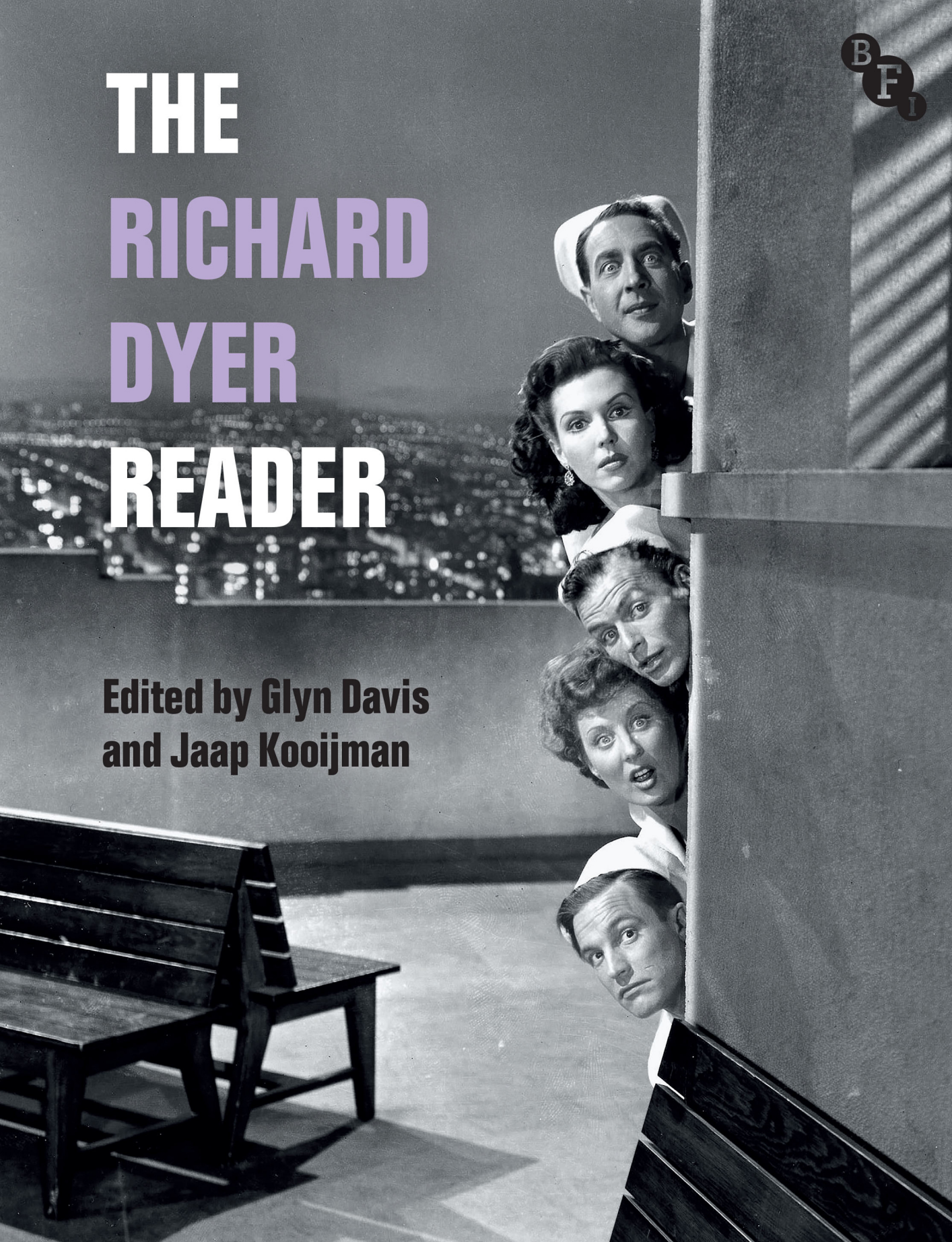


THE RICHARD DYER READER

Edited by Glyn Davis
and Jaap Kooijman



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Richard Dyer holding a portrait of the German director Wieland Speck; photographed by Erwin Olaf at the 1986 International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in Amsterdam. (Courtesy of Studio Erwin Olaf and Collection IAV-Atria)

INTRODUCTION TO *THE RICHARD DYER READER*

Glyn Davis and Jaap Kooijman

In December 1986, Richard Dyer was arrested. He was attempting to get back into the United Kingdom after attending the International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in Amsterdam. Dyer had been an invited speaker at the event, where he had given talks on Judy Garland and Rock Hudson, on underground cinema, and on pornography. The last of these was based on his essay 'Coming to terms' (see Section 5), and he had taken some pornographic materials with him to use as illustration. Returning from Amsterdam, he was stopped and searched for drugs; the customs officers found the porn. Dyer cooperatively admitted to having more such materials at home, which led to the officers searching Dyer's entire house. They confiscated all of his videos and a number of pornographic magazines; he was formally arrested on a charge of importing obscene materials. As he told Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis the following year:

I did eventually get everything back (apart from the tape I'd 'imported') after a lawyer had written to say they had no right to take it. I won on the grounds that the material had been legally obtained in Britain. I didn't fight to get the remaining tape back, partly because it's so easy to replace, but also because I couldn't be sure of the political support I would get, since the Left and feminists are divided on the issue.¹

Dyer candidly relates this anecdote in a manner that combines the personal, the political, and the academic. Having delivered a public but scholarly talk on pornography, he subsequently found himself subject to personal and invasive scrutiny for owning copies of the material he had discussed; whilst under threat of legal action, he remained sensitive to wider debates and attitudes towards porn from various political groups.

1. Richard Dyer, 'A conversation on pornography', in Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis (eds.), *Coming on Strong: Gay Politics and Culture*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp. 211–212.

The personal, the political, and the academic regularly combine in Dyer's writings and talks, sometimes in unexpected admixtures, always in ways that provide insight. *The Richard Dyer Reader* attempts to pay attention to all three facets, in isolation and in combination, by providing a substantive introduction to his output over a span of more than five decades. The direct title of the Reader recognises that these elements combine in one person and their work. The synthesis of these three distinct factors was acknowledged in an epistolary essay by Amy Villarejo, in which she articulated the multiple voices of Dyer's writing – its scholarly sources and inspirations; its queer sex-positive politics; and its democratic, reader-friendly accessibility:

From Raymond Williams, Richard derives big-picture clarity about the role of culture and thought. From queer experience, or what he charmingly describes as the multiple experiences of queerness, he offers a keen sense of the performative nature of identity [...], never diminishing the presence and pleasures of hanky-panky and eroticism, and never abandoning the complexity and delights of queer style. From a commitment to liveliness and readability, Richard delivers a prose that balances, entices, and specifies, all the while seeking to discover, with humility and wit [...], what matters and how.²

Dyer has used this composite voice and worldview to forge and present vital, ground-breaking contributions to a number of fields: cultural studies, film and television studies, lesbian and gay studies, whiteness studies. In the 1970s and 1980s, as he established his career and profile, he made key contributions to – and thus helped to shape – all of these nascent disciplines. He often did this in contrast to emerging orthodoxies. For instance, as Andy Medhurst has noted, Dyer's writing did not square with the dominant tone and approach of the then-leading academic film journal *Screen*: 'He liked Hollywood, he told jokes, he blasphemously neglected *La Grande Syntagmatique* in favour of Lana Turner's frocks.'³ And yet Dyer's work has been published in an extraordinarily diverse array of publications (including *Screen*): radical pamphlets, newspapers and magazines, educational resources, festival programmes, conference proceedings, academic journals and edited collections... This Reader samples from across these many types of material, mingling canonical with lesser-known pieces of work, sustained explorations of topics with shorter interventions.

Born in Leeds in 1945 but raised in Beckenham (now part of Greater London), Dyer was sent away to boarding school where he was, as he told Dario Llinares, 'a lower-middle-class boy in a second-rate upper-class school.'⁴ His experiences at

2. Amy Villarejo, 'The Gay and the Rad', *Cinema Journal* 57:2 (Winter 2018), p. 162.

3. Andy Medhurst, 'Queer feelings [review of *Only Entertainment*]', *Sight and Sound* 3:3 (March 1993), p. 35.

4. Dario Llinares and Neil Fox, The Cinematologists podcast, 'Episode 43: Professor Richard Dyer', 6 April 2017, <http://www.cinematologists.com/podcastarchive/2017/4/6/episode-43-professor-richard-dyer>

the school fostered a sense of class awareness that would subsequently permeate his writing. In 1968, Dyer graduated from the University of St Andrews with an MA in French; the earliest essay to feature in *The Richard Dyer Reader*, on Jean-Jacques Rousseau (see Section 4), was published while he was still a student. Following graduation, he spent a year exploring different opportunities. During the summer of 1968, Dyer lived in Paris where he was employed as an English teacher at a mental health institution. Back in the UK, he worked in theatre, first as the assistant to Laverne Meyer of the Northern Dance Theatre in Manchester, then to Julian Oldfield, the director of the newly-opened Gateway Theatre in Chester. When asked to direct Noël Coward's *South Sea Bubble*, a play he found too reactionary, Dyer left to live in London, where he worked at the gay coffee bar As You Like It on Monmouth Street. The bar was across the street from the Soul City record store, where Dyer could find the latest soul and Motown releases.⁵

During this peripatetic year, Dyer was awarded a grant to study for his PhD at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS).⁶ Although he initially planned to write about gay literature, Dyer shifted his focus to popular forms of entertainment. The impact of the CCCS on Dyer's subsequent thought and writing is substantive; he forged lasting allegiances and friendships with his thesis supervisor Stuart Hall and fellow students including Rosalind Brunt. The students at the Centre undertook 'collective work' together; in 1969–70, this involved reading texts on structuralism (Dyer wrote a paper on Saussure) and a sustained cross-media study of the Western (Dyer wrote about *Once Upon a Time in the West*); in 1970–71, it involved working through a substantial body of theoretical material for consideration for a *Reader in Cultural Studies* (Dyer authored a piece on Sartre's 'Problem of method'); in 1971–72, the focus was on Karl Marx's work. Dyer contributed an essay on singer Tom Jones to the first issue of the CCCS journal, *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* (included in this Reader in abridged form; see Section 1). He completed his thesis promptly; as Rosalind Brunt remembered, 'Someone like Richard Dyer had the discipline to go away and complete his PhD in three years. But that was very unusual – there was always the pull of the collective work.'⁷

-
5. Some of the biographical details in this chapter are taken from different interviews with Richard Dyer, including: Kieran Connell, 'Transcript: CCCS interview Richard Dyer,' 12 August 2013; Jaime Valentine, interview with Richard Dyer for *OurStory Scotland*, 16 April 2014; Barbara Klinger, 'Fieldnotes: Richard Dyer interviewed by Barbara Klinger', Society for Cinema and Media Studies, 13 April 2015, <https://vimeo.com/145394630>.
 6. On the CCCS, see: Kieran Connell and Matthew Hilton, 'The working practices of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies,' *Social History* 40:3 (2015), pp. 287–311.
 7. Christopher Pawling and Rosalind Brunt, 'Christopher Pawling and Rosalind Brunt Interview', *Cultural Studies* 27:5 (2013), p. 708.



CCCS meeting, circa 1971. Top: Alan Shuttleworth, Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart. Bottom: Rachel Powell, Richard Dyer, Anne Patchett. (Courtesy of Trevor Millum)

Dyer was approached by Fontana to turn his PhD into a ‘reader-friendly’ book. The manuscript he produced – called *That’s Entertainment!* – included (amongst other topics) explorations of the idea of entertainment, escape and escapism, and the pervasiveness of conservative ideologies. One chapter had the tantalising title ‘Motown, Martini and Massacres: The Boundaries of Entertainment’. However, the manuscript was rejected by the publisher, and Dyer shelved it. As he told us in a recent interview (see Section 7), ‘they said, “Oh, it’s too popular, it’s not academic enough.” [...] I should have tried somewhere else, but I didn’t.’ Related material did make it into Dyer’s first monograph, on *Light Entertainment*, published by the British Film Institute (BFI) in 1973. This short book marked the beginning of a long-standing relationship with the BFI and its associated cinema, the National Film Theatre (NFT; renamed BFI Southbank in 2007), and in particular with the BFI’s education department. In 1974, Dyer was awarded one of three BFI-funded three-year lectureships at universities



CCCS meeting, circa 1971; Alan Shuttleworth, Richard Dyer, Anne Patchett, and unidentified person. (Courtesy of Trevor Millum and Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections, University of Birmingham, USS138)

in England; he was appointed to a position at Keele University, where his time was divided equally between teaching American Studies and adult education classes.⁸ (The other two lectureships were awarded to Robin Wood and Peter Wollen, for positions at the University of Warwick and the University of Essex, respectively.) In 1977, Dyer programmed the groundbreaking 'Images of Homosexuality' season of films for the NFT, also editing the short book, *Gays and Film*, that accompanied the season (he worked on other seasons for the cinema, including a survey of Jacqueline Audry's films co-curated with Elaine Burrows). Reviewing 'Images of Homosexuality' in the short-lived journal *Gay Left*, the filmmakers Paul Hallam and Ron Peck called it 'a pioneering season that introduced a lot of scarcely-known films and reintroduced others that were out of circulation.'⁹ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Dyer attended BFI summer schools; he contributed to the production of educational materials for

8. For detail on Dyer's time at Keele, see Richard Dyer, 'Film Studies at Keele', *Screen Education* 19 (Summer 1976), pp. 54–57.

9. Paul Hallam and Ron Peck, 'Images of Homosexuality: Notes on the National Film Theatre Season of Gay Films, July 1977', *Gay Left* 5 (Winter 1977), p. 20.

teachers, college tutors, and university lecturers – including teaching packs on stars, and on the dumb blonde stereotype. The BFI has published a significant number of Dyer's books: *Light Entertainment, Stars* (1979), the co-authored *Coronation Street* (1981), *Heavenly Bodies* (1986), three BFI Classics (1993; 1999; 2002), *Nino Rota* (2010), and *Lethal Repetition* (2015). This Reader swiftly – and appropriately – found a home at BFI publishing.

During the years of his studies at the CCCS and working at Keele, Dyer was resident in Birmingham; he would return there in the late 1970s, after a brief period of living in London, when he was appointed to a position at the University of Warwick. In Birmingham, Dyer became involved with gay liberation activism. He was a member of the Gay Action Group; amongst other activities, they leafleted screenings of *Sunday, Bloody Sunday*, provoking audiences to reflect critically on their responses to the film. Dyer was involved in co-authoring a gay sex education pamphlet (*Growing Up Homosexual*), and in outreach work with colleges. He wrote a critique of *The Killing of Sister George* for *Gladrag*, the newsletter of the Birmingham Gay Liberation Front. Dyer joined the Gay Left Collective in the second half of the 1970s, and wrote several pieces for their journal; through the Collective he met Ron Peck, who auditioned Dyer for the lead role in his film *Nighthawks* (about a gay teacher in London who spends his evenings cruising bars and clubs). Dyer was offered the role, but couldn't take it up.¹⁰ His gay-affirmative activism included a body-positive dimension: he took part in nude photoshoots for the British magazine *Jeremy* and the Canadian *Attitude + Plus*. Over the decades, he has contributed essays to various gay/queer periodicals: the British *Playguy*, *The Body Politic*, *Attitude*.

Across the 1970s, Dyer's politics – feminist, Marxist, anti-racist – solidified. At the CCCS, he first encountered feminist thought; as he told Stefanie Leinfellner in 2018, he 'felt an immediate affinity for it and an immediate feeling of its importance', and took away an understanding that '[e]verything I do must be informed by the issues raised by feminism.'¹¹ His engagement with Marxism and socialist politics – fomented at St Andrews, stoked at the CCCS – became a lifelong preoccupation and influence. The Gay Left Collective was a socialist group; the first issue of its journal opened with a group statement that highlighted its aims 'to contribute towards a Marxist analysis of homosexual oppression', and 'to encourage in the gay movement an understanding of the links between the struggle against sexual oppression and the struggle for

10. See: Glyn Davis, "'A panorama of gay life': *Nighthawks* and British queer cinema of the 1970s", in Ron Gregg and Amy Villarejo (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Queer Cinema*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 435–456.

11. Stefanie Leinfellner, "'I cannot imagine a world in which gender makes no difference" – Richard Dyer im Gespräch', *Journal Netzwerk Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung NRW* 43 (2018), p. 61.



'Richard' posing in the Montreal-based gay journal *Attitude + Plus*, 1981. (Courtesy of Thomas Waugh)

socialism.¹² Dyer's commitment to a Marxist politics led to him writing regular columns for the communist fortnightly *Comment* in the early 1980s, and for *Marxism Today* in the late 1980s and early 1990s – though it is worth noting that those columns were often on aspects of mass or popular culture that he deemed worthy of scrutiny, such as David Attenborough's natural history television series *Life on Earth* or the American sitcom *Soap*.¹³

Dyer regularly, in his writings, tells revealing personal anecdotes, which he then uses as a springboard for engaging in theoretical analysis. In 'Straight acting', for instance,

12. The Gay Left Collective, 'Collective statement', *Gay Left* 1 (Autumn 1975), p. 1.

13. Richard Dyer, 'Look at life the BBC way', *Comment* 18:10 (10 May 1980), p. 144; 'Soaping away the illusions', *Comment* 18:12 (7 June 1980), p. 192.

published in *Marxism Today* in 1990, Dyer reveals that he ‘once had a relationship with a married man’, and that when ‘it came to an end, he said the reason was that he’d discovered that people he knew, knew about us and he couldn’t stand the thought of being known to be homosexual.’ Dyer uses this experience to highlight how heterosexuality ‘as a social reality seems to be invisible to those who benefit from it.’ He proposes ways ‘to make heterosexuality strange’, and thus expose its constructedness – not because he wants to get his own back on his ex-lover, but because ‘the centrality of heterosexuality as a reference point and assumption remains secure.’¹⁴ For Dyer, the personal encounter or experience always has the potential to lead to political insight. To give a further example, he lived in New York for most of 1981 and discovered there quite a different gay scene than the one in Birmingham; he regularly went dancing in the now legendary disco club the Paradise Garage. As he told Tim Lawrence in 2005: ‘Obviously there were lots of white people at the Garage, but nonetheless one felt one was going to a Black-defined space. That made me reflect much more upon the fact that I was white.’¹⁵ Although, as he has suggested elsewhere, Dyer ‘was always interested in Black culture, I mean, that had always been a very important reference point for me’, his experiences in New York led to a heightened awareness of whiteness that subsequently became a major thematic strand within his writing.¹⁶

Personal passions became topics worthy of study and discussion. Throughout his life and career, Dyer has been aware of the importance of dress. At Keele University, he had a penchant for wearing, as he told Matthew Rettenmund, ‘pretty little women’s jumpers’ (see Section 7). Dyer was informed by a head of department that he dressed too much like a student, which could have been code for telling him that his dress was too flamboyant, too feminine, too queer. In 1992, the actor and comedian Lenny Henry received an honorary degree from the University of Warwick; Dyer (who was wearing an Italian designer suit) was introduced to him as ‘the best dressed man in the university’, to which Henry (wearing a blue pinstripe suit) replied, ‘Not today!’ The relationship between queerness and sartorial style has surfaced occasionally in Dyer’s writings. In ‘Fashioning change’ (1994), for instance, published in a collection of essays marking the 25th anniversary of Stonewall, he related an anecdote about attending a job interview, and attempting to choose a tie: ‘How ironic should it be, how over the top should I go to signal that I know that ties are just a piece of manly frippery; how far back from over the top should I withdraw in order not to appear to be sending the panel up? On such precipices of decision is gay style lived.’¹⁷ A sensitivity to the

14. Richard Dyer, ‘Straight acting’, *Marxism Today* (August 1990), p. 24.

15. Tim Lawrence, ‘In defence of disco (again)’, *New Formations* 58 (Summer 2006), p. 133.

16. Kieran Connell, ‘Transcript: CCCS interview Richard Dyer’, 12 August 2013, p. 2.

17. Richard Dyer, ‘Fashioning change: Gay men’s style,’ in Emma Healey and Angela Mason (eds), *Stonewall 25: The Making of the Lesbian and Gay Community in Britain*, London: Virago, 1994, pp. 179–180. The essay

nuances of fashion coding is peppered throughout his analyses of individual films; for example, in 'Seen to be believed' (1983), Dyer draws attention to 'the tactility of the sweater, the pretty patterning of the scarf, the carefully adjusted set of the collar' of a character in *La dolce vita*.¹⁸

As already noted, Dyer's first teaching position was at Keele. He briefly taught at Bulmershe College (now part of the University of Reading), before taking up a position at the University of Warwick; much later, he moved to King's College London, and was awarded an Honorary Professorship position at the University of St Andrews. Across the decades, he has held Visiting Professorship positions at a number of international locations, including New York, Philadelphia, Stockholm, and Bergamo. And yet he has always sustained an interest in reaching audiences beyond higher education, an investment in the value of critical thought for the general public fostered, partly, by Richard Hoggart's influence on the workings and objectives of the CCCS. Keele provided Dyer with sustained experiences of teaching beyond the standard classroom. As he told Barbara Klinger, 'I learnt a lot from doing adult education [...] I feel everyone ought to do that kind of education, it's really good training in thinking about teaching, and thinking about making ideas accessible and so on.'¹⁹ Dyer had had some previous minor experience of teaching courses to broader demographics, through work at the film society in Birmingham (he delivered a course, amongst other topics, on Polish cinema); in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he helped to programme seasons of films at the Birmingham Arts Lab, writing screening notes and delivering accompanying talks and discussions. Through the BFI's educational activities – summer schools, conferences, assembly of teaching packs on particular topics – he contributed to evolving debates about the best ways to teach film, television, and cultural studies. In recent decades, reaching yet another public demographic, he has recorded a DVD/Blu-ray commentary (on *Seven*) and several 'bonus feature' interviews (for films including *Walk on the Wild Side*, *The Possessed*, and *The Iguana with the Tongue of Fire*).

Dyer's monographs and collections – *Stars* (1979), *Heavenly Bodies* (1986), *Now You See It* (1990), *Only Entertainment* (1992), *The Matter of Images* (1993), *White* (1997), *The Culture of Queers* (2002), *Pastiche* (2007), *In the Space of a Song* (2012), *Nino Rota* (2010), and *Lethal Repetition* (2015) – are, obviously, central to his status as a film studies scholar. Several of these titles have been reissued with supplemental essays by other scholars (Paul McDonald for *Stars*; Julianne Pidduck for *Now You See It*; Maxime Cervulle for *White*). The second editions of *Now You See It* (2003), *Only Entertainment* (2002), and

was retitled as 'Dressing the part' for its inclusion in Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 63–69.

18. Richard Dyer, 'Seen to be believed: some problems in the representation of gay people as typical', *Studies in Visual Communication* 9:2 (1983), p. 4.

19. Klinger, op. cit.

Richard Dyer's column in
Comment, 16 May 1981.

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Richard Dyer

**EXPORTING THE
JOYS OF CLASS**

■ British television is the best. This seems to be the critical consensus in the United States, and ratings even suggest that the public beyond the critics goes along with this in some measure. It may just be an unconscious homesickness, but I too find myself inesorably drawn to re-runs of *All Creatures Great and Small* or *The Good Life* when I'm at home for the evening.

This surprises me, though I had been warned. I expected American television to be full of bezzazz, professionally consummate razzmatazz. Yet it is, in the current jargon, mostly just plain 'tacky'. Even the shows you think are going to be better than their British equivalents aren't.

It comes to something when one has to acknowledge that the dancing on *Top of the Pops* is more imaginative and vital than that on the US show *Solid Gold* (—though there is some compensation in a new silver-haired Dianne Warwick hosting the show and still in fine funky voice); that news reporting on both BBC and ITV is more analytical and hard-hitting than anything over here; that *Crossroads* is more genuinely moving than *Days of our Lives*, *All My Children* and the other lunchtime soaps. Only sitcom doesn't suffer from the comparison, though there is never much critical edge to the shows here despite the crack and fizzle of the delivery.

It is the lack of edge, of bite, that makes US television not just dull but maddening, and it seems inextricably linked to the absolute pervasiveness of consumer capitalism in the media. People really believe in capitalism in the USA, in a way no-one really does in Europe. Selling is

not an evil necessity, nor even a duty, but a pleasure and a way of life.

On commercial television and even more confusingly on the radio there is very little distinction made between programmes and advertising: one style pervades everything, politics, entertainment and the market place are felt as complementary, not antagonistic, realms of social life. A commentator will turn, without signalling, from talking of the day's events to telling you of the merits of such and such a product (—I really want to tell you about MacDonald's burgers—they're a real personal favourite of mine and I know they will be of yours—note the way that 'real' recurs again and again in this wilful confusion of reportage and hype).

Chat shows turn out to be extended commercials—not just for a personality's latest books, films or records as in Britain but, as for instance on the Joan Fontaine show that I tuned into so eagerly, for the latest in lawn-mowers and pet food. Made-for-TV movies and series use exactly the same visual style—down to the characteristic grooming of the actors—for creating a fictional world as do the ads.

No wonder British television looks so good. For one thing, it doesn't look and sound like the commercials. But what is this 'excellence' that is so highly prized? It is nothing less than the loving recreation of class society. In addition to those I've mentioned, *UB-40*, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* and *Malice Aforethought* are currently popular. All construct their past (or vaguely present) fictional world with such care that they are almost palpable. Every nuance of class difference is registered, but it is always as difference rather than antagonism or struggle.

Thus the series all evoke nostalgia for a world based on class. The net effect is both to distance class into an aspect of the past (and, for Americans, of Europe) and make it seem attractive. This is the wonderful gift of British television to the world, a simultaneous denial and celebration of class society.

The Matter of Images (2002) had their content rejigged or expanded by Dyer. Individual books, or essays in collections, have become canonical texts, in the sense that they have helped to define academic debate, are widely cited, and/or are included in the syllabi of university courses. *Stars* and *White*, for instance, are amongst the founding texts of star studies and whiteness studies; essays such as 'Entertainment and utopia' (1977) and 'Homosexuality and film noir' (1977) continue to be widely taught and referenced.²⁰ The contents of this Reader could easily have been compiled from Dyer essays that

20. Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and utopia', *Movie* 24 (Spring 1977), pp. 2-13; 'Homosexuality and film noir', *Jump Cut* 16 (1977), pp. 18-21.

can be considered as canonical – a book of ‘Richard Dyer’s Greatest Hits’. Instead, we have selected five canonical essays and one lecture (‘The persistence of textual analysis’, appearing in print for the first time) as a key text of each section, around which we have thematically compiled essays that may be less well known, less often anthologised, or less easily accessible. A seventh section includes four interviews with Dyer that provide additional context and insight on his career and work, including a new conversation with us that was conducted in 2021. Short introductions to each section outline ways to think through and across Dyer’s writing career, highlighting connections between the texts selected and Dyer’s wider oeuvre.

Although we do not claim that the selection is representative of Dyer’s work, we have attempted to present a wide range of topics from across the different decades and from multiple sources of publication. Undoubtedly, the selection also reflects our personal preferences and our own subject positions as white European openly gay cis-men, coming of age during the 1970s and 1980s. We have excluded writings that seem less relevant today than when they were published, such as Dyer’s essay on Dame Edna Everage, or his piece on ‘Yuppie culture’.²¹ Other essays have been included precisely because they have retained their relevance. The 1981 essay on Lady Diana and Prince Charles ‘Of rage and despair’ (see Section 5), for instance, continues to have bite due to ongoing discussions about the place and status of the monarchy in British cultural life (a topic, incidentally, that Dyer suggested as a possible collective research focus for the CCCS in 1971, but which was not taken up).²²

‘In defence of disco’ – the key text of Section 2 – is also a pertinent example, its relevance repeatedly refreshed. The essay was originally published in *Gay Left* in 1979 and subsequently appeared in Dyer’s essay collection *Only Entertainment*. It has been anthologized in several readers, including *On Record* (1990), *Out in Culture* (1995), *The Faber Book of Pop* (1995), *Electronica, Dance and Club Music* (2012), and *Black Box* (2015).²³ Its 25th anniversary of publication was commemorated with an essay in the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* in 2005, and a special section in *New Formations* in 2006, the latter including essays by Jeremy Gilbert and Tim Lawrence as well as a reprint of

21. Richard Dyer, ‘The Dame and the Knight’, *Comment* 20:5 (6 March 1982), p. 16; ‘Yuppie culture’, *Marxism Today* (October 1985), pp. 47–48.

22. Richard Dyer, ‘Some nasty remarks and some constructive ones’, unpublished CCCS memo, 23 March 1971, Cadbury Research Library, Special Collections, University of Birmingham, Stuart Laing Papers, USS98.

23. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds), *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, London: Routledge, 1990; Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (eds), *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, London: Cassell, 1995; Hanif Kureishi and Jon Savage (eds), *The Faber Book of Pop*, London and Boston, MA: Faber and Faber, 1995; Mark J. Butler (ed.), *Electronica, Dance and Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 2012; The Black Box Collective (eds), *Black Box: A Record of the Catastrophe, Volume One*, Oakland: PM Press, 2015.

the original essay.²⁴ In spring 2021, a Spanish translation was published in the Chilean journal *Resonancias*. The introductory article by translator Amparo Lasén not only traces the essay's history but also notes how it has attained a new significance during the COVID-19 crisis.²⁵ 'It is amazing how much [the disco essay] has been taken up and reprinted and endlessly quoted and referred to,' Dyer told Simon Dickel in 2022. 'I think I wrote it in a weekend. It wasn't deeply researched, and it didn't need to be.'²⁶

Due to space restrictions, and a desire to include less well-known materials, it has been necessary to 'kill some darlings': we have excluded a number of essays that readers will probably have expected to be included in this Reader, most notably 'Entertainment and utopia' and 'Homosexuality and film noir', but also 'Lana: four films of Lana Turner' (1977), 'Believing in fairies: the author and the homosexual' (1991), and 'Is *Car Wash* a musical?' (1993).²⁷ We would have loved to include Dyer's extensive analysis of Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour* from *Now You See It* – an exemplary piece of historical and textual analysis – but sacrificed this for shorter pieces, less well-known but equally rich and deserving: a review of *The Towering Inferno* from *Movie* (Section 6), programme notes on Jane Fonda (Section 1) and dance films (Section 5) from Birmingham Arts Lab film programmes, a review of *Scorpio Rising* (Section 5) that offers a take on the film distinct from that included in *Now You See It*.

Three new pieces of writing are included in *The Richard Dyer Reader*: 'Fond of little tunes' (Section 5), 'Eisenstein's penis' (Section 6), and 'The persistence of textual analysis' (Section 6). A new edit of a chapter from *Lethal Repetition* ('The same over and over', Section 5) was produced by Dyer specifically for this collection. As we finalise this Reader, Dyer continues to author and publish new work; substantial essays on silence and noise in *La Captive* and on marginality in *La dolce vita* appeared in 2021.²⁸

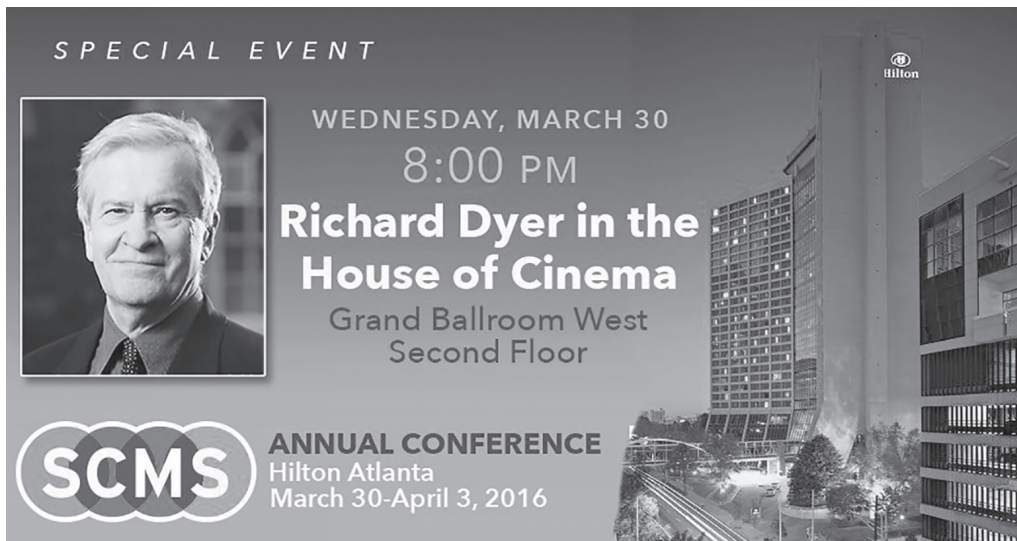
24. Jaap Kooijman, 'Turn the beat around: Richard Dyer's 'In defence of disco' revisited,' *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 8:2 (2005), pp. 257–266; Jeremy Gilbert, 'In defence of "In defense of disco"' and 'Dyer and Deleuze: Post-structuralist cultural criticism,' *New Formations* 58 (Summer 2006), pp. 99–100, 109–127; Tim Lawrence, 'In defence of disco (again),' *New Formations* 58 (Summer 2006), pp. 128–146.

25. Amparo Lasén, 'Invitación a la lectura y propuesta investigadora de la defensa de la música disco de Richard Dyer,' *Resonancias* 25:48 (2021), pp. 157–165.

26. Simon Dickel, unpublished interview with Richard Dyer, 4 February 2022.

27. Richard Dyer, 'Lana: Four films of Lana Turner', *Movie* 25 (Winter 1977–1978), pp. 30–52; 'Believing in fairies: The author and the homosexual', in Diana Fuss (ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, New York and London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 185–202; 'Is *Car Wash* a musical?', in Manthia Diawara (ed.), *Black American Cinema*, New York and London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 93–106. (It is worth noting that the book's content page lists the essay as 'Is *Car Wash* a Black musical?').

28. Richard Dyer, 'Making sense of noise and silence in *La Captive*,' in Carlo Cenciarelli (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cinematic Listening*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 241–251; 'On marginality: *La dolce vita*'s homosexuals,' in Ron Gregg and Amy Villarejo (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Queer Cinema*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 308–327.



Online banner announcing the SCMS event honouring Richard Dyer. (Courtesy of SCMS)

Although now an Emeritus Professor, Dyer remains widely engaged with contemporary film and television. In the second edition of his short book on *Brief Encounter*, for instance, he offered a nuanced comparison of David Lean's 1945 film with the HBO series *Looking* (2014–2016):

Brief Encounter and *Looking* are utterly of their time and place, the one so English and provincial, the other so San Francisco and now, *Brief Encounter*'s characters so indirect and its feelings so wholehearted, *Looking* so upfront and in your face and yet so self-conscious about emotional expression. The fact that they nonetheless play to the same affective concerns does not mean that nothing has changed in seventy years, but it does mean that emotional dedication and sexual jealousy are very deeply embedded in the societies we live in and so, when done right, continue to engage, fascinate and move us.²⁹

Dyer's work has always been informed by a remarkably thorough knowledge of cultural history, and marked by his ability to make surprising connections between materials and arguments. In her introduction to a dossier of essays in *Cinema Journal* that emerged from the 'Richard Dyer in the House of Cinema' event at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) conference in Atlanta in 2016, Lisa Henderson

29. Richard Dyer, *Brief Encounter*, London: BFI/Palgrave, 2015, p. 9.

highlighted Dyer's skills, writing that his 'openness, grace, and sometimes daunting honesty are well matched to his capacity for scholarly labour, for conversation, for film going, watching, hearing, teaching, and especially writing.'³⁰

All essays in the Reader have been edited to conform to a consistent style in referencing, punctuation, and spelling (UK English). We have 'silently' corrected obvious typos and innocent mistakes: for instance, the Diana Ross song is called 'Upside Down' not 'Inside Out' ('Diana Ross', Section 1); Jane Fonda's second husband was Tom Hayden not Tom Hagen (the latter is a fictional character who appears in *The Godfather*; 'Jane Fonda', Section 1). If a reprinted version of an essay differs from the original one, we have used the original. To give just one example, in the original version of 'Rock: the last guy you'd have figured?' (Section 3), published in the Canadian journal *The Body Politic* in December 1985, Dyer writes about Hudson's 'gayness', whereas in the expanded version, included in *The Culture of Queers* (2002), he uses 'homosexuality' instead; the later version features a discussion of the film *Seconds* which did not appear in the original, and therefore does not appear here. Although certain uses of language may now seem somewhat dated or potentially offensive – a 1985 use of the word 'spastic' ('Masculinity is so boring', Section 7), or some 1997 comments on trans identities ('Heterosexuality', Section 4) – we have decided not to update or edit these, leaving them intact as markers of their time.

We first raised the prospect of assembling a Reader of his work with Dyer late in 2019. He responded enthusiastically, flattered by the project, happy to be a 'silent partner' in its assembly. (The only essay he requested we include was 'The colour of entertainment' – see Section 2). Throughout the work on the Reader, Dyer has provided resources, drawn our attention to rare and lesser-known texts, fact-checked, and assisted with rights approvals. Like so many other academic books of the last two to three years, the labour involved in putting this collection together has taken place almost entirely online during the COVID-19 pandemic. We first discussed the project with Dyer in person, in a hotel lobby in London, in December 2019; this introduction was completed in person, in a hotel lobby in Bucharest, in June 2022. In between, the volume has been assembled almost entirely online. Individual archives and libraries to which we needed access were often closed or operating with severely restricted protocols; a new interview with Dyer (see Section 7) had to take place on Skype, rather than in person. Despite the barriers erected by the pandemic, however, the assembly of this book has provided regular, warm reminders of the pleasures of collaborative and collegiate scholarly projects, and of the high esteem in which Richard and his work are held in countries across the world. Friends, allies, and colleagues have been vocal in their enthusiasm for the project, and provided us with copies of materials from their

30. Lisa Henderson, 'Introduction: There is something about Richard Dyer', *Cinema Journal* 57:2 (2018), p. 150.

own collections or institutions that we could not source due to lockdowns. In particular, we would like to thank the following for their assistance: José Arroyo, Emilia Beatriz at Collective Text, Rosalind Brunt, Gloria Chalmers, Lucy Fife Donaldson, Jonathan Flatley, Catherine Grant, Ann Gray, Amy Holdsworth, Chris Holmlund, Daniel Humphrey, Joe McElhaney, Paula Massood, Mandy Merck, Trevor Millum, Erwin Olaf, Francesco Pitassio, Matthew Rettenmund, Ian Sanderson, Eliza Steinbock, Juan Antonio Suárez, Rob Verhorst, Thomas Waugh, and Pamela Wojcik, as well as the archivists at the University of St Andrews, the Cadbury Research Library of the University of Birmingham, the EYE Film Museum in Amsterdam, the Amsterdam Atria Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History, the Amsterdam IHLIA Institute of LGBTI Heritage, the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, and the National Library of Scotland. We are immeasurably grateful to Rebecca Barden, Tom Cabot, Sophia Contento, and Veidehi Hans, who have helped us in manifold ways throughout the assembly of this volume. Finally, we thank our respective partners, Iain Barbour and Jeroen van Ingen, for their extraordinary patience, love, and support.

This book is dedicated to Richard and Giorgio.

SECTION 1

A STAR IS BORN

and other essays on stardom and image



Barbra Streisand and Judy Garland performing on *The Judy Garland Show*, October 1963. (Archive Photos/Getty Images)

‘Most people who like cinema, like stars, but those who teach cinema are seldom willing to take this liking, which they themselves share, seriously. But stars need to be studied, and can be studied.’¹ In the four-page article ‘Studying the stars’, published in *Screen Education Notes* in 1973, Richard Dyer presented an early exploration into his theory of stardom, which he would further develop in the two complementary monographs *Stars* (1979) and *Heavenly Bodies* (1986). Without denying their individual agency, Dyer perceives stars neither as ‘real people’ nor as merely commodities of the entertainment industry, but as cultural signs that can be analysed as mediated ‘total star texts’ consisting of the star’s onscreen performances as well as promotional materials, interviews, critical reception, gossip in the tabloid press, and fan cultures. Most importantly, Dyer argues that stars express the often-contradictory ideological values of living as an individual in a capitalist society, functioning as ‘embodiments of the social categories in which people are placed and through which they have to make sense of their lives, and indeed through which we make our lives’.²

While his work on stardom is usually associated with film stars, Dyer’s first case study was of the Welsh singer Tom Jones, which he wrote whilst a graduate student at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and which was published in the first issue of the CCCS’s journal *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. In ‘The meaning of Tom Jones’ (1971, included here in an abridged version), Dyer analyses the Tom Jones star image, and its phallic masculinity in particular, as part of the popular *This Is Tom Jones* television show, already showcasing a queer wittiness in academic writing that was atypical and undoubtedly daring for its time: ‘Tom Jones has a penis and one does not forget it, but he has the personality to back it up.’ (Five decades later, Dyer would recall how Stuart Hall was ‘elated’ by this sentence).³

In his 1972 PhD dissertation ‘Social Values of Entertainment and Show Business’, Dyer discussed specific Hollywood musical stars, such as Julie Andrews, Fred Astaire, Doris Day, Judy Garland, Gene Kelly (included in this section), and Barbra Streisand. Building on Edgar Morin’s *Les Stars* (1957) and Orrin E. Klapp’s *Heroes, Villains, and Fools* (1962), Dyer introduced the seemingly paradoxical notion of the star being ‘just like you and me’ and simultaneously gifted with ‘innate talent’ and ‘professionalism’.

1. Richard Dyer, ‘Studying the Stars’, *Screen Education Notes* 7 (Summer 1973), p. 17.

2. Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, London: BFI/Macmillan, 1987, p. 18.

3. Richard Dyer, e-mail to the editors, 14 September 2021.

As he wrote:

The belief that stars simply are by birth more gifted than others, that some definite quality and talent shines through whatever a star does, is an important aspect of the star syndrome. At first sight it may seem to contradict the suggestion that stars are just like you and me, and in some cases – Streisand’s for instance – it does. More often however it works with the sense of ordinariness in important ways. Firstly, it justifies the fact that a star has become famous: it holds at bay any resentment that someone ordinary has got to the top. Secondly, publicity stresses that despite the exceptional talent, the star is still in every other way just like you or me. Ordinariness is thus coupled with genius, and the notion that genius requires a special temperament is discounted with confidence.⁴

Here Dyer highlights the contradiction that would later become known in media studies as the ‘ordinary/extraordinary paradox,’ often associated with John Ellis’s writing of a decade later.⁵ But while Ellis argues that the contradiction cannot be resolved, leaving the star image ‘incoherent’ and ‘incomplete’, Dyer shows how the star’s extraordinariness and ordinariness work together to enable stars to become exemplary embodiments of individualism within capitalism, to which audiences can relate in both admiration and recognition.

Throughout the 1970s, Richard Dyer’s writing on stardom was often connected to the work of the educational department of the British Film Institute. Dyer developed packages of annotated film extracts and teaching manuals for courses at schools and universities, including *The Dumb Blonde Stereotype* (1979), *Teachers’ Study Guide 1: The Stars* (1979), and *Marilyn Monroe: Star Dossier One* (1980). The latter contains a 33-page essay in which Dyer discusses not only the Marilyn Monroe star image during the period when she was alive (as he would also do in *Heavenly Bodies*), but also its posthumous prominence in popular culture. The dossier includes ten facsimile reproductions of newspaper clippings about Monroe and 44 slides of film stills and other Monroe-related images, such as the cover of Donna Summer’s *Four Seasons of Love* album (1976), featuring the disco singer mimicking Monroe’s famous *The Seven Year Itch* pose, which ‘illustrates the continued currency of the image,’ as well as raising questions about ‘the fact that a Black woman can take the pose.’⁶ Obviously, the packages only included selective samples of what constitutes a total star text, but they did enable the study of stars beyond the onscreen performance. Eventually, as Dyer

4. Richard Dyer, ‘Social Values of Entertainment and Show Business,’ unpublished PhD dissertation, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, October 1972, p. 304.

5. John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema; Television; Video*, London: Routledge & Regan Paul, 1982, pp. 91–108.

6. Richard Dyer, *Marilyn Monroe: Star Dossier One*, London: British Film Institute Education, 1980, p. 37.



Star Dossier One with Marilyn Monroe and Donna Summer on the cover, 1980. (Courtesy of Jaap Kooijman)

would later recall, the teaching material on stars ‘just got out of control and it clearly had to be a book,’ thus leading to the writing of *Stars*.⁷

Stars was primarily a theoretical and methodological study guide, but also featured an extensive case study of Jane Fonda. In this section, we have included a shorter profile that Dyer wrote for the Jane Fonda film season he organised at the Birmingham Arts Lab in 1979. At the time of its publication, *Stars* received much praise. ‘In its clarity and cogency it should have a decisive influence on all subsequent thinking about the implications of the star phenomenon,’ wrote Robin Wood.⁸ Yet there was also criticism, most notably by Pam Cook and Barry King, who both suggested that by

7. Barbara Klinger, ‘Fieldnotes: Richard Dyer interviewed by Barbara Klinger’, *Society for Cinema and Media Studies*, 13 April 2015, <https://vimeo.com/145394630>.

8. Robin Wood, ‘The Dyer’s Hand: Stars and Gays,’ *Film Comment* 16:1 (1980), p. 72.

perceiving stars merely as cultural signs open to (often subjective) interpretation, Dyer not only ignored their agency, but also downplayed the role of the entertainment industry in the ideological meaning-making process.⁹ In the supplementary chapter to the 1998 edition of *Stars*, Paul McDonald too argued for placing star studies more firmly within a historical and industrial context.¹⁰

The key text of this section is '*A Star Is Born* and the construction of authenticity', written for a weekend workshop on stardom organised by Christine Gledhill, held in January 1982. Dyer's essay was published in *Star Signs* (1982), a record of the workshop's proceedings, as well as the collection *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (1991), both edited by Gledhill – though the latter did not include the afterword in which Dyer presented his preliminary ideas regarding what would become the 'Judy Garland and Gay Men' chapter in *Heavenly Bodies*. Dyer delivered his workshop paper alongside contributions by John Ellis ('Star/Industry/Image') and Pam Cook ('Stars and politics'), using Judy Garland in the 1954 version of *A Star Is Born* as a case study to show how star images construct a sense of authenticity (stars are *born*), without denying that stars are also products of the entertainment industry (stars are *made*). That stars are 'manufactured and promoted' is widely recognised, Dyer writes, adding: 'Yet in the very same breath as audiences and producers alike acknowledge stars as hype, they are declaring this or that star as the genuine article. Just as the media are construed as the very antithesis of sincerity and authenticity, they are the source for the presentation of the epitome of those qualities, the true star.'

Around this time, Dyer also wrote essays on specific stars, such as 'The way she is' (1981) on Barbra Streisand for *The Movie* and 'Diana Ross' (1982) for *Marxism Today*, both included in this section. Previously, in his PhD dissertation, Dyer had suggested that it is difficult to see Streisand as someone 'like you or me' (or 'to believe she is even remotely nice'), a position he explored further a decade later.¹¹ Arguing that 'star images involve a great deal of rehearsal and manufacture, but few are experienced in that way,' Dyer perceived Streisand as an exception because of her overt professionalism. As he puts it, 'Her mannered portrayals draw attention to her performance as such. Her image tells the truth about the star phenomenon, namely, that all stars are performances.' Dyer's essay on Diana Ross, written after seeing her live in concert, focuses on how her 'unreal' performance celebrates that she, as a Black female star, is 'allowed' to be successful in mainstream culture: 'The sheer ecstasy of the whole

9. Pam Cook, 'Star Signs,' *Screen* 20:3–4 (1979), pp. 80–88; Pam Cook, '[Review of] *Stars*,' *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 3 (1980), pp. 123–125; Barry King, 'The star and the commodity: Notes towards a theory of stardom,' *Cultural Studies* 1:2 (1987), pp. 145–161.

10. Paul McDonald, 'Reconceptualising stardom,' in Richard Dyer, *Stars*, new edition, London: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 1998, pp. 175–200.

11. Dyer, 'Social Values of Entertainment and Show Business,' op. cit., p. 330.

Diana Ross thing is an outrageous revelling in what success could feel like, but not how to achieve it.¹²

Dyer's most extensive discussion of specific stars can be found in his second monograph on stardom, *Heavenly Bodies* (a synonym of 'stars', of course), in which he presents three case studies of stars who each 'in some measure revolted against the lack of control they felt they had' within the capitalist Hollywood system.¹³ The first two chapters, on Marilyn Monroe and Paul Robeson respectively, explore how both star images function within ideologies of gender and sexuality (femininity and masculinity) and race (whiteness and Blackness) during the times when their films were released. The third chapter focuses on how a specific subcultural group – white urban gay men – has appropriated the star image of Judy Garland, both during and after her life. In his review of *Heavenly Bodies*, Simon Watney deemed the Garland chapter 'the most successful' and praised the 'charm and openness' of Dyer's writing, yet he would have preferred 'a much more expansive and substantial book about Judy Garland, with room to explore the pressing question of how and why different audiences identify so intensely with different stars.'¹⁴

Although he told Matthew Rettenmund in 1997 (see Section 7 of this Reader) that he had stopped writing about stars ('I'm loyal to Judy'), Richard Dyer has occasionally discussed specific star images. Included in this section are essays about Audrey Hepburn's 'imperfections' that made her 'perfect', published in *Sight and Sound* (1993), and about Charles Hawtrey and the 'unambiguous ambiguity' of his sexuality, published in the first issue of the gay glossy magazine *Attitude* (1994). He has also written about Elizabeth Taylor for an exhibition at London's National Portrait Gallery (2000), about Lena Horne for a German academic journal (2010), and about Bette Davis on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of her death in 2019 ('Davis was doing performativity before Judith Butler was born').¹⁵ The 2012 Arrow Blu-ray release of the 1950 Hollywood film *Born Yesterday*, starring Judy Holliday, includes the 25-minute featurette 'Blonde Ambition' in which Dyer not only discusses how Holliday added complexity to the dumb blonde stereotype, but also places her in a longer tradition of New York Jewish humour.

12. Dyer's 'Diana Ross' forms the basis of the audiovisual essay 'Success: Richard Dyer on Diana Ross [and Beyond]' by Jaap Kooijman, published in *[in]Transition: Journal of Videographic Film & Moving Image Studies* 2:4 (2016), <http://mediacommons.org/intransition/success>.

13. Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, op. cit., p. 6.

14. Simon Watney, 'Stellar Studies', *Screen* 28:3 (1987), pp. 111, 113.

15. Richard Dyer, 'First a star: Elizabeth Taylor,' in *Only Entertainment*, second edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 112–117; Richard Dyer, 'Singing Prettily: Lena Horne in Hollywood,' *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung*, 2010:2 (2010), pp. 11–25; Richard Dyer, short statement for 'The Bette Davis Testimonials,' 20 August 2019, published on Martin Shingler's website: <http://www.martinshingler.co.uk/?p=856>.

Dyer returned to *A Star Is Born* with his essay on the 2018 version of the film, published in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. The film's star Lady Gaga is placed by Dyer in the tradition of David Bowie and Madonna as 'a hero of inauthenticity,' based on the self-reflexive theatricality of her star image that seems at odds with both Judy Garland's authenticity in the 1954 version as well as the 'premeditated quality of [Barbra] Streisand's performance style' in the 1976 version. Yet, as Dyer reminds us in the final paragraph of *Stars*, when analysing and demystifying star images we should not ignore their affective qualities of beauty and pleasure, how they make us *feel* – the way Marilyn Monroe makes him catch his breath, or Montgomery Clift makes him sigh. As Dyer concludes, 'while I accept utterly that beauty and pleasure are culturally and historically specific, and in no way escape ideology, nonetheless they are beauty and pleasure and I want to hang on to them in some form or another.'¹⁶

16. Dyer, *Stars*, London: British Film Institute, 1979, p. 185.

1 *A STAR IS BORN* AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHENTICITY (1981)

This paper deals with a narrow – but crucial – aspect of the film *A Star Is Born*, namely, the notion and construction of ‘authenticity’. The processes of authentication discussed are the guarantee of both star ‘quality’ in general and of the particular image of the star concerned. At the weekend I will sketch in two elements not really discussed here – the components of Judy Garland’s star image and her importance as a subcultural icon for gay men.

It is easy enough to outline the components of Judy Garland’s star image in terms of social meanings. I only have to refer the stages in her career to three different stereotypes – the all-American small town girl-next-door; the personification of showbiz good humour and bezazz; the neurotic woman – for you to pick up on the social resonances of her image. If we wanted to understand the specificity of the image and account for its particular appeal and purchase, we could look closer at the precise inflection her image gives to those stereotypes, their place in the wider cultural discourses of the period, and the different concerns of the different known Garland audiences. We could begin to see why people paid to go and see her, and to differentiate between the various meanings that could be found in her image.

Yet none of this quite seems to deliver an understanding of the most common-sensical notions attached to the words ‘star’ and ‘charisma’ – notions like magic, power, fascination, and also authority, importance and aura. Part of the answer lies in the precise, and differentiated relation between the values perceived to be embodied by the star and the perceived status of those values (especially if they are felt to be under threat or in crisis, or to be challenging received values, or else to be values that are a key to understanding and coping with contemporary life). But I also want to suggest that all of this depends on the degree to which stars are accepted as truly being what they appear to be.

(There is a whole other way of relating to stars, a way that is essentially deconstructive, that refuses the guarantee that appearances are not deceiving. The most widespread, habitual form of such deconstructive reading practice is camp. Garland’s

relation to this, a phenomenon deeply rooted in male gay culture, is particularly paradoxical, considering that she is, and precisely in her authenticity, a key icon of traditional gay male culture.)

There is a whole litany in the fan literature surrounding stars in which certain adjectives endlessly recur – sincere, immediate, spontaneous, real, direct, genuine and so on. All of these words can be seen as relating to a general notion of ‘authenticity’. It is these qualities that we demand of a star if we accept her or him in the spirit in which she or he is offered. Outside of a camp appreciation, it is the star’s really seeming to be what s/he is supposed to be that secures his/her star status, ‘star quality’ or charisma. Authenticity is both a quality necessary to the star phenomenon to make it work, and also the quality that guarantees the authenticity of the other particular values a star embodies (such as girl-next-door-ness, etc.). It is this effect of authenticating authenticity that gives the star charisma, and that I want to look at here.

But first we need to consider the peculiarity that authenticity should be so crucial a notion in the whole phenomenon. The vocabulary of immediacy, sincerity, believability and so on is so familiar – since we also use it of people we encounter in life – that its particularity may not necessarily strike us. Yet it seems clear that it is a vocabulary of little more than two or three hundred years’ existence (or rather, this way of using these words is only that old, the words themselves being much older). The peculiarity of this use of these words is their application to individual persons as the criteria for the truth or validity of social affairs. To put it another way, the truth of social affairs has become rooted not in general criteria governing social behaviour itself but in the performers themselves and, at the same time, the criteria governing performance have shifted from whether the performance is well done to whether it is truthful, that is, true to the ‘true’ personality of the performer. (I mean performer here in both its theatrical and its sociological usages.) Even truth is a peculiar criterion – we no longer ask if someone performs well or according to certain moral precepts but whether what they perform is truthful, with the referent of truthfulness not being falsifiable statements but the person’s ‘person’.

This development, charted by Richard Sennett in his book *The Fall of Public Man*, is essential to the development of humanism and individualism. All the major discourses of contemporary Western society address themselves to people as individuals, as free and separate human beings who are, in their separateness, the source of all social arrangements. Once individuals, in this sense, become the pivot of the whole ensemble of discourses that make sense of society, it is not surprising that it comes to matter very much whether those individuals are indeed functioning as they appear to be. If the individual is the guarantor of the social order, then he or she must be worthy of that role. Hence – to take one striking example – the enormous moral fervour surrounding lying; taken by the West as an absolute moral wrong, its acceptance as morally

useful in many societies baffles us. We are hardly able to think another's statements without first determining whether the person really does mean what s/he says (and not whether it is right, or expedient, or formally correct, or kind).

Yet just at the point that this way of ordering and understanding human discourse and intercourse establishes itself as the fundament of human affairs, the possibility, and then probability, that what people say is *not* what they mean becomes even more clear, and disturbing. The major trends within Western culture that are hailed as intellectual revolutions have all done their bit to dislodge the security with which the individual holds her/his place as the guarantor of discourse. Marxism (at any rate in its most widely understood form) proposes that the political activity of society, in the form of freely operating spokespeople freely elected by freely constituted (i.e. 'individual') electors, is not the real politics of society at all, which on the contrary resides in the invisible operation and structures of the means and forces of production and reproduction. The behaviourisms propose that what we appear to do freely for reasons of which we are conscious we actually do for reasons that are barely available to consciousness at all, drives and instincts. Psychoanalysis equally proposes that consciousness is not really consciousness at all, but a surface masking the workings of that consciousness below consciousness that we choose to call unconscious. And some forms of linguistics, and aesthetic modernisms associated with them, insist that we do not speak language but that it speaks us, that the individual, far from being the guarantor of discourse, is in fact the product of it. I have sketched in these discourses at the level of their theoretical articulation, but they inform all levels of discourse, to varying degrees and in varying forms. Everyone is familiar with the notions that what we do, say, think and feel, and what happens in the world, are not due to us as we know ourselves but to economic forces, instincts, unconscious motivations, habits and patterns of speech. Two historical developments have further endangered the notion of the individual – the development of the mass media (and in particular advertising, both in itself and as an economic concomitant of commercial radio, television and journalism) and the rise of totalitarianisms (Nazism, Stalinism, etc.). The reigning concept behind both of these is that of 'manipulation', of the handling of human discourse and intercourse such as to yield vast profits and despotic power, on the one hand, and a docile populace on the other. (This is not the place to enter into discussion of the validity and notions of mass culture, totalitarianism and manipulation, though we should recognise how deeply problematic they are; what is at issue here is their widespread currency as indicators of the characteristic form of social relations in the 'developed' countries.)

Much of the internal intellectual history of Marxism, behaviourism, psychoanalysis, linguistics and modernism has been the attempt to reconcile their paradigms with those of humanism. I do not propose to go into that here. What is particularly fascinating about the mass media and totalitarianism is that, even as they are being

identified as destroying the individual, they are also largely in the business of prompting the individual and the claims of humanism. To get back to stars, no aspect of the media can be more obviously attended by hype than the production of stars; there is nothing sophisticated about knowing they are manufactured and promoted, it is a sense that is common. Even the media knows it, as films like *A Star Is Born* show. Yet in the very same breath as audiences and producers alike acknowledge stars as hype, they are declaring this or that star as the genuine article. Just as the media are construed as the very antithesis of sincerity and authenticity, they are the source for the presentation of the epitome of those qualities, the true star.

How does the star image pull this off? How is the image authenticated as something more – truer, more real – than an image? In part, the star phenomenon is defined by an inbuilt means of authentication. Stars appear before us in media texts – films, advertisements, gossip columns, television interviews and so on – but unlike other forms of representation stars do not only exist in media texts. To say that stars exist outside of the media texts in real life would be misleading, but stars are carried in the person of people who do go on living away from their appearances in the media, and the point is that we know this. When he got home John Wayne may have become Marion Morrison again, but there was a real human being with a continuous existence, that is, who existed in between all the times he was ‘being’ John Wayne. But there is no way in which Elizabeth Bennett can leave the pages of *Pride and Prejudice* (except to be referred to in other media texts, in parodies, speculative continuations of the story, adaptations, etc.). In the first place then the question of the star’s authenticity can be referred back to her/his existence in the real world.

This referral-back is tied up with the fact that stars exist in photographic media. Stars are a particular instance of the supposed special relation between a photograph and its referent. A photograph is always a photograph *of* something or somebody who had to have been there in order for the photograph to be taken. In the light of my remarks above, it is symptomatic that one of the best-known saws about photography is that ‘the camera never lies’. The spread of photography as a casual practice has no doubt severely dented the confidence with which the camera’s truth is believed: few people are the naive realists that theory belabours to refute. Yet the residual sense of the subject or person having-been-there remains powerful. Joan Crawford is not just a representation done in paint or writing – she is carried in the person née Lucille LeSueur who went before the cameras to be taken for us.

And if the existential bond (the indexicality, in C.S. Peirce’s terminology) between Crawford and Crawford/LeSueur in the movie or pin-up is perceived to be distorted (de-authenticated) by the manipulation of the film-making or photographic process (glamour lighting, clever editing and so on), then we can always go and get photos of her doing the chores at home and cuddling baby Christina. And if we think those

are a put-up job, then we might get a candid camera shot of her without make-up, or uncover a snapshot of her scowling at Christina. And so on in an infinite regress by means of which one more authentic image displaces another. But then they are all part of the star image, each one anchoring the whole thing in an essential, uncovered authenticity, which can then be read back into the performances, the roles, the pin-ups.

There is no need for what-is-uncovered to corroborate the particular character traits incarnated at the most obvious and familiar level of the star's image. In the development of the star phenomenon in Hollywood the attempt to make the different levels mutually reinforcing was certainly strenuously made – until the manipulations of that became so widely known that sources not apparently identified with Hollywood became the privileged access to the star's 'real' personality. Hence the growth of scandal magazines, unauthorised biographies, candid camera photo-journalism and so on.

The growth of this aspect of the total star text (i.e. as read across all her/his different media manifestations) draws on one possible way of taking the implications of Marxism, linguistics and, most explicitly, psychoanalysis and behaviourism. These displace the individual as the guarantor of discourse, but they do posit – or can be read as positing – a 'real' that is beneath or behind the surface represented by 'the individual' as a discursive category. Indeed, many of the claims of these theoretical discourses on our attention has been in their assertion of revealing a, or the, truth behind appearances, stripping away the veil of bourgeois categories or civilised (repressed) behaviours. The basic paradigm is just this – that what is behind or below the surface is, unquestionably and virtually by definition, the truth. Thus features of stars which tell us that the star is *not* like he or she appears to be on screen serve to reinforce the authenticity of the star image as a whole. And, very often, films made subsequent to a particular exposé will incorporate the truth revealed by the exposé as part of the authentication of the star in her/his next film.

At this point the authentication afforded by the ambivalent star-as-image: star-as-real-person nexus resembles nothing so much as a hall of mirrors. Not every case is so complicated. Many star images were authenticated by showing that the star really was like he or she was on the screen. In other cases, the off-screen reputation is either suppressed (as in the endless word of mouth about which indelibly heterosexual love gods and goddesses were in reality gay) or just does not get widely incorporated into the image's popular currency (e.g. every interview and biography assures us that James Cagney is of a gentle and kindly disposition, but it seems to have no impact on his image). But the full complexity of the potential inter-relations is illustrated by the career of Judy Garland. For instance, at the end of her career *I Could Go On Singing*, by drawing on all the publicity surrounding her Problems, offers itself as a guaranteed authentic portrait, and retrospectively, with the knowledge of her experiences

as a child and adolescent at MGM, the films of the '40s can be re-read for signs of disturbance and neurosis. Thus there is a constant play of authenticating levels in the process of reading the image at different points in time. *A Star Is Born* is probably most complex in this regard, since it clearly reworks the MGM Garland image (in notions of innate talent, in various details of dress and performance recalling the innocent girl-next-door of the early films, and in the films-within-the-film which, as Wade Jennings points out, resemble nothing so much as the kind of big-production number MGM put Garland into in the '40s. Yet it seems also to incorporate into it oblique reference to the difficult years immediately preceding it (e.g. as Jennings suggests, in transferring the Garland career to the Mason character) and can also be read, particularly in terms of Garland's performance style, for signs (not hard to find) of what we are pleased to label neurosis.

So far all I have said is still rooted in the basic fact of the star phenomenon, that star images are carried in the person of real people. But it is also clear that this is unstable. Corroboration that a star is really like s/he appears to be *may* work, but may be read as further manipulation; showing that the star is not really like s/he appears to be *may* itself be taken up into the image, its further construction and re-reading, but it could shatter the illusion altogether. There is more to authentication – there is a rhetoric of authenticity. This too has its own in-built instability – yesterday's markers of sincerity and authenticity are today's signs of hype and artifice. Nevertheless it is a powerful rhetoric so long as it is not perceived as a rhetoric.

I am not concerned here to try to establish the particular codes of authenticity that were current at given points in time. What interests me here are the reigning notions that inform the shifting rhetorical strategies. Authenticity is established or constructed in media texts by the use of markers that indicate lack of control, lack of premeditation and privacy. These return us to notions of the truth being behind or beneath the surface. The surface is organised and under control, it is worked out in advance, it is public. In terms of performance this would mean that every detail is marked as deliberate and calculated; in terms of narrative it would mean that all the actions that really matter are set in the public domain. This kind of performance and this kind of narrative are, needless to say, just what we don't get when authenticity is at stake.

Much of the effort of a film must be the deployment of markers of authenticity to buoy up the unstable authenticity of the star; and this becomes still more so when the film is about the phenomenon of stardom. Few treatments of stardom are in fact as naive as the title *A Star Is Born* suggests. The Cukor-Garland film repeatedly indicates that stars are made by elaborate processes of production and manufacture; the extended 'Born in a Trunk' number is about the fact that being born in a trunk is not being born a star. Yet while it is acknowledging the constructedness of stars, it is also

wishing to assert that stars are real, that this star, anyhow (whether we're thinking of her as Esther Blodgett, Vicki Lester or Judy Garland) is authentic. The whole film shifts between acknowledging manufacture as the rule and asserting the authenticity of this particular case.

The crucial moment of this assertion of authenticity is the 'The Man That Got Away' number. We must be convinced by this number that Esther really has 'star quality'; if this does not convince us, everything that follows suggests that her rise to stardom is just hype.

It may establish authenticity just by being Garland's big solo – it may be enough that it is Garland. Done in one long take, it may be accepted as capturing the continuousness of her performance which we may already think of as 'authentic' (– the Bazinian notion of the realism of the long take may be pertinent here). But the number is too crucial to the film to rest on that.

The number is located (by what is in fact a false point-of-view proceeding) as seen by James Mason (Norman Maine) and followed by his declaration that she has that 'little something extra' that is star quality. He looks at and appraises her, sober (for the first time so far in the film) and without lust (his usual mode of looking, as the previous scene establishes) – his judgement is signalled as unfuddled and disinterested, therefore more authoritative. He is himself a star, as well as a more fully established character in the film than is Esther/Garland at this point. For these reasons, he may be taken as the voice of truth. If he says she's a star, then she is. Still – this is not sure. He is hardly what we would call a reliable witness on the strength of what we've seen so far.

The film has to marshal markers of authenticity. *Lack of control*: several of Garland's gestures and facial (particularly mouth) expressions are redundant in terms of directly expressing or underlining the words or musical phrases of the song: such gestures are habitually read as neurotic (I'm sorry to keep using this word so lightly, but equally endlessly putting inverted commas around it is tedious – I intend neurosis as a socially constructed category) and her off-screen image by 1956 would have made such a reading easy. (For example – she brushes a lock of hair off her forehead after bringing her hand to her throat on the words, "No more that all time thrill"; but her hair is cropped, there is no lock on it; it is redundant as a practical gesture, but indecipherable as an expressive one, except as a gesture that can be taken to 'betray' neurosis.) *Unpremeditated*: other gestures, together with the opening "doo doo" and the raised eyebrow on the final piano phrase followed by a satisfied laugh, seem to be called forth by the music, to be improvised. She and the other musicians have already been described as jazz musicians, thus linking them to a music tradition that is assumed to be based on unpremeditated musical expressivity (– it is assumed that improvisations in jazz just happen, immediate and spontaneous, unrehearsed); and behind that, there is the link with Black culture, which has always functioned as a marker of authenticity

and naturalness in white discourses. *Private*: she and the band do not know that they are being observed, that they are on. The dark lighting and the close grouping that the moving camera continually reframes both connote intimacy, not public performance. In all these ways, the number is overdetermined in terms of authenticity.

No number, no scene in a film, can guarantee that it will be read in the way it intends or 'prefers'. The reframing camera which keeps Esther/Garland in the centre *may* remind us that this is a performance for us; that Garland knows we are looking even if Esther doesn't know that Norman is. It is only a step from this to reminding ourselves that this could well be the twentieth take, which scotches the notions of unpremeditated, unrehearsed performance. And so on. But this is to deconstruct the film in the process of viewing, to see the markers of authenticity as markers. It is to go against the grain of the number, and the film.

One of the curious things about this number is that the song does not refer to anything that has happened so far in the film, and it seems to stretch a point to suggest that it refers forward to Norman's suicide. One could see it as referring to Garland's life, her previous marriages and affairs; and this is the resonance the song acquired as she used it in subsequent concert appearances. Yet this was never so insistent a part of her neurotic image as the legacy, in the form of pills and alcohol, of her years as a child star in Hollywood. The authenticity the number is after really has nothing to do with what Esther/Garland is singing about – it is the authenticity of her capacity to sing that is at stake. We must know that her star quality has nothing to do with recording techniques (even though what we are watching is perforce a recording...), with mechanical reproduction, but is grounded in her own immediate (= not controlled), spontaneous (= unpremeditated) and essential (= a private) self. That guarantees that her stardom is not a con, because an authenticated individual is acting as the guarantor of the truth of the discourse of her stardom. By not having a direct emotional referent, the number reinforces the authenticity of the star quality that can *then* legitimate the authenticity of whatever particular emotions Esther/Vicky will be called upon to express. In this way, the number is an especially interesting indicator of the processes of the authentication of star quality.

Afterword: On Judy Garland

At the session based around my paper at the 'Star Signs' Workshop, I omitted ways one might begin thinking about the relationship between the image of Judy Garland and a specific audience, namely gay men in the urban gay male subculture. At present my interest in this is at the level of a project for investigation, it is not yet the result of sustained work on the question. What follows are hypotheses towards work in progress. This is not the usual academic disclaimer, but a real signal to you of how very speculative these remarks are.

I am interested in Judy Garland more because I am interested in (male) gay culture than because I am interested in stars. However, the relationship between Garland and male gay culture does seem to me a particularly good example of the relationship between a media text (Garland) and the discourse of a particular cultural grouping, which enables us, in principle, to examine concretely the way that an audience can read a text. What is offered here, speculative as it is, is work that attempts to deal with the questions of the polysemy of media texts and the question of differentiated (but not purely individualised) readings that recent media theory has been concerned with.

Judy Garland has been a key icon in urban male gay culture. I could almost say that I learnt to be gay by learning how to love Judy Garland. Talking about her records, raving about her films, gossiping about her doings – these were (and to a certain extent, surprisingly, still are) a way of getting into the swing of being gay, the entrée to gay discourse. I've put this personally, but it is clear from even the cursory analysis of gay publications that I have made that this was a common, defining experience.

Why did the Garland image occupy this crucial place in the discourse? She was not the only star in the discourse, of course – the roll call of these stars is a well-known litany: Mae West, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Shirley Bassey, Diana Ross, Grace Jones, to name but a few. What must first strike an outsider is the fact that these are all women stars. Why did gay male culture so get off on women stars?

An immediate answer is that the culture required stars that express sexual desire for men. In the period we're talking about (and still, really) male stars could not express that desire. It is no accident that the stars concerned are associated either with popular song (especially ballads) and women's melodramas, the two forms that could signify, through the female singer or protagonist, desire for men. (I'll leave aside here the interesting fact that the most recent stars have been Black, except to mention that this must have something to do with the emergence in the sixties and seventies of a sense among gay men of being a minority that could be compared – rightly or wrongly – with ethnic minorities. The other major contemporary star in the gay male pantheon is Barbra Streisand, who is big on ethnicity too.)

It could have happened that the gay subculture would have fastened on to that other, more covert form of desire for men that has been discerned (mainly, it must be said, by straight critics) in buddy relationships in the western and other genres. If one can imagine such genres existing in classical Greek society, then perhaps something like them (though they'd have to be very different in many ways) would have been significant for contemporary gay male culture. Classical Greek society constructed same-sex physical intercourse within dominant definitions of masculinity, and very much at the expense of women. (This is also true of certain aspects of the current male gay culture, though it should be stressed that the differences between Hellenic and Greenwich Village homosexuality are far greater than their one similarity of



Judy Garland in *A Star Is Born*, 1954. (BFI National Archive)

being defined within rather than against ‘masculinity’). However the traditional urban male gay subculture of the West in the twentieth century was not constructed within masculinity but rather over against it.

I don’t want to get into the complex arguments here around the very notion of homosexuality. Suffice it to say that while same-sex sexual practice is universal, a category of persons labelled ‘homosexuals’ is a modern invention. As a category of the regime of sexuality it attempted to define same-sex sexuality as characteristic of a certain type of person and – and this is what is important here – as in some sense deviating from/transgressive of not just normal, that is hetero-sexuality, but also of gender roles too. In the category of homosexuality, we see vividly illustrated the conflation of sexuality and gender so characteristic of our age.

In terms of identifying with stars or screen characters then, the one position that gay men could not occupy (*as* gay men) was that of the heterosexual male star/hero, since he could not express desire for other men, not so much because that was not

heterosexual as because it was not masculine. But we could identify with (heterosexual) women stars and characters because they could express that desire. (It should also be added that since homosexuality is forced on gay culture as a sexual category, so gay male culture very much knows itself as sexual – it does not recognise itself in buddy relations precisely because they hide, it is argued, rather than foreground sexuality.)

It is not *any* female star who becomes a figure in male gay subcultural discourse. Just as male homosexuality is a category defined outside of masculinity, so also it is not simply a 'feminine' position. Rather it has been defined as neither masculine or feminine (no matter how much male/female role playing it is credited with), a sexualised 'condition' outside of, or rather, in between, gender. Gay people have then been tempted by and drawn to notions of a sexual/gendered in-betweenism, to androgyny.

Garland's image is easily read in terms of androgyny. Even though sold by MGM as the ultimate in female normalcy, the girl-next-door, her roles and playing in her early films have tensions within them that could be read androgynistically. She is a girl-next-door, a stereotype instantly evoking associations of meekness, sweetness, subordination and so on, who is yet spunky, with a loud, belting singing voice. The films often – usually – set up her character over against a glamour girl type, thus foregrounding (or rather enabling us to foreground) the question of the relationship between competing female role stereotypes (virgin and vamp, for starters) and between gender and sexual stereotypes. *Meet Me in St. Louis* is particularly self-conscious in its play with these various elements (e.g. Esther initiates her relationship with boy-next-door John even while constructing herself as an object of gaze – sitting on the porch, standing on the stairs with the lights dimmed; their first love scene founders on his mumbled line, as they part, "You've got a good grip for a girl"). So, even in the MGM films, in the studio whose films are at least easily co-opted for a Comolli/Narboni category 'e' reading, Garland's image can be read through the discourse of androgyny. Later films exploit it far more directly, yielding those sequences that have been so re-worked in gay imagery – the 'Get Happy' number from *Summer Stock* and the 'Somewhere There's a Someone' from *A Star Is Born*, both with Garland dressed in man's clothing except for her legs in black tights. This was a look increasingly used for the stage shows, and the cropped hair style begun around the time of *A Star Is Born* is a further aspect of this.

Garland is then an example of a star who expresses desire for men in an androgynous mode – or, to make sure the operation I'm involved in here is clear, her image easily allowed itself to be read like this. In this respect she is like a number of other women stars; but she also relates to two further aspects of gay male subcultural discourse.

Firstly, to camp. This form of wit is a way of making fun of and protecting oneself against straight society. I don't propose to go into the arguments about it here. It is enough to say that Garland's act made much use of it. A camp appreciation of

Garland is not one at her expense (as it is of, say, John Wayne or Joan Crawford) but rather is an enjoyment of her being camp about other things, and including about what she's been made to do. This element comes out in wisecracks and the humorous delivery of a line – *The Pirate* makes the most sustained use of this of any of her films. Perhaps the classic Garland camp line is her reply to a woman who came up to her after a stage show and said, 'Never forget the rainbow, Judy, never forget the rainbow'; Garland replied, 'How can I forget the rainbow? I've got rainbows up my arse.'

To androgyny and camp – both ways of exploiting the space of the social category 'homosexual' – a third element must be added that is more negative. The category homosexual is not a neutral one – it is intended to define a pathology, a sickness. If the gay subculture internalised the idea of homosexuals as a discrete category of in-betweeners, then it is not surprising that it should in part internalise the definition of the category's sickness. Self-hatred, a belief in one's pathos, also marks gay male culture, and for this the later image of Judy Garland provided vivid imagery. Precisely because she could be our (androgynous, camp) star, her failures, her chaotic life, her problems with her appearances, her men, her career could also be used as an expression of what a mess gay men thought they were. There are two aspects to this – a deeply self-oppressive identification with her God-awfulness, but also an admiration for her ability to keep going in the face of it, to be brave and strong under the burden of her/our life. All of this applies far more to her stage and television work, and her image in publicity, though the few later films from *A Star Is Born* on also use it, particularly *I Could Go On Singing*.

All of this needs further research. The analysis of urban male gay culture has only just begun, and it needs to be put together with a detailed consideration of the textual possibilities of the Garland image. In particular, it is clear that Garland's place in gay cultural discourse is overdetermined – I need to get the complexity of the determinations clearer, to begin to see the contradictions and the different ways of inhabiting homosexuality that what I've said above tends to elide. All I have been suggesting is a way of beginning to think about these questions.

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2 THE MEANING OF TOM JONES (1971)

This is a study of the public personality of Tom Jones, the most highly paid British entertainer in history. It takes this image as a significant complex of meaning and subjects it to an immanent analysis of its aesthetic and moral values. It is concerned with the determinant meaning of the image rather than with the particular meaning or significance the image may assume in a given situation. It seeks to define and understand what objectively the value dimensions of the image are, rather than to understand its subjective meaning to audience, manager or star. Even beyond the errors of naivety of 'effects' research, a great deal of contemporary research is focussed, in principle if not in practice, on the meaning of the phenomenon in question to the actors. The present research is based on the belief that this meaning-to-actor can only be comprehended within an understanding as precise as possible, of what the phenomenon is.

THE SHOW

The following analysis is structured on the basis of the ATV Network production *This Is Tom Jones*. There are several reasons for this.

First, the analysis had to be of performance, since this is our primary definition of what Jones is. Second, television performances are the only kind available over a sufficiently wide area to make debate possible. That is to say that findings are needed upon which disagreements can be made, and this is only possible when the researcher deals with material that others can scrutinise; otherwise he will produce only journalistic assertion. Third, the television programme is much richer in evidence and semiological reference than other performance forms (cabaret, night club, variety one-night stand). Much of contemporary light entertainment on television consists of programmes built around a single performer and designed to present him or her not simply as a performer but as a personality. This it does by employing a variety of artistic devices to present a selection of facets which it is felt go to make up the public personality of the performer. Thus a television show will be particularly helpful to us when we are attempting to examine this public personality.

Like many weekly television shows, *This Is Tom Jones* has a regular structure or formula. The following treatment is essentially of this, rather than of any particular show.

THE SHOW: OPENING

The show opens with the camera trained on a microphone on a stand. A voice announces 'This is Tom Jones' and a hand grabs the mike. The camera tracks back to show Jones singing 'It's Not Unusual'. This opening, song and production, set off a train of associations that in effect set the tone for the whole show.

The song

'It's Not Unusual' was Tom Jones' first record to become a big hit, climbing in a very short time to number one in the Hit Parade. Jones as a public personality began here. It is important to dwell on this moment of public celebration, because it is here that so many of the elements which go to make up the image were first stated, and with a powerful impact. These images would both carry Jones, colouring his every performance or appearance in the press, and have to be carried by him, something he would have to live up to and bear out.

The song in itself, if one thinks of it apart from Jones' performance of it, is not unlike a type of song particularly popular in that year, 1965. This was a type composed principally by Burt Bacharach and Tony Hatch, and characterised by unusual 'sophisticated' harmonics and difficult and surprising rhythms and leaps in the tune's line. The words were also rather unusual, dealing with topics other than love and loss of love, or rather dealing with them distinctively – using urban or realistic images to express feelings – loss expressed by 'there's always something there to remind me', or the injunction to the beloved to 'walk on by' 'if you see me walking down the street', or the advice to the lonely to go 'downtown'. All this was supported by a luxuriant kind of orchestration which finally linked the songs to an older ballad tradition, different both to the frankly romantic ballads that put even comedians like Ken Dodd into the hit parade and to the beat, post rock 'n' roll numbers that were also popular. It was the sophisticated music of the same middle class urban society that had applauded Cole Porter and Jerome Kern.

That is the song, thought of apart from Jones' performance of it. For when Jones took it, provided a simple up-tempo backing for it and sang it in his own distinctive manner, it no longer belonged to this genre of popular music. That is, its connection with this genre was readily discernible (note the quirky rhythms at the end of each phrase, the double negative and use of 'wo-wo' in the words) but it clearly also expressed a whole different approach to music – bluesy, aggressive, with a heavy beat. Jones thus introduced a new music (and hence new values) to the hit parade whilst still relating to a widely acceptable idiom.

What was the difference? First, Jones was a man, and most of these songs had been sung by women (the song had itself been intended for Dusty Springfield). Not only this, he was very much a man, compared to the androgynous type that was then becoming popular. On the other hand, the masculinity was of a recognisable type – it did not have the strangeness, the shockingness, the hipness of a Mick Jagger. The masculinity was in the build, in the face, in the voice. On television he appeared in a string shirt of the kind Cliff Richard wore in ‘Summer Holiday’; on Richard it had been coyly sexy, on Jones it was really provocative.

This masculine sexiness, surprising in the context of that song and that sort of pop singer, has remained the essential defining characteristic of Tom Jones, and we shall return to it repeatedly as we get nearer to understanding precisely what image of sexuality is involved. Newspapers were quick to pick it up at the time of the success of ‘It’s Not Unusual’. He was compared to P. J. Proby, at the time making headlines by splitting his velvet trousers on stage, but Jones had none of the campness and baroque which Proby introduced in his act. Nor was he like Billy Fury, who had seemed to be performing elaborate masturbatory rites with the microphone when he was on stage. Questioned about his sexiness, Jones would always say that he was merely ‘presenting the number’ – it was the emotion he felt at the time, and since he was a living man, this (of course) had a sexual dimension to it.

The production

The production of the opening number in *This Is Tom Jones* is also important. The microphone seems to be waiting for the star, and this is emphasised by the delay in its being used, the camera’s concentration on it and the announcement over. The notion of the star will be considered at the end of this paper, but here it is important to consider the image of stardom which is part of Jones’ public personality. Jones is defined by his masculine values, by his performing ability (which the microphone heralds) but also by his ontological status as a star, or a superstar. That is he is not just a sexy man who sings well, but a different order of being.

This kind of imagery is well expressed in two booklets, *Tom Jones*¹ and *This is Tom Jones*.² In both these the life of Jones is covered in a few pages and the rest is devoted to a celebration of what it is like to be a star. Two elements are particularly emphasised. The first is Tom’s admission into a kind of mutual admiration society of stars. Such ‘unquestionable’ greats as Frank Sinatra and Betty Grable seek fleeting contact with Tom, whilst both booklets devote considerable space to a visit Elvis Presley and his wife paid Tom while he was touring the States. The Purnell booklet emphasises

1. *Tom Jones*, a Purnell TV Special, London: BBC Publications Ltd., 1969.

2. *This is Tom Jones*, A Daily Mirror Special, London: Hamlyn, 1969.



Tom Jones performing on *This Is Tom Jones*, September 1969. (ABC Photo Archives/Disney General Entertainment Content via Getty Images)

Tom's own admiration for Elvis as a teenager and continues: 'The great moment came and suddenly Tom was standing face to face with the man who has remained the true superstar of the last decade, carrying fans who had cheered him when they were sixteen, and who had now married and turned twenty-six or more, with him.' This extraordinarily loose sentence gives no specific idea of the kind of stardom Elvis embodies, but rather evokes a world of adulation, where existence is defined by the fact of being adulated. A second emphasis is Tom's possession of a Rolls Royce. A picture of him standing by it is captioned 'The symbol of success – showbiz style ... a gleaming Rolls-Royce'. This is from the Purnell booklet; the *Daily Mirror* goes one better: 'Not one Rolls-Royce in the garage, but two. That's the ultimate symbol of success for Tom' and another picture shows him seated in one of them, a cut-glass decanter and glass in hand with the caption: 'Just testing the luxury of his new Rolls

Royce with a quick snifter from the concealed bar at the back'. The Rolls Royce is of course almost of itself suggestive of a different world of being – luxuriant, smoothness, wealth. Anyone who is at home in a Rolls Royce seems almost a different order of person. Or if that is felt to be going too far, the Purnell description makes a similar point rather more crudely: 'Outside the house a gleaming car sits waiting, the light catching on the highly polished surface as though ready for instant flight. It is a Rolls Royce and it shrieks expense'. The Purnell booklet has a section entitled 'A Day in the life of a Star'. Even the title seems to be suggesting that Tom is defined by being a star, rather than by more specific qualities. The article which follows shows Tom rising very late, driving to a club to rehearse, taking a sauna, giving a performance and going back to bed. This is spun out, but more time is spent discussing what Tom's manager Gordon Mills does or says or the progress of the car through various streets to various clubs than in anything Tom does. Apart from signing autographs and the fifty minutes of 'a-tomic Tom', he does nothing but be. His car is chauffeur-driven, his decisions are made for him, even his body is 'stretched, pulled and rolled into shape' by someone else. A superstar precisely does not do anything but just is.

These two booklets and the rest of Jones' publicity gives substance and detail to the resonances set up by the actual production of the opening number. This interplay of production and promotion is what together constitutes the image of Tom Jones.

Another aspect of production in the opening number of *This Is Tom Jones* is the phallic significance of the microphone. One could argue that all microphones are, but in this instance the observation fits well with the imagery of Jones. There is something about the way his hand grabs the mike which immediately makes of the mike a live thing. Moreover, the camera's concentration on it gives it a kind of vital, even autonomous quality. One might even speak of totems.

It is evident that in discussing Tom Jones one must at some point or other mention his penis. The idea that male performers are sex symbols is hardly original. Hortense Powdermaker, in her extremely unreliable book *Hollywood the Dream Factory* reports that young male leads were commonly referred to on the film lot as the Penis. However, in the case of Tom Jones it is not just symbolic, it's the penis itself. A series of articles in the *Daily Sketch* in the beginning of November 1969 referred repeatedly to Tom's tight trousers, always managing to imply that they revealed the shape of his penis. Letters from female viewers were quoted: one woman asked whether Tom padded his crutch, to which Tom replied 'There's nothing false about me but my nose'. Certainly, the trousers are cut in a revealing fashion, although not as revealing as the *Daily Sketch* made out, and in several of the photographs in the *Daily Mirror* booklet the lighting and angle show clearly a bulge at the crutch. Moreover, Tom's movements are either a thrusting forward of the groin or else, especially and increasingly, as the series has proceeded, a gyrating of the hips. He doesn't dance properly nor does he

use his arms expressively. Of course, one can overplay this kind of observation and certainly Tom's sexuality cannot be reduced to a bulge in his pants. The point is that, with Tom Jones as compared to a sexy singer like Engelbert Humperdinck, the precise physical meaning of sexuality is not glossed over by a wash of sultry looks. Tom Jones has a penis and one does not forget it, but he has the personality to back it up.

The opening sequence of the Tom Jones TV show then gives us Tom the singer and record maker, Tom the superstar, Tom the penis and Tom of 'It's Not Unusual', a jumping off point for a complex series of understandings about what Tom is.

THE SHOW: REGULAR FEATURES

Apart from the guest spots, Tom does four other spots in his show, most of which emphasise aspects that have already emerged in the discussion of the show so far.

First, there is an up-tempo routine with the dancers. The dancing is frantic, and Tom stands in the middle moving but hardly dancing. Of particular interest are the sets and costumes for this sequence. In the first show, the routine took place before a huge blown-up photograph of Tom wearing a black leather outfit. The second show had him again in black leather, but had the dancers in weird lurex costumes, with bras for the girls and singlets for the boys, and a set that looked like a highly glamourised factory – the whole tone was industrial and dynamic. On 14th December 1969, Tom wore for this spot white trousers and Western jacket (see below), the dancers wore 'wet look' jumpsuits (trendy styling in a modern artificial fabric), the setting was back projection of circles and the camera work added to the hectic and gyrating effect. Another show had Tom and the dancers in Karate clothes, with the boys and the girls alternately defeating each other in bouts of very swiftly moving Karate. What these numbers do is project the *dynamic* aspect of Tom's image and the *aggressiveness*, which comes from the machine age, the Western or newly discovered forms (on a mass scale) of Japanese violence. (In fact, these sequences, often inventively conceived, tend to drown Tom – the dancing and design are so much more dynamic and professional than he is.) Then there is his country-and-western spot, when he sings accompanied by a guitarist called Big Jim Sullivan. On one occasion Tom introduced this spot by saying that it was one of his favourite kinds of music and that he felt so at home in it. Compared to the kind of music broadcast on 'Country meets Folk' on Radio One, Jones' country and western seems far more powerful and more in a tradition of industrial balladeering than the folksy flavour of most of what passes for country and western. Certainly with the Western gear and the heavy presence of Big Jim Sullivan it suggests a world of virility – the hard West.

Another regular spot for Jones in the shows is the moment when he sings a sentimental ballad. After 'It's Not Unusual' Tom's hits were in fact far more of the type associated with Engelbert Humperdinck or Ken Dodd – 'Delilah', 'Green Green Grass

of Home', and 'Without Love'. They are characterised by big, soaring and easily memorised melodies, broadly sentimental lyrics and heavily romantic orchestration, closer to Rachmaninov than to Bacharach's Mahler. Undoubtedly it is these that have earned him his strong following amongst older women. What they contribute to the Jones image is an enlargement of the area of 'soul', a kind of bastard spiritualisation of it. In a sense, this is another kind of respectability, taking up the banal reassurances of popular romantic ballads but I think it works more especially as an apparent enrichment (but in my view actual impoverishment) of the total sexual field we have already picked out. It has the bigness of manly emotion; if it is sentimental, it is generously so and in an uncomplicated way. It is usually shot in a part of the set that looks like a rather plush and anonymous hotel lounge or first class passenger airport lounge, and often benefits from imaginative fluid camerawork; Tom does not sing to a camera but is caught singing wrapped in emotion.

THE SHOW: CLOSING SEQUENCE

Finally there is the closing sequence of the show. This begins like the opening sequence, with a close up of a microphone and the voice over 'This is Tom Jones' but when the camera swings back it is to see Tom entering a large arena lit from below (that is, a glass floor with underfloor lighting), surrounded on three sides by 'stalls' of women and backed on the fourth by a large orchestra and chorus (The Mike Sammes Singers). He does three numbers, a fast one to open and close, and a slow one in the middle. At the end of the first number he undoes his bow tie (he is wearing a dinner jacket) and mops his brow. At points during the songs he goes up to the front rows of women, shakes hands with some and sometimes kisses a few. They in turn shriek and hold out their hands and bodies to him. This sequence has a live feel to it, almost like an outside broadcast and one half fears and hopes that at any moment the women will drag Tom down among them. By this point, he has everything working for him – the publicity and promotion, the big sound of band and orchestra, the big (working-class) body (penis) bursting out of the dinner jacket (upper class/superstar class), the kinds of song referring back to specific aspects (virility, romance) of his image. Moreover, for viewers, as opposed to those actually in the audience, it is a sight of a celebration of all these things – it is sex symbol and superstar in action, validated by the screams of the audience.

We have been concerned above all with facets and features, with elements of meaning and aesthetic qualities. Of course, Jones is not a jumble or even an ordered collection of ideas or features. He is a human being and it is important to remember this. What gives any symbolic cluster its force in the world of entertainers is the fact that the actual physiognomy and existential reality of the cluster is unique and assured by the

uniqueness of the individual human being. This is not a declaration of faith, but a simple observation of fact. Generalised values are here embodied in a particular person, and the fact that that person is particular acts as a 'guarantee' that the generalised values hold, have meaning. Jones does not simply symbolise or represent sexuality for instance: the fact that he exists means, or can be felt to mean, that this sexuality itself exists.

THE NOTION OF STARDOM

A star is someone in the world of entertainment who has charisma. He or she has that aura, that special magic, that star quality and excitement ... clichés for the phenomenon are not hard to find – understanding is rather more difficult. Charisma has been defined as 'an *extraordinary* quality of a person, regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged, or presumed.'³ The qualification is important, since it raises the question of whether, in the present instance, a star really is extraordinary or not. Audiences and professional entertainers alike seem to need to believe that the charisma is real, an inborn 'something extra', but modern thought on charisma has tended to underplay this and stress the importance of social context. E.A. Shils writes: 'The charismatic quality of an individual as perceived by others or himself, lies in what is thought to be his connection with (including possession by or embodiment of) some *very central* feature of man's existence and the cosmos in which he lives. The centrality, coupled with intensity, makes it extraordinary'.⁴

There are two ways of understanding this in terms of how individuals come to have this particular role in society. On the one hand, the charismatic figures can be seen as simply a passive recipient of various social tendencies, someone who happened to be around when these tendencies were coming together. Clearly it is difficult – but not impossible – to hold such a view and in certain cases it may be singularly appropriate. The present Royal Family for instance may be said to have charisma, but it would be hard to think this an extraordinary quality they possess; infinitely passive they were born in the right place to embody certain central tendencies of our society. On the other hand, the charismatic individual may be seen as one more than usually responsive to the mood and tendencies of his society and able to act in such a way as to play an especially appropriate, and hence charismatic, role in it. The example of Napoleon may be relevant; one could argue that the condition of French society at the time made dictatorship by that kind of man possible and meaningful to the people, and that in addition Napoleon, being the kind of person he was, was able to

3. Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, New York: Oxford University Press, 1946, p. 295.

4. Edward Shils, 'Charisma, Order, and Status', *American Sociological Review* 30:2 (April 1965), p. 201.

understand the situation in terms of his won charismatic role in it. This ability to, as it were, 'seize the time', need not be deliberate or even conscious; in political history it does always seem to have been so (Louis XIV, Cromwell, Lenin, Churchill, Mao Tse-Tung ...), but if we turn to the field of professional entertainers it seems less likely. Thus the apparent need of the American public for prematurely avuncular singers in the mid-twentieth century was surely not realised by Bing Crosby when he assumed this role and gave to it his own particular blandness and humour. He was neither passively in the right place, since the mass media industry is not highly structured in quite the same decisive way as the English class system, nor inexplicably charismatic, an extraordinary individual overwhelming all by his personality. The charisma came from both the appropriateness and the individuality of Crosby.

In any event, whether or not you believe in the reality of the charismatic figure's extraordinary qualities is ultimately a matter of choice that does not affect the analysis. That is to say that if one takes the line that the figure *does* possess these qualities, then one is still bound to show why these qualities should work at this time, which means examining the social context. My own bias, for what it is worth, is not to believe in the qualities themselves but to believe in the capacity of certain people to embody, sustain and effectively create these qualities. A star is someone who always manages to live up to his charismatic image. It may be that Tom Jones' meteoric rise in the USA, and the present falling-off of interest there is due to his inability to live up, over a sustained period, to his image.

Having said this, I do not see a simple way of showing the centrality of the values Jones expresses to our society. For one thing, whilst they certainly are central, I don't believe that one could show that there was a 'need' for Tom Jones. If he had not happened, there is no reason to suppose that he would have to have been invented. Peter Jones' image, in his recent biography of Tom Jones, of a nation crying out for masculinity in an entertainment industry swamped by effeminacy doesn't really seem adequate, although clearly this is part of the explanation. (But it doesn't explain why effeminacy should have got so far in the pop world). Jones does represent forcefully traditional images and values of the working-class male, which may be said to be under threat from the seductions of affluence and hooliganism – but paradoxically Jones catches the violence of the latter and the respectability and materialism of the former. Again, Jones' appeal to middle-aged women is suggestive, when one considers their role in the old working-class street culture, now diminishing, and their vulnerability to advertisers of consumer goods and labour-saving devices (which are associated too with respectability and knowing one's place). Jones, by suggesting the old values of pride in class and toughness and yet by being affluent and respectable, may be providing a set of values comparable to the aggression-without-bite that has made *The Sun* so successful. These are of course only hypotheses, but it is perhaps in providing such

hypothesises that the real usefulness of the analysis of the mass media lies. Rather than seeking to explain why Tom Jones is popular, in itself rather a trivial question, one is saying, given that Tom Jones is popular, and with these people, what does this tell us about the kind of society we live in. Given that he is like *this* what can we suppose (and set up for further research) about contemporary culture and consciousness? It is reasonable after all to want art to tell us about life, and not parasitically to call on life to tell us about art.

Original (longer) version published in *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Vol. 1 (1971), pp. 53–64.

3 GENE KELLY (1972)

Gene Kelly is good-looking, with a broad white smile and a muscular body. He is, in John Russell Taylor's words, 'the open, confident, brash ... straightforward American male.'¹ His energy and his virility register in his dancing style, but his personality does not go uncriticised in the films and this gives him a certain vulnerability.

Kelly's style is, like most film dancers, a hybrid. Chiefly he draws on tap, folk and modern dance – social dances are conspicuously absent from his range. The styles are predominantly masculine – few women have mastered tap, American folk styles are actually limited to male expression, and modern dance, although many of its pioneers have been women, is especially associated with virile, aggressive, impressively physical performance. Kelly himself has admitted that Martha Graham was the biggest choreographic influence on him,² and although it may not be directly observable in the overall style, nonetheless it is recognizable in the tautness of the limbs, the development of dance to express lonely or neurotic states, and in a liking in solo numbers for oppositional asymmetrical shapes. The modern dance approach gives the dancing a strength and physical presence, a sense of effort and strain, which express masculine activity and power, and Kelly's own body, with big thighs and shaped torso, is a paradigm of muscular virility.

The masculinity of the dancing is complemented by the vehicles. Kelly always plays an all-American type – vaudeville performer (*For Me and My Gal*), ex-G.I., but very much seen as having once been a G.I. (*American in Paris*, *It's Always Fair Weather*) and particularly as a sailor (*Anchors Aweigh*, *On the Town*, *The Magic Lamp*). He has on occasion been quite fierce about masculinity and dancing, regretting "the paucity of men entering the dance field, for a reason no-one wants to talk about – the feeling that the field is dominated by homosexuals. ... Dancing is a form of athletics, and I'd like to see it attract strong young men who can experience the value and the sheer

1. John Russell Taylor, *The Hollywood Musical*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1971, p. 60.

2. Albert Johnson, 'The tenth muse in San Francisco', a report of a lecture given by Gene Kelly, in *Sight and Sound* 26:1 (Summer 1956), p. 48.