaffirmed the reality and validity of the 'sturdy yeoman', and similarly with the other values of the American Dream. One could say that at a time when the American value system might have been redirected, the old goals appearing inadequate, Rogers was there to demonstrate that there was life still in the traditional values and attitudes.

Eckert's article, 'Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller', uses a similar model, but with greater attention to the specificities of ideology. This leads him to

stress the function of Temple for dominant ideology and interests, rather than for the reassurance of the audience as in Brown's approach. Eckert links Temple to the political solutions offered by the Republicans and Democrats to the poverty born of the Depression – the former stressed the role of individual charity (giving to the poor), seeing the federal relief programme proposed by the Democrats as an attack on the American ideals of initiative and individualism. By 1934, says Eckert, there was a deadlock – federal relief was not really working, yet its introduction had 'utterly demoralised charity efforts'. Into this situation comes Temple. The emphasis in her films is on love as a natural, spontaneous opening of one's heart so that 'the most implacable realities alter and disperse'; it is a love that is not universal but rather elicited by need:

Shirley turns like a lodestone toward the flintiest characters in her films – the wizened wealthy, the defensive unloved, figures of cold authority like Army officers, and tough criminals. She assaults, penetrates and opens them, making it possible for them to *give* of themselves. All of this returns upon her at times, forcing her into situations where she must decide who *needs* her most. It is her *agon*, her calvary, and it brings her to her most despairing moments. This confluence of needing, giving, of deciding whose need is greatest, also obviously suggests the relief experience. (p. 19)

Eckert stresses that one has to take other elements into account to understand fully Temple's star status – e.g. 'the mitigation of reality through fantasy, the exacerbated emotions relating to insufficiently cared for children, the commonly stated philosophy of pulling together to whip the Depression', but none the less insists that 'Shirley and her burden of love appeared at a moment when the official ideology of charity had reached a final and unyielding form and when the public sources of charitable support were drying up' (ibid.). I would generalise from this the notion of the star's image being related to contradictions in ideology – whether within the dominant ideology, or between it and other subordinated/revolutionary ideologies. The relation may be one of displacement (see next section, 'Displacement of values'), or of the suppression of one half of the contradiction and the foregrounding of the other (see Merton on Kate Smith, p. 29 below), or else it may be that the star effects a 'magic' reconciliation of the apparently incompatible terms. Thus if it is true to say that American society has seen sexuality, especially for women, as wrong and, in effect, 'extraordinary', and yet has required women to be both sexy and pure and ordinary, then one can see Lana Turner's combination of sexuality and ordinariness, or Marilyn Monroe's blend of sexiness and innocence, as effecting a magical synthesis of these opposites. This was possible partly through the specific chains of meaning in the images of those two stars, and partly through, once again, the fact of their real existence as individuals in the world, so that the disunity created by attaching opposing qualities to their images was none the less rendered a unity simply by virtue of the fact that each was only one person. (One can see this process in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, where the character of Cora is totally contradictory, endlessly given 'inconsistent' motivation by the script; so a discussion of Cora as a constructed character would reveal nothing but fragmentation, yet, because it is played by Lana Turner, a unity imposes itself. See Dyer, 'Four Films of Lana Turner'.)

Displacement of values

So far I have been discussing the way stars may reinforce aspects of ideology simply by repeating, reproducing or reconciling them. However, both Barry King and Eckert (in his article on Shirley Temple) suggest that reinforcement may be achieved not so much by reiterating dominant values as by concealing prevalent contradictions or problems.

King discusses this in general terms. What he calls 'Hollywood studio realism' is built around 'the centrifuge of the hero', and is, he claims, 'inescapably social commentary' – yet it must not offend the audience (for else it would not sell). The star solves this problem 'because he or she converts the opinion expressed in the film to an expression of his being ... he converts the question "why do people feel this way?" to "how does it feel to have such feelings?"' This works in terms of the producers: 'The stars ... ease the problem of judgement (which would politicise media) off the shoulders of those controlling the media by throwing it onto the realm of personal experience and feelings.' Equally it works for the audience, depoliticising their consciousness by individualising it, rendering the social personal:

By embodying and dramatising the flow of information, the stars promote depoliticised modes of attachment (i.e. acceptance of the *status quo*) in its audience. The stars promote a privatisation or personalisation of structural determinants, they promote a mass consciousness in the audience. Individuals who perceive their world in terms of personal relevance alone are individuals in a privatised mass. Their personal troubles tend to remain personal troubles.

The stars serve to mask people's awareness of themselves as class members by reconstituting social differences in the audience 'into a new polarity pro-star/anti-star ... collective experience is individualised and loses its collective insignificance'. In all these ways then stars, by virtue of being experienced (that is they are a phenomenon of experience not cognition) and individuated (embodying a general social value/norm in a 'unique' image), and having an existence in the real world, serve to defuse the political meanings that form the inescapable but potentially offensive or explosive point of departure of all media messages. King has not argued this through in the case of a specific star, but the argument might run that John Wayne or Jane Fonda, both stars with obvious political associations, act unavoidably to obscure the political issues they embody simply by demonstrating the lifestyle of their politics and displaying those political beliefs as an aspect of their personality. This means that films and stars are ideologically significant in the most general sense of cutting audiences off from politics, rendering them passive (cf. Lowenthal), but not ideologically significant in the narrower sense of reinforcing a given political standpoint. The specific politics of Wayne and Fonda would thus be irrelevant in discussing their ideological function, which is identical with that of all stars.

Whilst I would certainly share King's view as a description of a *tendency* of the star phenomenon, nevertheless I find it hard to discount the specific ideological meaning/function of given stars. King's view depends upon dismissing as politically irrelevant such things as lifestyles, feelings and 'the personal'. Obviously whether or not one regards these things as political depends upon one's politics.

My own feeling is that we are so shaped and penetrated by our society that the personal is always political. In this perspective it may be true to say that Wayne or Fonda are politically irrelevant in terms of converting the 'issues' of conventionally conceived right or left politics respectively, but precisely because they are experiential, individual living embodiments of those politics they may convey the implications of those politics in terms of, for example, sex roles, everyday life, etc. Under what circumstances this can happen is discussed below, pp. 77–83.

Charles Eckert's discussion of Shirley Temple stresses the way in which Temple's image both 'asserts and denies' problem aspects of Depression-capitalist society. Money, in the Republican ideological complex to which Temple's films belong, was a problematic issue: 'as a charitable gift [it] was benevolent, whereas [money] in the form of dole was destructive'. Charity and initiative were the values to be foregrounded, while money was 'ambivalent and repressed':

In Shirley Temple's films and biographies, through a slight but very important displacement, charity appears as love and initiative as work. Both love and work are abstracted from all social and psychological realities. They have no causes; they are unmotivated. (...) Money is subjected, in keeping with its ambivalent nature, to two opposing operations. In Shirley's films and the depictions of real life attitudes toward money, it is censored out of existence. It is less than destructive. It is nothing. But in an opposing movement, found largely in Shirley's biographies, money breaks free and induces an inebriated fantasy that a Caliban would embrace, a vision of gold descending from the heavens, a treasure produced from a little girl's joy and curls and laughter. (p. 20)

Eckert's analysis seems to me to be in many respects exemplary for its linking of the produced image to the specific ideological realities of its time. Of course, not all stars will require the concept of displacement to account for their ideological functioning, but many will and Temple is a good example of the usefulness of the concept, since she is the kind of star so apparently without ideological significance. (It is a pity all the same that Eckert does not discuss her more direct, obvious embodiment of ideological conceptions of the family, childhood and femininity, and her relationships with black characters in the films.)

Compensation

The notion of stars compensating people for qualities lacking in their lives is obviously close to the concept of stars embodying values that are under threat. The latter are presumably qualities which people have an idea of, but which they do not experience in their day-to-day lives. However, compensation implies not that an image makes one believe all over again in the threatened value, but that it shifts your attention from that value to some other, lesser, 'compensatory' one.

Leo Lowenthal sees the shift as one from active involvement in business, politics, the productive sphere, to active involvement in leisure and consumption:

It is some comfort for the little man [sic] who has become expelled from the Horatio Alger dream, who despairs of penetrating the thicket of grand strategy in politics and business, to see his heroes as a lot of guys who like or dislike highballs, cigarettes, tomato juice, golf, and social gatherings – just like himself. ('The Triumph of Mass Idols', p. 135)

Lowenthal sees that this is a problem of real structural failures in society, not just a crisis of belief in an ideology. This perspective also informs Robert K. Merton's study of Kate Smith in his book *Mass Persuasion*. This is a study of the enormously successful war-bond drive conducted by Kate Smith on 21 September 1943. Many factors contributed to this success (length of broadcast, its special build-up, the content of what Smith said, etc.), but none more so than the image of Smith herself. Merton suggests that there was a congruence between Smith's image and the themes used to sell the bonds (e.g. patriotism, self-sacrifice, etc.), but above all notes that interviewees for his study stressed time and again Smith's sincerity. The radio broadcast itself 'corroborated' Smith's image of sincerity by the fact that she was doing it for nothing and that it went on for so long and yet she never flagged. Equally her image had been built up by the convergence of a variety of factors:

published accounts of her charities; inadvertent and casual radio references to her contributions; expressions of her identification with other plain people; the halo transferred from the kind of people she talks about to herself – all these contribute to her established reputation as a doer of good. (p. 100)

Smith's image is then a condensation of various traditional values, 'guaranteed' by the actual existence of Smith as a person, producing her as an incarnation of sincerity.

Merton's interviewees contrasted Smith's sincerity with 'the pretenses, deceptions and dissembling which they observe in their daily experience' (p. 142). Merton suggests that the experience of being manipulated characterises contemporary society, it is one of 'the psychological effects of a society which, focused on capital and the market, tends to instrumentalise human relationships' (p. 143):

The emotional emphasis placed on Smith's 'really meaning what she says' derives from the assumption that advertisers, public relations counsels, salesmen, promoters, script writers, politicians and, in extreme cases, ministers, doctors and teachers are systematically manipulating symbols in order to gain power or prestige or income. It is the expression of a wish to be considered as a person rather than a potential client or customer. It is a reaction against the feelings of insecurity that stem from the conviction that others are dissembling and pretending to good-fellowship to gain one's confidence and make one more susceptible to manipulation. (p. 144)

The Smith following ... is no mere aggregate of persons who are entertained by a popular singer. For many, she has become the symbol of a moral leader who 'demonstrates' by her own behaviours that there need be no discrepancy between appearance and reality in the sphere of human relationships. That an entertainer should have captured the moral loyalties of so large a following is itself an incisive commentary on prevailing social and political orientations. (p. 145)

Although one could quarrel with aspects of Merton's formulation (the notion of 'a person' should not be taken as a given or an absolute, since notions of what it is to be human are culturally and historically specific; it may be that the discrepancy between appearance and reality in human relationships is necessary and inescapable, Smith's appeal therefore being unrealisably utopian), at the level of description it seems very persuasive.

Merton also explores other aspects of Smith's image, unfortunately in less de-

tail. Thus he suggests that Smith embodies the first of the 'three prevailing models for the feminine sex role: the domesticity pattern, the career pattern, and the glamour pattern' at the expense of the other two. By reinforcing and therefore legitimating the domesticity pattern, she 'serves to mitigate the strain and conflict' these contradictory roles impose on women. 'Smith is taken as a living testimonial that the cultural accent on feminine attractiveness may be safely abandoned' (p. 147). 'She ... provides emotional support for those who are shut off from occupational achievement.' Merton discusses her mother image, her success (though remaining 'just one of us') and her 'unspoiledness' in similar terms, always relating it to specific senses of lack of anxiety in sectors of the audience. (The sincerity emphasis, unlike the others, Merton found in all classes and both sexes.)

Charisma

Merton's ideas, as well as those of Eckert and Brown, all relate to the notion of 'charisma' as developed by Max Weber in the field of political theory. I'd like to end Part One by discussing Weber's theories and their relevance to the star phenomenon, as, in a suitably modified form, the notion of charisma (in the Weberian sense, not just meaning 'magic', etc.) does combine concepts of social function with an understanding of ideology.

Weber was interested in accounting for how political order is legitimated (other than by sheer force), and suggested three alternatives: tradition (doing what we've always done), bureaucracy (doing things according to agreed but alterable, supposedly rational rules) and charisma (doing things because the leader suggests it). Charisma is defined as 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he [sic] is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least superficially exceptional qualities' (*On Charisma and Institution Building*, p. 329).

There are certain problems about transferring the notion of charisma from political to film theory. As Alberoni has pointed out, the star's status depends upon her/his not having any institutional political power. Yet there is clearly some correspondence between political and star charisma, in particular the question of how or why a given person comes to have 'charisma' attributed to him/her. E. A. Shils in 'Charisma, Order and Status' suggests that

The charismatic quality of an individual as perceived by others, or himself [sic] lies in what is thought to be his connection with (including possession by or embedment in) some *very central* feature of man's existence and the cosmos in which he lives. The centrality, coupled with intensity, makes it extraordinary.

One does not have to think in terms of 'man's existence' and 'the cosmos', somewhat suspect eternal universals, to accept the general validity of this statement, especially as it is probably very often the case that what is culturally and historically specific about the charismatic person's relationship to her/his society may none the less present itself, or be read, as being an eternal universal relationship.

S. N. Eisenstadt in his introduction to Weber's *Charisma and Institution Building* has taken this one stage further by suggesting, on the basis of a survey of com-

munications research, that charismatic appeal is effective especially when the social order is uncertain, unstable and ambiguous and when the charismatic figure or group offers a value, order or stability to counterpoise this. Linking a star with the whole of a society may not get us very far in these terms, unless one takes twentieth-century western society to have been in constant instability. Rather, one needs to think in terms of the relationships (of the various kinds outlined above) between stars and specific instabilities, ambiguities and contradictions in the culture (which are reproduced in the actual practice of making films, and film stars).

This model underlines one of the earliest attempts to analyse a star image, Alistair Cooke's *Douglas Fairbanks: The Making of a Screen Character*, published in 1940. Cooke accounts for Fairbanks's stardom in terms of the appropriateness of his 'Americanness' to the contemporary situation of America:

At a difficult time in American history, when the United States was keeping a precarious neutrality in the European war, Douglas Fairbanks appeared to know all the answers and knew them without pretending to be anything more than 'an all-round chap, just a regular American' (*The American*). The attraction of this flattering transfer of identity to the audience did not have to be obvious to be enjoyed. The movie fan's pleasure in Fairbanks might have been expressed in the simple sentence of a later French critic: 'Douglas Fairbanks is a tonic. He laughs and you feel relieved.' In this period of his earliest films it was no accident that his best-liked films should have been *His Picture in the Papers*, *Reggie Mixes In*, *Manhattan Madness*, and *American Aristocracy*. These were respectively about the American mania for publicity; about a society playboy who was not above finding his girl in a downtown cabaret and fighting a gangster or two to keep her; about a Westerner appalled at the effete manners of the East, and about a Southerner of good family who married into 'bean-can' nobility, and was healthily oblivious of any implied snobbery. Here already was the kernel of a public hero close enough, in manner and get-up, to contemporary America to leave his admirers with the feeling that they were manfully facing the times rather than escaping from them. (pp. 16-17)

Marilyn Monroe provides another example. Her image has to be situated in the flux of ideas about morality and sexuality that characterised the 50s in America and can here be indicated by such instances as the spread of Freudian ideas in post-war America (registered particularly in the Hollywood melodrama), the Kinsey report, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, rebel stars such as Marlon Brando, James Dean and Elvis Presley, the relaxation of cinema censorship in the face of competition from television, etc. (In turn, these instances need to be situated in relation to other levels of the social formation, e.g. actual social and sexual relations, the relative economic situations of men and women, etc.) Monroe's combination of sexuality and innocence is part of that flux, but one can also see her 'charisma' as being the apparent condensation of all that within her. Thus she seemed to 'be' the very tensions that ran through the ideological life of 50s America. You could see this as heroically living out the tensions or painfully exposing them.

Just as star charisma needs to be situated in the specificities of the ideological configurations to which it belongs (a process discussed in Part Two), so also virtually all sociological theories of stars ignore the *specificities* of another aspect of the phenomenon – the audience. (Assumptions about the audience as a generalised, homogenous collectivity abound in the material surveyed above.) The