Introduction
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From: *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*

Eve Arnold's portrait of Joan Crawford gathers into one image three dimensions of stardom. Crawford is before two mirrors, a large one on the wall, the other a small one in her hand. In the former we see the Crawford image at its most finished; she is reduced to a set of defining features: the strong jaw the gash of a mouth, the heavy arched eyebrows, the large eyes. From just such a few features, an impressionist, caricaturist or female impersonator can summon up 'Joan Crawford' for us. Meanwhile, in the small mirror we can see the texture of the powder over foundation, the gloss of the lipstick, the pencilling of the eyebrows - we can see something of the means by which the smaller image has been manufactured.

Neatly, we have two Crawford reflections. The placing of the smaller one, central and in sharpest focus, might suggest that this is the one to be taken as the 'real' Crawford. Eve Arnold is known as a photographer committed to showing women 'as they really are', not in men's fantasies of them. This photo appears in her collection The Un retouched Woman (1976), the title proclaiming Arnold's aim; it is accompanied by the information that Crawford wanted Arnold to do the series of photos of her to show what hard work being a star was. The style and context of the photo encourage us to treat the smaller image as the real one, as do our habits of thought. The processes of manufacturing an appearance are often thought to be more real than the appearance itself - appearance is mere illusion, is surface.

There is a third Crawford in the photograph, a back view slightly less sharply in focus than the mirror images. Both the large and the small facial images are framed, made into pictures. The fact that the different mirrors throw back different pictures suggests the complex relationship between a picture and that of which it is a picture, something reinforced by the fact that both mirrors reflect presentation: making-up and decorating the face. Both mirrors return a version of the front of the vague, shadowy figure before them. Is this third Crawford the real one, the real person who was the occasion of the images? This back view of Crawford establishes her as very much there, yet she is beyond our grasp except through the partial mirror images of her. Is perhaps the smaller mirror image the true reflection of what the actual person of Crawford was really like, or can we know only that there was a real person inside the images but never really know her? Which is Joan Crawford, really?

We can carryon looking at the Arnold photo like this, and our mind can constantly shift between the three aspects of Crawford; but it is the three of them taken together that make up the phenomenon Joan Crawford, and it is the insistent question of 'really' that draws us in, keeping us on the go from one aspect to another.

Logically, no one aspect is more real than another. How we appear is no less real than how we have manufactured that appearance, or than the 'we' that is doing the manufacturing. Appearances are a kind of reality, just as manufacture and individual persons are. However, manufacture and the person (a certain notion of the person, as I'll discuss) are generally thought to be more real than appearance in this culture. Stars are obviously a case of appearance - all we

know of them is what we see and hear before us. Yet the whole media construction of stars encourages us to think in· terms of 'really' - what is Crawford really like? which biography, which word-of-mouth story, which moment in which film discloses her as she really was? The star phenomenon gathers these aspects of contemporary human existence together, laced up with the question of 'really'.

The rest of this chapter looks at this complex phenomenon from two angles - first, the constitutive elements of stars, what they consist of, their production; secondly,the notions of personhood and social reality that they relate to. These are not separate aspects of stardom, but different ways of looking at the same overall phenomenon. How anything in society is made, how making is organised and understood, is inseparable from how we think people are, how they function, what their relation to making is. The complex way in which we produce and reproduce the world in technologically developed societies involves the ways in which we separate ourselves into public and private persons, producing and consuming persons and so on, and the ways in which we as people negotiate and cope with those divisions. Stars are about all of that, and are one of the most significant ways we have for making sense of it all. That is why they mailer to us, and why they are worth thinking about.

Making Stars

The star phenomenon consists of everything that is publicly available about stars. A film star's image is not just his or her films, but the promotion of those films and of the star through pin-ups, public appearances, studio hand-outs and so on, as well as interviews, biographies and coverage in the press of the star's doings and 'private' life. Further, a star's image is also what people say or write about him or her, as critics or commentators, the way the image is used in other contexts such as advertisements, novels, pop songs, and finally the way the star can become part of the coinage of everyday speech. Jean-Paul Belmondo imitating Humphrey Bogart in *A bout de soufflé* is part of Bogart's image, just as anyone saying, in a mid-European accent, 'I want to be alone' reproduces, extends and inflects Greta Garbo's image.

Star images are always extensive, multimedia, intertextual. Not all these manifestations are necessarily equal. A film star's films are likely to have a privileged place in her or his image, and I have certainly paid detailed attention to the films in the analyses that follow. However, even this is complicated. In the case of Robeson, his theatre, recording and concert work were undoubtedly more highly acclaimed than his film work - he was probably better known as a singer, yet more people would have seen him in films than in the theatre or concert hall. Later, in the period not covered here, he became equally important as a political activist. Garland became more important in her later years as a music hall, cabaret and recording star, although, as I argue in the Garland chapter, that later reputation then sent people back to her old films with a different kind of interest. Again, Monroe may now have become before everything else an emblematic figure, her symbolic meaning far outrunning what actually happens in her films.

As these examples suggest, not only do different elements predominate in different star images, but they do so at different periods in the star's career. Star images have histories, and histories that outlive the star's own lifetime. In the chapters that follow I have tried to reconstruct something of the meanings of Robeson and Monroe in the period in which they were themselves

still making films - I've tried to situate them in relation to the immediate contexts of those periods. Robeson and Monroe have continued to be ethnic and sexual emblems as they were in their lifetime, but I have wanted to situate them in relation to the specific ways of understanding and feeling ethnic and sexual questions which were available in the thirties and fifties respectively, rather than in relation to what they mean in those terms now, although this would be an equally proper enquiry. (I did not, by the way, put ethnic and sexual in relation to Robeson and Monroe 'respectively', because Robeson is importantly situated in relation to ideas of sexuality just as Monroe is a profoundly ethnic image.) With Garland I have done the opposite - I have tried to look at her through a particular world-view, that of the white urban male gay subculture that developed in relation to her after her major period of film stardom and as she was becoming better known as a cabaret, recording and television star (and subject of scandal). The studies of Monroe, Robeson and Garland that follow are partial and limited, not only in the usual sense that all analyses are, but in being deliberately confined to particular aspects of their images, at particular periods and with a particular interest in seeing how this is produced and registered in the films.

Images have to be made. Stars are produced by the media industries, film stars by Hollywood (or its equivalent in other countries) in the first instance, but then also by other agencies with which Hollywood is connected in varying ways and with varying degrees of influence. Hollywood controlled not only the stars' films but their promotion, the pin-ups and glamour portraits, press releases and to a large extent the fan clubs. In turn, Hollywood's connections with other media industries meant that what got into the press, who got to interview a star, what clips were released to television was to a large extent decided by Hollywood. But this is to present the process of star making as uniform and oneway. Hollywood, even within its own boundaries, was much more complex and contradictory than this. If there have always been certain key individuals in controlling positions (usually studio bosses and major producers, but also some directors, stars and other figures) and if they all share a general professional ideology, clustering especially around notions of entertainment, still Hollywood is also characterised by internecine warfare between departments, by those departments getting on with their own thing in their own ways and by a recognition that it is important to leave spaces for individuals and groups to develop their own ideas (if only because innovation is part of the way that capitalist industries renew themselves). If broadly everyone in Hollywood had a sense of what the Monroe, Robeson and Garland images were, still different departments and different people would understand and inflect the image differently. This already complex image-making system looks even more complex when one brings in the other media agencies involved, since there are elements of rivalry and competition between them and Hollywood, as well as co-operation and mutual influence. If the drift of the image emanates from Hollywood, and with some consistency within Hollywood, still the whole image-making process within and without Hollywood allows for variation, inflection, and contradiction.

What the audience makes of all this is something else again - and, as I've already suggested, the audience is also part of the making of the image. Audiences cannot make media images mean anything they want to, but they can select from the complexity of the image the meanings and feelings, the variations, inflections and contradictions, that work for them. Moreover, the agencies of fan magazines and c1ubs, as well as box office receipts and audience research, mean that the audience's ideas about a star can act back on the media producers of the

star's image. This is not an equal to-and-fro - the audience is more disparate and fragmented, and does not itself produce centralised, massively available media images; but the audience is not wholly controlled by Hollywood and the media, either. In the case, for example, of feminist readings of Monroe (or of John Wayne) or gay male readings of Garland (or Montgomery Clift), what those particular audiences are making of those stars is tantamount to sabotage or what the media industries though they were doing.

Stars are made for profit. In terms of the market, stars are part or the way films are sold. The star's presence in a film is a promise or a certain kind of thing that you would see if you went to see the film. Equally, stars sell newspapers and magazines, and are used to sell toiletries, fashions, cars and almost anything else.

This market function of stars is only one aspect or their economic importance. They are also a property on the strength or whose name money can he raised for a film: they are an asset to the person (the star him/herself), studio and agent who controls them; they are a major part or the cost of a film. Above all, they are part of the labour that produces film as a commodity that can he sold for profit in the market place.

Stars arc involved in making themselves into commodities; they are both labour and the thing that labour produces. They do not produce themselves alone. We can distinguish two logically separate stages. First, the person is a body, a psychology, a set of skills that have to be mined and worked up into a star image. This work, of fashioning the star out of the raw material of the person, varies in the degree to which it respects what artists sometimes refer to as the inherent qualities of the material; make-up, coiffure, clothing, dieting and body-building can all make more or less of the body features they start with, and persona lily is no less malleable, skills no less learnable. The people who do this labour include the star him/herself as well as make-up artistes, hairdressers, dress designers, dieticians, bodybuilding coaches, acting, dancing and other teachers, publicists, pin-up photographers, gossip columnists, and so on. Part of this manufacture of the star image takes place in the films the star makes, with all the personnel involved in that, but one can think of the films as a second stage. The star image is then a given, like machinery, an example of what Karl Marx calls 'congealed labour', something that is used with further labour (scripting, acting, directing, managing, filming, editing) to produce another commodity, a film.

How much of a determining role the person has in the manufacture of her or his image and films varies enormously from case to case and this is part of the interest. Stars are examples of the way people live their relation to production in capitalist society. The three stars examined in subsequent chapters all in some measure revolted against the lack of control they felt they had - Robeson by giving up feature film-making altogether, Monroe by trying to fight for better parts and treatment, Garland by speaking of her experiences at MGM and by the way in which her later problems were credited to the Hollywood system. These battles are each central parts of the star's image and they enact some of the ways the individual is felt to be placed in relation to business and industry in contemporary society. At one level, they articulate a dominant experience of work itself under capitalism not only the sense of being a cog in an industrial machine, hut also the fact that one's labour and what it produces seem so divorced from each other - one labours to produce goods (and profits) in which one either does not share at all or

only in the most meager, back-handed fashion. Robeson's, Monroe's, Garland's sense that they had been used, turned into something they didn't control is particularly acute because the commodity they produced is fashioned in and out of their own bodies and psychologies.

Other stars deliver different stories, of course. June Allyson, in interviews and in her biography 'with Frances Spatz-Leighton', sings the praises of the job security provided by the studio system, of big capital, just as in her movies she perfected the role of the happy stay-at-home housewife who saw it as her role to support her man in his productive life, whether he produced music (as in The Glenn Miller Story) or profits (as in Executive Suite). There is a consistency between her 'contented housewife' screen image, her satisfaction with her working conditions, the easygoing niceness in the tone of the biography and interviews. She thus represents the possibility of integrated, mutually supporting spheres of life, not the tension between screen image, manufacture and real person that Monroe, Garland and Robeson suggest.

Many male stars - Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart, Paul Newman, Steve McQueen - suggest something else again. In each, sporting activity is a major - perhaps the major - clement in their image; they are defined above all as people for whom having uncomplicated fun is paramount, and this is implicitly carried over into their reported altitude to their work. But equally work isn't important it's just something you do so as to have the wherewithal to play polo, sail yachts race cars. This is, then, an instrumental attitude towards manufacture, not the antagonistic one of Garland, Robeson and Monroe, nor the integrated one of Allyson, nor yet again the committed one or for example, Fred Astaire, Joan Crawford or Barbara Streisand. These last three suggest different connotations of commitment to work - Astaire to technical mastery. In the endless stories of his perfectionist altitude towards rehearsal and the evidence of it on the screen; Crawford in her total slogging away at all aspects of her image and her embodiment of the ethic of hard work in so many of her films; Streisand in her control over the films and records she makes a reported shopfloor control that also shows in the extremely controlled and detailed nature of her performance style. Whatever the particular inflection, stars play out some of the ways that work is lived in capitalist society. My selection of Monroe, Robeson and Garland is different only in that there is in them an element of protest about labour under capitalism which you do not find in Allyson, Gable, Astaire, Streisand and the rest.

The protests of Robeson, Monroe and Garland are individual protests. Robeson and Monroe could he taken as protests emblematic of the situation of black people and women respectively and have been properly used as such. But they remain individualised, partly because the star system is about the promotion of the individual. Protest about the lack of control over the outcome of one's labor can remain within the logic of individualism. The protests or Robeson, Monroe and Garland arc or the individual versus the anomie corporation; they arc protests against capitalism that do not recognise themselves as such, protests with deep resonances within the ideologies or entrepreneurial capitalism. They speak in the name of the individual and or the not ion or success, not in the name or the individual as part or a collective organisation or labor and production. (Robeson alone began to move in that direction in his ensemble theatre work, and in his deliberately emblematic role in political activity in later years.)

A star image consists both of what we normally refer to as his or her 'image', made up of screen roles and obviously stage-managed public appearances, and also of images of the

manufacture of that 'image' and of the real person who is the site or occasion of it. Each element is complex and contradictory, and the star is all of it taken together. Much of what makes them interesting is how they articulate aspects of living in contemporary society, one of which, the nature of work in capitalist society, I've already touched on. In the chapters that follow I want to look at the ways in which three particular stars relate to three aspects of social life - sexuality, ethnicity and sexual identity. Even being that specific, it is still complicated. I'm still wanting to keep some sense of the multiplicity of readings even of those stars in those terms. In the rest of this chapter, however, I want to risk even wider generalizations. Work, sexuality, ethnicity and sexual identity themselves depend on more general ideas in society about what a person is and stars are major definers of these ideas.

Living Stars

Stars articulate what it is to be a human being in contemporary society; that is they express the particular notion we hold of the person, of the 'individual'. They do so complexly, variously -they are not straightforward affirmations of individualism. On the contrary, they articulate both the promise and the difficulty that the notion of individuality presents for all of us who live by it.

'The individual' is a way of thinking and feeling about the discrete human person, including oneself, as a separate and coherent entity. The individual is thought of as separate in the sense that she or he has an existence apart from anything else - the individual is not just the sum of his or her social roles or actions. He or she may only be perceived through these things, may even be thought to be formed by them, yet there is, in this concept of the person an irreducible core of being, the entity that is perceived within the roles and actions, the entity upon which social forces act. This irreducible core is coherent in that it is supposed to consist of certain peculiar, unique qualities that remain constant and give sense to the person's actions and reactions. However much the person's circumstances and behaviour may change, 'inside' they are still the same individual; even if 'inside' she or he has changed, it is through an evolution that has not altered the fundamental reality of that irreducible core that makes her or him a unique individual.

At its most optimistic, the social world is seen in this conception to emanate from the individual and each person is seen to 'make' his or her own life. However, this is not necessary to the concept. What is central is the idea of the separable, coherent quality, located 'inside' in consciousness and variously termed 'the self, 'the soul', 'the subject' and so on. This is counter posed to 'society', something seen as logically distinct from the individuals who compose it, and very often as inimical to them. If in ideas of 'triumphant individualism' individuals are seen to determine society, in ideas of 'alienation' individuals are seen as cut adrift from and dominated, haltered by the anonymity of society. Both views retain the notion of the individual as separate, irreducible, unique.

It is probably true to say that there has never been a period in which this concept of the individual was held unproblematically throughout society. The notion of the individual has always been accompanied by the gravest doubts as to its tenability. It is common, for instance, to characterize Enlightenment philosophy as one of the most shiningly optimistic assertions of individuality; yet two of its most sparkling works, Hume's “An Essay on Human Understanding”

and Diderot's “Rameau's Nephew”, fundamentally undercut any straightforward belief in the existence of the coherent, stable, inner individual; Hume, by arguing that all we can know as our self is a series of sensations and experiences with no necessary unity or connection, Diderot by focusing on the vital, theatrical, disjointed character of Rameau's nephew, so much more 'real' than Diderot, the narrator's stodgily maintained coherent self.

If the major trend of thought since the Renaissance, from philosophical rumination to common sense, has affirmed the concept of the individual, there has been an almost equally strong counter-tradition of ideas that have severely dented our confidence in ourselves: Marxism, with its insistence that social being determines consciousness and not vice versa, and, in its economist variant, with its vision of economic forces propelling human events forward; psychoanalysis, with its radical splitting of consciousness into fragmentary, contradictory parts; behaviourism, with its view of human beings controlled by instinctual appetites beyond consciousness; linguistics and models of communication in which it is not we who speak language, but language which speaks us. Major social and political developments have been understood in terms of the threat they pose to the individual: industrialization can he seen to have set the pace for a whole society in which people arc reduced to being cogs in a machine; totalitarianism would seem to he the triumph, easily achieved, of society over the individual; the development of mass communications, and especially the concomitant notion of mass society. sees the individual swallowed up in the sameness produced by centralised, manipulative media which reduce everything to the lowest common denominator. A major trajectory of twentieth century high literature has examined the disintegration of the person as stable ego, from the fluid, shifting self of Woolf and Proust to the minimal self of Beckett and Sarraute. 'Common sense' is no less full of tags acknowledging this bruised sense of self: the sense of forces shaping our lives beyond our control, of our doing things for reasons that we don't understand, of our not recognising ourself in actions we took yesterday (to say nothing of years ago), of not seeing ourselves in photographs of ourselves, of feeling strange when we recognise the routinised nature of our lives - none of this is uncommon.

Yet the idea of the individual continues to be a major moving force in our culture. Capitalism justifies itself on the basis of the freedom (separateness) of anyone to make money, sell their labour how they will, to be able to express opinions and get them heard (regardless of wealth or social position). The openness of society is assumed by the way that we are addressed as individuals - as consumers (each freely choosing to buy, or watch, what we want), as legal subjects (free and responsible before the law), as political subjects (able to make up our mind who is to run society). Thus even while the notion of the individual is assailed on all sides, it is a necessary fiction for the reproduction of the kind of society we live in.

Stars articulate these ideas of personhood, in large measure shoring up the notion of the individual but also at times registering the doubts and anxieties attendant on it. In part, the fact that the star is not just a screen image but a flesh and blood person is liable to work to express the notion of the individual. A series of shots of a star whose image has changed - say, Elizabeth Taylor - at various points in her career could work to fragment her, to present her as nothing but a series of disconnected looks; but in practice it works to confirm that beneath all these different looks there is an irreducible core that gives all those looks a unity, namely Elizabeth Taylor. Despite the elaboration of roles, social types, attitudes and values suggested by anyone of these

looks, one flesh and blood person is embodying them all. We know that Elizabeth Taylor exists apart from all these looks, and this knowledge alone is sufficient to suggest that there is a coherence behind them all.

It can be enough just to know that there was one such person, but generally our sense of that one person is more vivid and important than all the roles and looks s/he assumes. People often say that they do not rate such and such a star because he or she is always the same. In this view, the trouble with, say, Gary Cooper or Doris Day, is that they are always Gary Cooper and Doris Day. But if you like Cooper or Day, then precisely what you value about them is that they are always 'themselves' – no matter how different their roles, they bear witness to the continuousness of their own selves.

This coherent continuousness within becomes what the star 'really is'. Much of the construction of the star encourages us to think this. Key moments in films are close-ups, separated out from the action and interaction of a scene, and not seen by other characters but only by us, thus disclosing for us the star's face, the intimate, transparent window to the soul. Star biographiies are devoted to the notion of showing us the star as he or she really is. Blurbs, introductions, every page assures us that we are being taken 'behind the scenes', 'beneath the surface', 'beyond the image', there where the truth resides. Or again, there is a rhetoric of sincerity or authenticity, two qualities greatly prized in stars because they guarantee, respectively, that the 'star really means what he or she says, and that the star really is what she or he appears to be. Whether caught in the un mediated moment of the close-up, uncovered by the biographer's display of ruthless uncovering, or present in the star's indubitable sincerity and authenticity, we have a privileged reality to hang on to, the reality of the star's private self.

The private self is further represented through a set of oppositions that stem from the division of the world into private and public spaces, a way of organising space that in turn relates to the idea of the separability of the individual and society:

private	public
individual	society
sincere	insincere
country	city
small town	large town
folk	urban
community	mass
physical	mental
body	brain
naturalness	artifice
sexual intercoursc	social intercourse
racial	ethnic

When stars function in terms of their assertion of the irreducible core of inner individual reality, it is generally through their associations with the values of the left-hand column. Stars like Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, John Wayne, Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Steve McQueen, James Caan establish their male action-hero image either through appearing in Westerns, a genre importantly

concerned with nature and the small town as centres of authentic human behaviour, and/or through vivid action sequences, in war films, jungle adventures, chase films, that pit the man directly, physically against material forces. It is interesting that with more recent examples of this type - Clint Eastwood, Harrison Ford - there has been a tendency either to give their films a send-up or tongue-in-cheek flavor (Eastwood's chimp films, Ford as Indiana Jones) or else a hard, desolate, alienated quality (Eastwood in *Joe Kidd*, Ford in *Blade Runner*), as if the values of masculine physicality are harder to maintain straight-facedly and unproblematically in an age of microchips and a large scale growth (in the USA) of women in traditionally male occupations.

The private self is not always represented as good, safe or positive. There is an alternative tradition of representing the inner reality of men, especially, which stretches back at least as far as the romantic movement. Here the dark, turbulent forces of nature are used as metaphors for the man's inner self: Valentino in *The Son of the Sheik*, the young Laurence Olivier as Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* and as Maxim de Winter in Rebecca. In the forties and fifties the popularization of psychoanalysis added new terms to the private/public opposition. Thus:

private	public
subconscious	conscious
Id	Ego

and in the still more recent Lacan inflection:

Imaginary	Symbolic

These have been particularly important in the subsequent development of male stars, where the romantic styles of brooding, introspective, mean-but-vulnerable masculinity have been given Oedipal, psychosexual, paranoid or other crypto-psychoanalytical inflections with stars like Montgomery Clift, James Dean, Marlon Brando, Anthony Perkins, Jack Nicholson, Richard Gere. Recent black male stars such as Jim Brown, Richard Roundtree and Billy Dee Williams are interesting in that their fiercely attractive intensity seems closer to the 'dangerous' romantic tradition proper; at the same time they also draw on the old stereotype of the black man as brute, only now portraying this as attractive rather than terrifying; and they are almost entirely untouched by the psychoanalytical project of rationalising and systematising and naming the life of the emotions and sensations. All these male stars work variations on the male inner self as negative, dangerous, neurotic, violent, hut always upholding that as the reality of the man, what he is really like.

The stars analysed in the rest of this book also have strong links with the left-hand, 'private' column. Monroe was understood above all through her sexuality - it was her embodiment of current ideas of sexuality that made her seem real, alive, vital. Robeson was understood primarily through his racial identity, through attempts to see and, especially, hear him as the very essence of the Negro folk. Both were represented insistently through their bodies - Monroe's body was sexuality; Robeson's was the nobility of the black race. Garland too belongs with the left-hand column, initially through her roles as country or small-town girl, later through the way her body registered both her problems and her defiance of them. All the descriptions of

her from her later period begin by describing the state of her body and speculating from that on what drugs, drink, work and temperament have done to it, and yet how it continues to be animated and vital. Not only are Monroe, Robeson, Garland stars who are thought to be genuine, who reveal their inner selves, but the final touchstone of that genuineness is the human body itself. Stars not only bespeak our society's investment in the private as the real, but also often tell us how the private is understood to be the recovery of the natural 'given' of human life, our bodies. Yet as the chapters that follow argue, what we actually come up against at this point is far from straightforwardly natural; it is particular and even rather peculiar ways of making sense of the body. The very notions of sexuality and race, so apparently rooted in the body, are historically and culturally specific ideas about the body, and it is these that Monroe and Robeson, especially, enact, thereby further endowing them with authenticity.

What is at stake in most of the examples discussed so far is the degree to which, and manner in which, what the star really is can be located in some inner, private, essential core. This is how the star phenomenon reproduces the overriding ideology of the person in contemporary society. But the star phenomenon cannot help being also about the person in public. Stars, after all, are always inescapably people in public. If the magic, with many stars, is that they seem to be their private selves in public, still they can also be about the business of being in public, the way in which the public self is endlessly produced and remade in presentation. Those stars that seem to emphasize this are often considered 'mannered', and the term is right, for they bring to the fore manners, the stuff of public life. When such stars are affirmative of manners and public life they are often, significantly enough, European or with strong European connections - stars to whom terms like suave, gracious, debonair, sophisticated, charming accrue, such as Fred Astaire, Margaret Sullavan, Cary Grant, David Niven, Deborah Kerr, Grace Kelly, Audrey Hepburn. Rex Harrison, Roger Moore. These are people who have mastered the public world, in the sense not so much of being authentically themselves in it nor even of being sincere, as of performing in the world precisely, with poise and correctness. They get the manners right. An additional example might be Sidney Poitier, only with him the consummate ease of his public manners comes up against the backlog of images of black men as raging authenticities, with, the result that in his films of the fifties and sixties he is not really able to be active in public, he is a good performer who doesn't perform anything.' It is only with *In the Heat of the Night* that something else emerges, a sense of the tension attendant on being good in public, a quality that brings Poitier here into line with a number of other stars who suggest something of the difficulty and anxiety attendant upon public performance.

Many of the women stars of screwball comedy - Katharine Hepburn. Carole Lombard, Rosalind Russell, and more recently Barbra Streisand - have the uncomfortable, sharp quality of people who do survive and succeed in the public world, do keep up appearances, but edgily, always seen to be in the difficult process of doing so. Bette Davis's career has played variations on this representation of public performance. Many of her films of the thirties and forties exploit her mannered style to suggest how much her success or survival depends upon an ability to manipulate manners, her own and those of people around her, to get her own way (*Jezebel, The Little Foxes*), to cover her tracks out of courage (*Dark Victory*) or guilt (*The Letter*), to maintain a public presence at all costs for a greater good than her own (The Private Life of Elizabeth and Essex), to achieve femininity (*Now Voyager*) and so on. If being in public for Davis in these films is hypertense, registered in her rapid pupil movements, clenching and unclenching fists,

still in the thirties and forties she is enacting the excitement, the buzz of public life, of being a person in public. Later films become something like the tragedy of it. *All About Eve* details the cost of keeping up appearances, maintaining an image. *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* evokes the impossibility of achieving again the public role that made her character feel good. Yet the end of Baby Jane affirms the public self as a greater reality than the private self cooped up in the dark Gothic mansion - we learn that it is Crawford not Davis who is the baddie; away from the house, on the beach, surrounded by people, the ageing Jane can become the public self she really is, Baby Jane. Davis's career thus runs the gamut of the possibilities of the private individual lip against public society; from, in the earlier films, triumphant individualism, the person who makes their social world, albeit agitatedly, albeit at times malignantly, to, in the later films, something like alienation, the person who is all hut defeated by the demands of public life, who only hangs on by the skin of their teeth - until the up-tempo happy ending.

The private/public, individual/society dichotomy can be embodied by stars in various ways; the emphasis can fall at either end of the spectrum, although it more usually falls at the private, authentic, sincere end. Mostly too there is a sense of 'really' in play - people/stars are really themselves in private or perhaps in public hut at any rate somewhere. However, it is one of the ironies of the whole star phenomenon that all these assertions of the reality (If the inner self or of public life take place in one of the aspects of modern life that is most associated with the invasion and destruction of the inner self and corruptibility of public life, namely the mass media. Stars might even seem to be the ultimate example of media hype, foisted on us by the media's constant need to manipulate our attention. We all know the studios build up star images, how stars happen to turn up on chat shows just when their latest picture is released, how many of the stories printed about stars are but titillating fictions; we all know we are being sold stars. And yet those privileged moments, those biographies, those qualities of sincerity and authenticity, those images of the private and the natural can work for us. We may go either way. As an example, consider the reactions at the time to John Travolta in Saturday Night Fever. I haven't done an audience survey, but people seemed to be fairly evenly divided. For those not taken with him, the incredible build-up to the film, the way you knew what his image was before you saw the film, the coy but blatant emphasis on his sex appeal in the film, the gaudy artifice of the disco scene, all merely confirmed him as one great phoney put-on on the mass public, But for those for whom he and the film did work, there were the close-ups revealing the troubled pain behind the macho image, the intriguing off-screen stories about his relationship with an older woman, the spontaneity (=sincerity) of his smile, the setting of the film in a naturalistically portrayed ethnic subculture, A star's image can work either way, and in part we make it work according to how much it speaks to us in terms we can understand about things that are important to us.

Nonetheless, the fact that we know that hype and the hard sell do characterise the media, that they are supreme instances of manipulation, insincerity, inauthenticity, mass public life, means that the whole star phenomenon is profoundly unstable. Stars cannot be *made* to work as affirmations of private or public life. In some cases, the sheer multiplicity of the images, the amount of hype, the different stories told become overwhelmingly contradictory. Is it possible still to have any sense of Valentino or Monroe; their persons, apart from all the things they have been made to mean? Perhaps, but at best isn't it a sense of the extraordinary fragility of their inner selves, endlessly fragmented into what everyone else, including us, wanted them to be? Or it may be that what interests us is the public face, accepting the artifice and fantasy for what it is

- do we ask for sincerity and authenticity from Jayne Mansfield or Diana Ross, Groucho, Harpo or Chico Marx?

Or we may read stars in a camp way, enjoying them not for any supposed inner essence revealed but for the way they jump through the hoops of social convention. The undulating contours of Mae West, the lumbering gait and drawling voice of John Wayne, the thin, spiky smile of Joan Fontaine-each can be taken as an emblem of social mores: the ploys of female seduction, the certainty of male American power, the brittle niceness of Upper class manners. Seeing them that way is seeing them as appearance, as image, in no way asking for them to he what they are, really.

On rare occasions a star image may promote a sense of the social constructedness of the apparently natural. The image of Lena Horne in her MGM films does this in relation to ideas of black and female sexuality. Her whole act in these films - and often it is no more than a turn inserted into the narrative flow of the film - promotes the idea of natural, vital sexuality, with her flashing eyes, sinuous arm movements and suggestive vocal delivery. That people saw this as the ultimate in unfettered feminine libido is widely attested, yet as an act it has an extraordinary quality, a kind of metallic sheen and intricate precision that suggests the opposite of animal vitality. In an interview with Michiko Kakutani in the New York Times (Sunday 3 May 1981, section D. ppl.24), Lena Horne discussed her image in this period in relation to her strategy of survival in the period as a black woman:

> *Afraid of being hurt, afraid of letting her anger show, she says she cultivated an image that distanced her from her employers, her colleagues, and from her audiences as well. If audience members were going to regard her as no more than an exotic performer—'Baby, you sure can sing but don't move next door'—well, then, that's all they'd get. By focusing intently on the notes and lyrics of a song, she was able to shut out the people who were staring at her, and over the years, she refined a pose of sophisticated aloofness, a pose the said, 'You're getting the singer, but not the woman.' 'I used to think, "I'm black and I'm going to isolate myself because you don't understand me," she says. 'All the things people said—sure, they hurt, and it made me retreat even further. The only thing between me and them was jive protection.'*

It is rare for a performer to understand and slate so clearly both how they worked and the effect of it, but this catches exactly Horne's image in the forties and fifties, its peerless surface, its presentation of itself *as* surface, its refusal to corroborate, by any hint of the person giving her self, the image of black sexuality that was being wished on her. This could not, did not, stop audiences reading her as transparently authentic sexuality; hut it was some sort of strategy of survival that could also he seen for what it was, a denaturalising of the ideas of black sexuality.

I have been trying to describe in this chapter some of the ways in which being interested in stars is being interested in how we arc human now. We're fascinated by stars because they enact ways of making sense of the experience of being a person in a particular kind of social production (capitalism), with its particular organisation of life into public and private spheres. We love them because they represent how we think that experience is or how it would be lovely to feel that it is. Stars represent typical ways of behaving, feeling and thinking in contemporary

society; ways that have been socially, culturally, historically constructed. Much of the ideological investment of the star phenomenon is in the stars seen as individuals, their qualities seen as natural. I do not wish to deny that there are individuals, nor that they are grounded in the given facts of the human body. But I do wish to say that what makes them interesting is the way in which they articulate the business of being an individual, something that is, paradoxically, typical, common, since we all in Western society have to cope with that particular idea of what we are. Stars are also 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 - categories of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and so on. And all of these typical, common ideas, that have the feeling of being the air that you breathe, just the way things are, have their own histories, their own peculiarities of social construction.

Because they go against the grain of the individualising, naturalising emphasis of the phenomenon itself, these insistences on the typical and social may seem to be entirely imported from theoretical reflection. Yet ideas never come entirely from outside the things they are ideas about, and this seems particularly so of the star phenomenon. It constantly jogs these questions of the individual and society, the natural and artificial, 'precisely because it is promoting ideas of the individual and the natural in media that are mass, technologically elaborated, aesthetically sophisticated. That central paradox means that the whole phenomenon is unstable, never at a point of rest or equilibrium, constantly lurching from one formulation of what being human is to another. This book is an attempt to tease out some of those formulations in particular cases, to see how they work, to get at something of the contradictions of what stars are, really.