

6 Stars as Specific Images

Stars embody social types, but star images are always more complex and specific than types. Types are, as it were, the ground on which a particular star's image is constructed. This image is found across a range of media texts. I want in this chapter to discuss the nature of the different categories into which these texts fall, and then to consider, generally and through an extended example, Jane Fonda, how these texts construct a specific star image.

A star image is made out of media texts that can be grouped together as *promotion*, *publicity*, *films* and *criticism* and *commentaries*.

Promotion

This refers to texts which were produced as part of the deliberate creation/manufacture of a particular image or image-context for a particular star. It includes (i) material concerned directly with the star in question - studio announcements, press hand-outs (including potted biographies), fan club publications (which were largely controlled by the studios), pin-ups, fashion pictures, ads in which stars endorse a given merchandise, public appearances (e.g. at premieres, as recorded on film or in the press); and (ii) material promoting the star in a particular film - hoardings, magazine ads, trailers, etc. Thomas B. Harris has described this in some detail in 'The Building of Popular Images'.

Promotion is probably the most straightforward of all the texts which construct a star image, in that it is the most deliberate, direct, intentioned and self-conscious (which is not to say that it is by any means entirely any of those things).

Promotion can get things wrong. Early promotion may not push the aspects of the performer which were subsequently to make them a star (e.g. both Davis and Monroe were promoted as routine pin-up starlets to begin with). However, this is more the exception than the rule, and either way promotion can be taken as an indicator of the studio's (or its promotion department's), agent's or star's conception of a given star image.

On occasion, promotion of a film may be deliberately untrue to the film itself, in the interests of promoting the star's image (e.g. Marlon Brando's attempts to escape the 'Stanley Kowalski' image of *A Streetcar Named Desire* by playing Napoleon in *Desiree* and Mark Antony in *Julius Caesar* did not deter the promoters of those films from billing his roles in Kowalski-esque terms - see the discussion by Hollis Alpert in his *The Dreams and the Dreamers*, 'Marlon Brando and the Ghost of Stanley Kowalski').

Publicity

This is theoretically distinct from promotion in that it is not, or does not appear to be, *deliberate* image-making. It is 'what the press finds out', 'what the star lets slip in an interview', and is found in the press and magazines (not only the strictly film ones), radio and television interviews, and the gossip columns. In practice, much of this too was controlled by the studios or the star's agent, but it did not appear to be, and in certain cases (e.g. Ingrid Bergman's 'illegitimate' child by Roberto Rossellini) it clearly was not. The only cases where one can be fairly certain of genuine publicity are the scandals: Fatty Arbuckle's rape case, Ingrid Bergman's child, the murder of Lana Turner's gigolo boyfriend, Robert Mitchum's dope charge, Judy Garland's drunken breakdowns, Elizabeth Taylor's 'breaking up' of Debbie Reynolds's marriage with Eddie Fisher. Scandals can harm a career (Arbuckle permanently, Bergman temporarily) or alternatively give it a new lease of life (Turner, Mitchum, Taylor). An unnamed publicity man is quoted by Hollis Alpert to suggest a link between scandal and success and glamour:

The stars are losing their glamour. It's next to impossible to get Burt Lancaster into columns these days. He's too serious. The public prefers its stars to behave a little crazy. Look what that dope party did for Bob Mitchum! Look how Deborah Kerr's divorce troubles sent her price way up! Who wants to form a fan club for a businessman? (*The Dreams and the Dreamers*, p. 39)

The importance of publicity is that, in its apparent or actual escape from the image that Hollywood is trying to promote, it seems more 'authentic'. It is thus often taken to give a privileged access to the real person of the star. It is also the place where one can read tensions between the star-as-person and her/his image, tensions which at another level become themselves crucial to the image (e.g. Marilyn Monroe's attempts to be considered something other than a dumb blonde sex object, Robert Redford's 'loner' shunning of the attention his star status attracts).

Films

Inevitably, the films have a distinct and privileged place in a star's image. It is after all *film* stars that we are considering - their celebrity is defined by the fact of their appearing in films. However, the star is also a phenomenon of cinema (which as a business could make money from stars in additional ways to having them make films, e.g. in advertising, the fan industry, personal appearances) and of general social meanings, and there are instances of stars whose films may actually be less important than other aspects of their career. Brigitte Bardot is a case in point, and Zsa Zsa Gabor is a film star whose films only a dedicated buff could name. The deaths of Montgomery Clift, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe and Judy Garland (and the premature retirement of Greta Garbo) may be as significant as the films they made, while Lana Turner's later films were largely a mere illustration of her life. It may be as pin-ups that Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth are really important, and as recording stars that Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby really matter. While in general films are the most important of the texts, one should bear these points

in mind when, as here, the focus is the star's total image rather than, as in Part Three, the role of that image in the films.

Particularly important is the notion of the *vehicle*. Films were often built around star images. Stories might be written expressly to feature a given star, or books might be bought for production with a star in mind. Sometimes alterations to the story might be effected in order to preserve the star's image. This is what is implied by the term 'star vehicle' (a term actually used by Hollywood itself).

The vehicle might provide a character of the type associated with the star (e.g. Monroe's 'dumb blonde' roles, Garbo's melancholic romantic roles); a situation, setting or generic context associated with the star (e.g. Garbo in relationships with married men, Wayne in Westerns; as Colin McArthur has noted of stars of gangster films, they 'seem to gather within themselves the qualities of the genre ... so that the violence, suffering and *Angst* of the films is restated in their faces, physical presence, movement and speech' (*Underworld USA*, p. 24)); or opportunities for the star to do her/his thing (most obviously in the case of musical stars - e.g. a wistful solo number for Judy Garland, an extended ballet sequence for Gene Kelly - but also, for instance, opportunities to display Monroe's body and wiggle walk, scenes of action in Wayne's films). Vehicles are important as much for what conventions they set up as for how they develop them, for their ingredients as for their realisation. In certain respects, a set of star vehicles is rather like a film genre such as the Western, the musical or the gangster film. As with genres proper, one can discern across a star's vehicles continuities of iconography (e.g. how they are dressed, made-up and coiffed, performance mannerisms, the settings with which they are associated), visual style (e.g. how they are lit, photographed, placed within the frame) and structure (e.g. their role in the plot, their function in the film's symbolic pattern). (For further discussion of performance and structure, see chapter 8). Of course, not all films made by a star are vehicles, but looking at their films in terms of vehicles draws attention to those films that do not 'fit', that constitute inflections, exceptions to, subversions of the vehicle pattern and the star image. (For further consideration of genre in film, see Edward Buscombe, 'The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema'; the section on 'Genre Criticism' in Bill Nichols, *Movies and Methods*; and Steve Neale, *Genre*.)

One needs also to consider the star's *filmic presentation*, the specific ways in which the star appears, performs and is used in individual films. This is dealt with in Part Three.

Criticism and commentaries

This refers to what was said or written about the star in terms of appreciation or interpretation by critics and writers. It covers contemporary and subsequent writings (including obituaries and other material written after a star's death or retirement), and is found in film reviews, books on films and indeed in almost any kind of writing dealing, fictitiously or otherwise, with the contemporary scene. To this can be added film, radio and television profiles of stars. These always appear after the initial promotion and film-making of a star, although they may act back on subsequent promotion and film activity (e.g. the response of

critics to Davis in *Of Human Bondage* legitimated her demand for 'strong' roles; the intellectuals' 'discovery' of Monroe is discernible in the increasingly self-reflexive nature of her last films). We need to distinguish between criticism and commentaries that did that, and those that have been elaborated after the star's active involvement in film-making. The latter may suggest an interpretation of the star at odds with the star's contemporary image (e.g. today's cult of Humphrey Bogart and Monroe - do we see more worldly wisdom in him, more tragic consciousness in her?).

Criticism and commentaries are oddly situated in the star's image. They are media products, part of the cinematic machine, yet it is commonly held that they are to be placed on the side of the audience - the consumers of media texts - rather than that of the industry - the producers of media texts. Critics and commentators are often taken to express rather than to construct the response to a star, and indeed on occasion they may well be expressing a widely held, pre-existing sentiment or view about a star. More frequently, however, they contribute to the shaping of 'public opinion' about a star (and the relationship of what the media call 'public opinion' to the opinion of the public must always remain problematic). Despite this, critics and commentators do not operate in the same space as those who construct the image in promotion and films. This gap between on the one hand promotional and filmic construction of the star image (which is further complicated by the highly ambivalent way publicity relates to promotion and films) and on the other the role of criticism and commentaries in that construction is a real one, and accounts for both the complexity, contradictoriness and 'polysemy' of the star image and also for the capacity of critical opinion to contribute to shifts in careers such as those of Davis and Monroe noted above.

A specific image: Jane Fonda

I want in a moment to look at the way these various media texts come together to form a particular star image, but before doing this we need to ask what exactly the nature of this coming together is.

It is misleading to think of the texts combining cumulatively into a sum total that constitutes the image, or alternatively simply as being moments in a star's image's career (this phrase is used throughout to emphasise the fact that we are talking about a film star as a media text not as a real person) that appear one after the other - although those emphases are important. The image is a *complex totality* and it does have a *chronological dimension*. What we need to understand that totality in its temporality is the concept of a *structured polysemy*.

By 'polysemy' is meant the multiple but finite meanings and effects that a star image signifies. In looking at Jane Fonda's image, I shall not be trying to say what she meant for the 'average person' at various points in her career, but rather to look at her image in terms of the multiplicity of its meanings. This does not mean that these are endless. The possibilities of meaning are limited in part by what the text makes available.

This polysemy is *structured*. In some cases, the various elements of signification may *reinforce* one another. John Wayne's image draws together his bigness, his

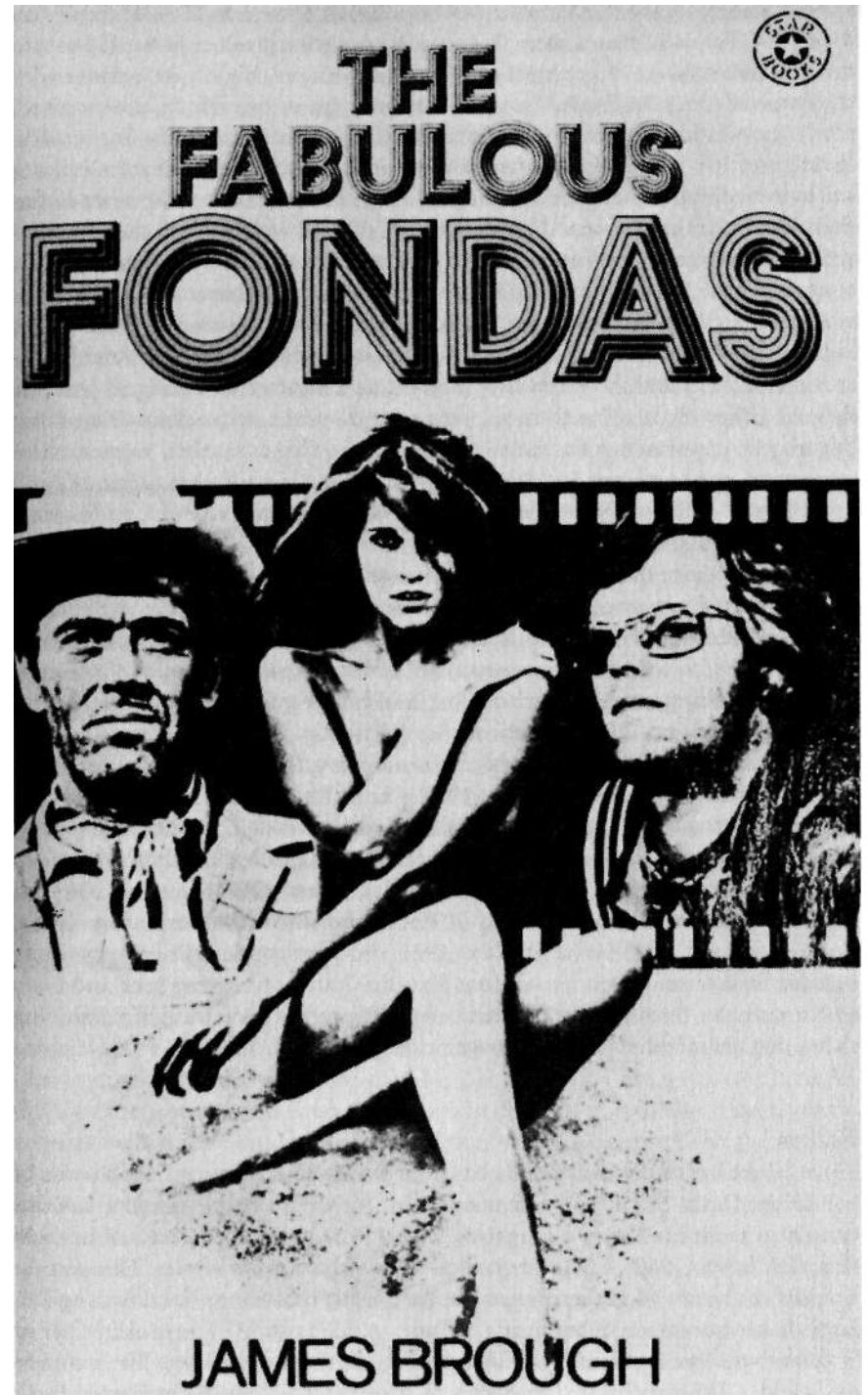


3 & 4 (left) Marlene Dietrich in the 1930s and (right) the 1950s.

association with the West, his support for right-wing politics, his male independence of, yet courtliness towards, women - the elements are mutually reinforcing, legitimating a certain way of being a man in American society. In other cases, the elements may be to some degree in *opposition* or *contradiction*, in which case the star's image is characterised by attempts to negotiate, reconcile or mask the difference between the elements, or else simply hold them in tension. At an extreme - for example the later part of Marilyn Monroe's career - the contradictions threaten to fragment the image altogether.

Images also have a *temporal dimension*. Structured polysemy does not imply stasis; images develop or change over time. In the case of Fonda, the direction is for the most part in terms of change, but it may also in other cases be seen in terms of continuity. Marlene Dietrich is an example of the latter. The image crystallised in her films with Josef von Sternberg (1930-5) has remained the key note of her career - for a sketch of what he calls a 'combination of opposites', see David Shipman, *The Great Stars - the Golden Years*, p. 156. Attempts to break with the image by putting her in Westerns (*Destry Rides Again*, 1939; *Rancho Notorious*, 1952) and other more American' vehicles only succeeded in reinforcing her image as the alluring, exotic female 'other'. Her ageing, far from dimming this, contributed to it, partly by the degree to which her beauty remained, partly by her presentation, in films, concerts, records and photographs, in these terms: the 'Eternal Feminine' whose long career is further promise of eternity. Glamour photographs from early and late in her career illustrate this continuity, in particular the way in which she emerges out of a vague background that places her nowhere earthly but rather in some 'other' realm of existence and the emphasis on her almost Oriental eyes that look straight into the camera.

The illustration on the cover of the paperback edition (1975) of James Brough's *The Fabulous Fondas* provides a useful way into most of the tensions in Jane



5 The Fabulous Fondas, cover of paperback edition, 1975.

Fonda's image. Henry Fonda wears cowboy clothes, Peter Fonda those from *Easy Rider*, Jane Fonda is thus situated between the traditional values of her father and the alternative values of her brother. This is, as we'll see, slightly at variance with the emphasis in Jane Fonda's image's career as far as her family is concerned, where the relationship to her father has been seen as of paramount importance. In terms of her image, her brother here reminds us rather of the radicalism she has espoused in the later part of her career. The next point about the cover is that the male Fondas are contained by the strip of celluloid within which their pictures are placed, whereas Jane Fonda is superimposed across the strip and is in no way contained by it. Similarly, her life has been as important to her image as her films, whereas her father and brother are less known as images outside of their films. Finally, Jane Fonda appears nude, in a pin-up pose, while Henry and Peter Fonda are dressed, head and shoulders only showing, in 'character'. Her image is crucially defined by her sexual attractiveness, whereas it is seldom even acknowledged that this may be important to the male Fonda's success. This cover then suggests three important aspects of Jane Fonda's image: the connection with her father, sex and radicalism. I will use these three aspects to structure this account, adding one other to it, 'acting'.

It will already be obvious that Fonda's image is organised around elements that relate awkwardly to one another. While some stars condense such contradictory elements within their image - in a movement that may unite or expose them - in Fonda's case, it is not so much a question of condensing as of negotiating these elements, oscillating between them in what could more purposefully be seen as trying to find a way through them. In particular during her early career, commentators repeatedly asked where she was going. Thus Stanley Kauffmann in a review of *In the Cool of the Day* (1964 - her fifth film) in *The New Republic* observed that she had 'considerable' talent and personality, but 'it is still worth wondering - up to now, anyway - what will become of her' (p. 198; all reviews cited are taken from John Springer, *The Fondas*, unless otherwise stated). Not till her association with Roger Vadim (1965-9) did anything like a clear image develop, and not till the time of *Klute* (1971) did the elements of the image come together in a certain dynamic tension. It is this drama of moving back and forth and eventually through the different elements, rather than simply combining them, that characterises Fonda's image's career.

Father

Throughout her career, Jane Fonda has been discussed and referred to in terms of her father. David Shipman's entry on her in *The Great Stars - the International Years* begins 'Jane is Henry's daughter ...' (p. 159). On the appearance of her first film, *Tall Story* (1960), Ellen Fitzpatrick in *Films in Review* wrote: 'This picture wouldn't be reviewed in these pages but for the fact that Henry Fonda's daughter, Jane, makes her screen debut in it' (Springer, p. 177), while *Time* spoke of her as 'a second-generation Fonda with a smile like her father's and legs like a chorus girl' (ibid.). This emphasis only began to slacken with *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1969) and her entry into radical politics, where her father is still mentioned but not in quite the same defining way.

Much of the discussion of Fonda in relation to her father attempts to discern physical similarities between them. John Springer claims that she has her father's 'electric-blue' eyes and his 'quick, embarrassed smile' (p. 47), while *Life* observed 'by inheritance, [Henry Fonda gave] her a tipped-up nose, blue eyes, a sudden smile - and talent' (quoted in Springer, p. 36). Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin go further in their film *Letter to Jane*, arguing that there is a certain expression she uses, especially in relation to political issues, that recalls that of her father (see p. 78). Without recourse to some very precise semiotic categorisation of facial features, it would be hard to prove that any or all of these physical similarities are based on accurate perception. What is important is the repeated assertion of that similarity, the frequent claim that one can see Henry Fonda in Jane, a claim that is widespread and more or less irresistible because she has retained her father's name and any way is so widely known to be his daughter.

These features carry certain connotations over from Henry to Jane, of which the two most important are Americanness and left-wing liberalism. The first of these connotations is clearly indicated by Ronald D. Katz in his interview article 'Jane Fonda - a Hard Act to Follow' (*Rolling Stone*, 9 March 1978): 'She grew up having a father who embodied for an entire nation all of those qualities that are American and middle class and good (pride, honesty, tenacity and a total sublimation of emotions - to name a few) ...' This all-Americanness is present in his films - particularly his roles in Westerns, an indelibly American genre, and as the President (*Young Mr Lincoln*, 1939; *The Longest Day*, 1962; *Fail Safe*, 1964), a presidential candidate (*The Best Man*, 1964) and a prospective Secretary of State (*Advise and Consent*, 1962) in pre-Watergate times - as well as in his background as reported: 'The values and attitudes of small-town America were virtually built into his bones and his blood' (Brough, *The Fabulous Fondas*, pp. 6-7); 'Life in [his] household was as conventional as a Norman Rockwell cover in the old *Saturday Evening Post*' (p. 8). This all-Americanness is supposedly reproduced in Jane Fonda's physical likeness to her father (Katz in *Rolling Stone* even suggests she possesses 'the 'All-American voice'), as well as in other aspects of her career/image. She was brought up on a farm, with all its homesteader connotations, far away from the glamour of Hollywood. She went to Vassar, one of the top women's colleges in the States, and her first film role in *Tall Story* was as a college student and basketball cheerleader. Her costume in this (see Fig. 6) places her clearly as one of the major icons of American normalcy, the majorette. This indelible Americanness has been an important element in her later career, which, with its French sex films and radical politics, has in substance been the antithesis of all-Americanness. Yet virtually all the American critics of *Barbarella* (1968) insisted on Jane's 'normal', 'healthy' performance in this 'kinky' film, and Pauline Kael in the *New Yorker* spoke of her as 'the American girl triumphing by her innocence over a lewd comic-strip world of the future' (Springer, p. 262). In terms of her politics, commentators have seen her Americanness as either the guarantee of her integrity ('it was easy to see that she was not searching for unusual publicity, she was rather letting her whole heart and soul out trying to end this war in Vietnam', David Carlson, *Hollywood Screen Parade*, August 1972, p. 64) or else, in Godard/Gorin's analysis, another instance of the weakness of American liberalism (see p. 78).



6 Tall Story, 1960.

Nor are Jane Fonda's politics a complete departure from her parental inheritance, as the image emphasises it, because her father also had a reputation for radicalism or 'left-wing liberalism'. His identification with the part of Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) most clearly crystallised this in his films, but he had always had an involvement with Democratic politics (particularly the Kennedys) and was outspokenly anti-McCarthy. None of this worked outside the system, as his daughter's politics has (or has tried to), and this is where she has in interviews defined the difference between them, but the sense of a connectedness at this level is also maintained.

As discussed so far, Jane Fonda's relation to her father has been seen in terms of the 'inheritance' of physical, cultural and political traits. This is how publicity and promotion, critics and commentators often posed it, but, as suggested above, the notion of Fonda having to negotiate this aspect of her life is as central to the image. It is a question - posed by reporters and interviewers - of 'what does your father think of this?', and Henry's alleged remark during her early years with Vadim - 'Daughter? I don't have a daughter' (quoted by Brough, *The Fabulous Fondas*, p. 182, no source given) - has served the press for many years subsequently. Equally, Jane Fonda has returned repeatedly in interviews (as they have been written up) to another aspect of her father - his four marriages. The actual content of her remarks is simply that this has made her somewhat of a 'cynic' (*Sunday Express*, 22 March 1964) about marriage. This, and the fact that she was for several years in analysis, has none the less been taken to indicate that her relationship with her father is psychologically problematic. Mike Tomkies's article on Vadim shows this shift: 'Nervous and highly strung, her childhood was unconventional. Her father has been married four times ...' (*Showtime*, March 1967, p. 19). He then goes on to indicate the one definite traumatic event in her childhood (she was twelve), when her mother committed suicide. However, although this event is mentioned in most biographical sketches of her, it is with her father that the emphasis lies. This is obviously partly because of his fame, and partly no doubt because of the spread of Freudian ideas in America endowing the image of father/daughter relationships with a greater charge than their mother/daughter equivalent. This, it should be said, is a selective perception of Freud, since he pointed out that for daughters as well as sons the first love object is the mother, thus leading, according to Freud, to the greater capacity for bisexuality among women. All of this gets lost in the predominant, heterosexually normative appropriations of Freud. As we shall see, the question of lesbianism and 'tomboyism' in relation to Jane Fonda's image is both complicated and crucial.

The emphasis on the problematic, 'psychological' aspects of Fonda's relation to her father also leads in the image to an insistence on men as father figures in her life. The supposed difficulties of the primary father/daughter relationship is taken to inform all her subsequent relations with men. Ann Leslie in the *Daily Express* (26 January 1969), implies that with the coming of Vadim, Fonda was completely transformed under his 'Svengali' - often evoked in this context - influence. The logical progression of this line is to subsume all other aspects of her life into this father/daughter one, so that by 1974 the *Sunday Telegraph* (31 March) could quote one of her biographers, Thomas Kiernan, as saying that 'The basic engine for change in her life is men'. In this way, as the article proceeds to do, all her views can be reduced to a relationship in which she surrenders, filially, to the views of a man - Vadim, Huey Newton ('the Black Panther'), Fred Gardner ('a Marxist'), Tom Hayden (her husband).

It is possible to see then how one tendency of the image is to return her personality and her views to her father, via concepts of heredity and/or psychoanalysis. This is, however, only a tendency. It is not picked up in the films, and her more recent career has been read as her establishment of herself as her own person. This means that the other elements in her career - sex, acting, politics - are no longer *reduced* to reproduction of or reaction against her father, as they are earlier in her

career. However, it may also be argued that her current image consolidates his *values* while at the same time being cut loose of him as a father or in the form of father figures.

Sex

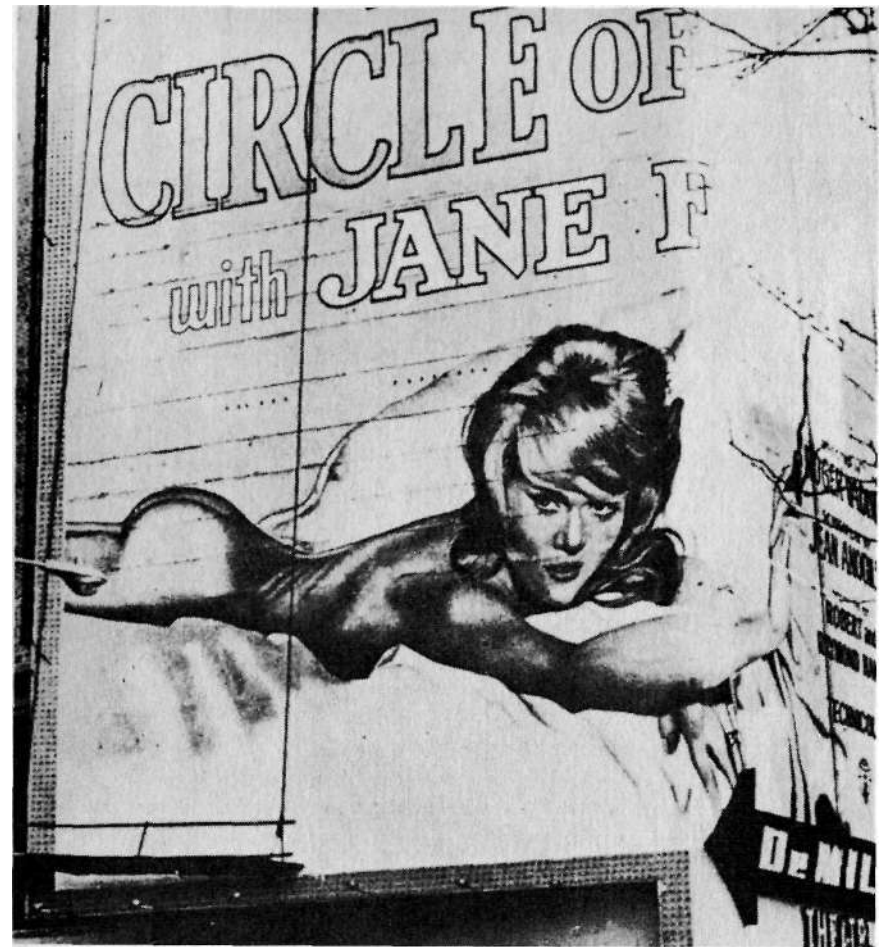
The question of Jane Fonda's sex appeal was raised from the first. Alongside the reference to her father, there went the other assurance that she was attractive. *Time's* 'a smile like her father's and legs like a chorus girl', quoted above, makes the point immediately, and there are very few reviews or publicity items that do not make reference to her looks. In promotion for her films she was almost exclusively sold in these terms. Even at the end of a relatively sympathetic account of her political developments, characteristically entitled 'Jane: the Battling Beauty who is Preaching Revolution', Donald Zee writes: 'Hollywood, frenziedly searching for its own backbone, might well study the philosophy of Jane Fonda. Studying the anatomy would be no hardship, either' (*Daily Mirror*, 6 April 1970); while the *Sunday Times* colour magazine's coverage of the making of *Julia* focused on 'Fonda at Forty', with tasteful pictures celebrating the preservation of her beauty.

'Beauty' is a rarefied term, and although not uncommon in writing about Fonda, it is by no means the predominant emphasis. Quite apart from the critics' discussions as to whether she is really beautiful or is rather plain but attractive, it is quite striking how crudely her sex appeal was frequently constructed. She was often photographed in a manner that vulgarised rather than beautified her body. Her bottom, in particular, was focused on - in the early scenes of *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962); in a cut-in close-up of her bottom's movement on horseback, followed by a leering Lee Marvin in reaction shot in *Cat Ballou* (1965); and in the American poster, which she objected to, for *La Ronde/Circle of Love* (1965). Not surprisingly, at the time of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1969), Pauline Kael in her *New Yorker* review could refer to Fonda as having been hitherto a 'nudie cutie' (Springer, p. 270), while *Variety* commented on her 'previous career as a sex bon-bon' (p. 268). The roles sometimes reinforced this crudity - as a tramp-cum-prostitute in *Walk on the Wild Side*; as the 'other woman' in *In the Cool of the Day* (1963); as, in the words of *Time*, 'trollope white Trash' (Springer, p. 223) in *The Chase* (1966); as a 'decadent high-class Southern gal' (Judith Crist, *New York World Journal Tribune*; Springer, p. 236) in *Hurry Sundown* (1967). All but *In the Cool of the Day* are deep South melodramas, a genre particularly given to 'hysterical', 'nymphomaniacal' portraits of women. In this perspective, *Klute* (1971) is a particularly interesting film, since, as Fonda plays the part of a prostitute, it invokes these earlier roles but also tries to inflect them in terms of feminism, so that, in Sheila Whitaker's words, the prostitute can be seen 'as the most honest and most despised of women' ('The Rebel Hero', p. 13). What is not clear is whether the role does cut free from the exploitative quality of the earlier image, or whether the latter contributes to reducing the radical potential of the character. The same problem arises with the discussion of fucking ('baiser') in *Tout va bien* (1973) and the nude scene with Jon Voigt in *Coming Home* (1978). It depends how the audience member reads these films, what sort of interest in or knowledge of Fonda s/he has.

The emphasis on sex in her image was of course increased during her association with Roger Vadim. The very association with him, the 'creator' of Brigitte



9 Walk on the Wild Side, 1962.



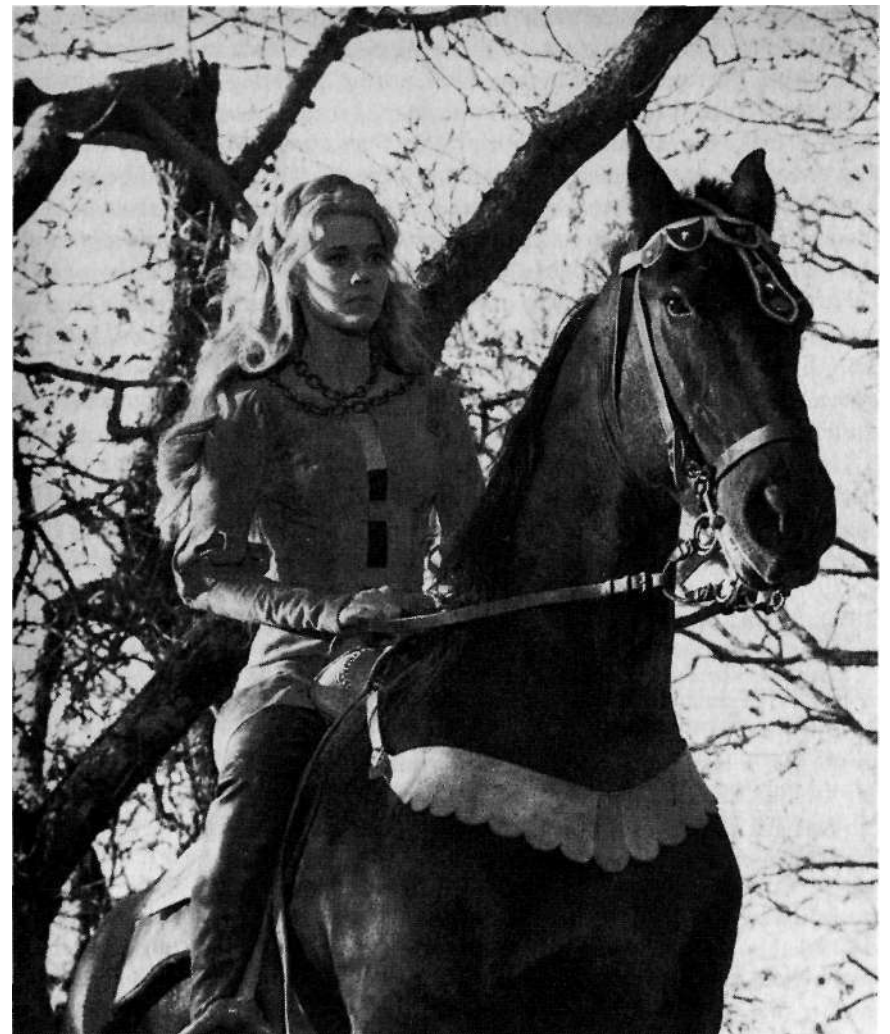
10 American hoarding advertising *La Ronde*/Circle of Love, 1965.

Bardot, the director of *And God Created "Woman"* (1956), already foregrounded sexuality, and the films they made together reinforced this: *La Ronde* (1965), *La Curie/The Game Is Over* (1966), *Barbarella* (1968) and the 'Metzengerstein' episode of *Histoires extraordinaires* (1969). Everything about these vehicles emphasised sex. The very fact that Jane Fonda was doing nude scenes was enough to 'place' these films in terms of both promotion and publicity, but in addition both the narratives and the *mise en scene* reinforced it. She played a 'philandering wife' (Shipman, p. 160) in *La Ronde* and a woman in love with her stepson in *La Curie*. *Barbarella* is entirely a series of sexual adventures, culminating in Barbarella being subjected to a machine that will kill her with erotic pleasure, but for which her sexual drive proves too much, thereby causing the machine to explode. *Barbarella* also threw in perverse, or, as the current jargon had it, 'kinky' elements, such as having sex with a grotesquely hirsute huntsman and being seduced by another woman. This 'kinkiness' was also present in *Histoires extraordinaires*, where the Fonda character is in love with her horse. The erotic treatment of this love is ex-



11 *Barbarella*, 1968.

plained by the fact that the horse is really the reincarnation of her beloved cousin. A further twist was given to this by the fact that the cousin, seen in flashbacks, was played by Fonda's brother, Peter. Although she objected, in interviews, that there had been no intention to provide titillating intimations of incest, this is certainly how it was widely taken. The 'kinkiness' of these plots and situations was heightened by the use of dress and decor, most obviously in *Barbarella*. In Fig. 11, we may note such commonplaces of erotic symbolism/fetishism as the hair-textured



12 *Histoires Extraordinaires*, 1969.

background, which both mingles with Fonda's hair and yet is itself more akin to pubic hair; the phallic gun; the use of plastic clothing, which both conceals and reveals breasts and belly; and the hint of bondage in the high, stiff neck plate. *Histoires extraordinaires* was also full of such elements, as in Fonda's clothing in Fig. 12 - chains and thigh-length leather boots.

Everything about Vadim's use of Fonda is erotic, and certainly this is how their films together were largely understood. Sheila Graham's article 'The Fondas: The Papa, the Mamas and the Kids' (published in her 1969 collection *Scratch an Actor*) suggests how widespread was the total identification of Vadim with the sexual use of Fonda: "Why are you always undressing?" I asked Jane in Rome, and "Why does Vadim always undress his women?" She protested, "It isn't true. I've only been nude in three films." Why does it seem like three hundred? (p. 201).

However, the association with Vadim, while intensifying the sex element in Fonda's image, also complicates it. In interviews, both Fonda and Vadim claimed that, in their life together and in these films, he was 'liberating' her. Mike Tomkies, for instance, quotes her as saying 'The moment I realized Roger was only letting me be myself, I trusted him completely' (*Showtime*, March 1967, p. 21) and writes that Vadim says that 'To-day ... it's no longer a problem for women to be sexually free. What interests him now is not the choice of freedom but the true way to it' (ibid.). (This view of Vadim was quite widespread, and Simone de Beauvoir wrote a monograph celebrating Brigitte Bardot's liberatedness - *Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome*.) Fonda was also quoted as saying that *Barbarella* was 'a kind of tongue-in-cheek satire against bourgeois morality' (*Photoplay*, February 1968, p. 63). All of this suggested that the relationship with Vadim was not necessarily to be read in terms of sexual objectification - that one could see it in terms of a coming to terms with sexuality.

That this happened in Europe also gave its significance as liberation a certain credibility, in that it belonged to a familiar cultural syndrome, unkindly evoked by Sheila Graham as 'the American girl gone to sex' (quoted by Shipman, p. 160) and elaborated by Pauline Kael at the beginning of her review of *Barbarella*:

What would Henry James have made of Jane Fonda, an actress so much like his heroines - an American heiress-of-the-ages abroad, and married to a superb example of the Jamesian villain, a sophisticated European (a Frenchman of Russian origins) who is redolent of shallow morals ... (Springer, p. 254)

As was noted above, this sense of Fonda retaining her all-Americanness, even in her 'kinkiest' vehicles, was widely asserted by the critics, and perhaps enabled even the 'Svengali' treatment from Vadim to be seen as one more aspect of her life that she was negotiating rather than being defined or taken over by.

Acting

Throughout her career, Fonda's ability as an actor has been affirmed. Before making her first film, *Tall Story*, she trained for a while under Lee Strasberg, who taught 'the Method' at the Actors' Studio in New York. (See Part Three for a discussion of this and other performance styles.) However, it is hard to discern any of the trademarks of this style in Fonda's performances. (Observers report that Fonda uses the Method approach to performance and character and it may have made the improvisatory feel of some of her later films, discussed below, easier for her.) Her rating as an actor came rather from four more traditional factors.

Firstly, she proved her ability by moderate success in the theatre, always regarded as a 'truer' test of acting'. Secondly, there was the range of roles she played in her career, in particular her switching back and forth between high melodrama (*Walk on the Wild Side*, 1962; *The Chapman Report*, 1962; *In the Cool of the Day*, 1963; *The Chase*, 1966; *La Curee*, 1966; *Hurry Sundown*, 1967; *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, 1969) and light comedies. The latter constitute the third factor validating her as an actor. Apart from *Cat Ballou* (1965), they all fall within a genre, the only label for which is American sex comedy'. This is the type of comedy associated in films with the later career of Doris Day and in the theatre most con-

summately with the plays of Neil Simon, the film of whose *Barefoot in the Park* Fonda made in 1967. The other films in this category were *Tall Story* (1960), *Period of Adjustment* (1962), *Sunday in New York* (1964) and *Any Wednesday* (1966). All of these were successful Broadway comedies (further theatrical validation) and in them all Fonda, said the critics, displayed her capacity with 'timing', a definite performance *skill*. The fourth confirmation of her acting ability came from her being nominated for an Oscar for *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* and winning one for *Klute* (1971), and, more convincing in terms of acting' as opposed to 'star' quality, gaining the New York Film Critics' Award as 'best actress' for both of them.

Her subsequent career has remained within this definition of acting ability, by doing a film with Godard (*Tout va bien*, 1973),¹ an adaptation of a classic (*A Doll's House*, 1974), a historical personage (Lillian Hellman in *Julia*, 1977), as well as a return to comedy with *Steelyard Blues* (1972) and *Fun with Dick and Jane* (1977).

In addition to an ability to play different kinds of part, rather than just 'be herself' (although one might want to question the validity of this distinction, in general or in the case of Fonda), and the association with non-Hollywood, non-glamorous vehicles and characters, most of the later films (from *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*) broadly belong to what has been called 'New Hollywood Cinema'. (For a discussion of this see Steve Neale's article 'New Hollywood Cinema'; although Godard is not Hollywood, he is, through his participation in the New Wave, one of the major influences on the new style of American film-making.) From the point of view of performers, this style places greater emphasis upon the elaboration of character within a loose narrative structure and upon naturalistic devices such as interrupted speech, hesitation, mumbling, tics and other techniques that give an air of improvisation to the performance. Fonda has mastered this style - the 'naturalism' of her performance is especially marked in the scenes with the psychoanalyst in *Klute* and throughout *Coming Home* (1978) - and since this is what constitutes 'good' acting in contemporary cinema, it is an index of her reputation as an actor.

Politics

There is already some problem in the critical writing as to whether Fonda is to be considered a sex star or an actor. Some argued that, in *La Curie* especially, she showed a capacity to act out sexuality, but in general the two elements were considered as separate and perhaps contradictory. Her adoption of radical politics raised much sharper contradictions.

There have been major news stories surrounding her political involvement in the four major areas of radicalism recognised by the American mass media - the Native Americans (her trip to the occupation of Alcatraz in 1969), her association with Huey Newton of the Black Panthers, her anti-war (Vietnam) work in GI 'coffee-houses' in one of which she was arrested (1969), and her feminism. In addition, in 1972 she married Tom Hayden, a leading member of the militant student organisation SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and one of the 'Chicago Seven'. She also promoted two anti-war ventures, the show (subsequently

filmed) *Free the Army* (or *Fuck the Army*) (1972) and a documentary film *Vietnam Journey* (1972). Some of her films have also been explicitly radical - in *Tout va bien* she is a radical journalist raking over the inheritance of 1968, *A Doll's House* is Ibsen's classic 'feminist' play; in *Julia* she plays a well-known left-wing liberal, Lillian Hellman; and *Coming Home* deals with a woman's politicisation through working with wounded soldiers during the Vietnam war. In addition, *Klute*, and *Coming Home* in particular, have been read as important in terms of feminism - *Klute* for using prostitution as a metaphor for the sexual treatment of women generally and *Coming Home* for its emphasis on the Fonda character's discovery of her capacity for independent action and for orgasm. (Before sleeping with the Voigt character, she has never experienced orgasm - the contrast, for the woman, between this 'liberated' sex and habitual 'oppressive' sex is shown by an earlier sex scene with her husband, played by Bruce Dern.)

The significance of all of this - the events and the films - is always in terms of the fact that *it is Jane Fonda doing them*. It is not just that the press always handles them in terms of the other aspects of her image - what would her father think? could she not have remained 'the high spirited and rebellious sex symbol who starred in 18 movies' rather than becoming 'the new Jane Fonda [who] is many things, but one thing she is not is "lovable"' (Mike McGrady, *Guardian*, 5 May 1971)? how was all this politicking related to her achievements as an actor? (Donald Zee pointed out in the *Daily Mirror* for 6 April 1970 that her 'dangerous political fling... may well deprive her of that Oscar accolade tomorrow night' - and she did not win the Oscar until two years later). This is not just the difficulty the press had in dealing with a revolutionary star. In fact it would be hard for the press to deal in any other way with a star's revolutionary associations. What the star does can *only* be posed in terms of *the star doing it*, the extraordinariness or difficulty of her/his doing it, rather than in terms of the ostensible political issues involved. Thus her visit to Alcatraz did not primarily give publicity to the situation of the Native Americans but rather posed the issue of what a woman like this was doing going to such a place. In other words, it posed the issue of white radicalism.

Fonda-as-star-as-revolutionary dramatises the problem of what role privileged white people can have in the struggles of under-privileged non-whites. (I will reserve the question of feminism for a moment; what is striking is how, in terms of public events and films, although not in some of her actions and statements, the issue of class is only raised in the film furthest removed from her situation and from the public, *Tout va bien*, which is itself a raking over of the problems of bourgeois revolutionaries.) It is this that Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin seized on in their film *Letter to Jane* (1974). They suggest that Fonda's politics are imbued with reactionary American values, and hinge their case on a semiotic analysis of a newsphoto of her in Vietnam during the filming of *Vietnam Journey*. As they point out, it is striking that the photo shows her with the Vietnamese rather than the Vietnamese in their own right. (They blame Fonda for this, whereas one could argue that this is inherent in the star phenomenon.) Moreover, they argue, her expression in the photo (Fig. 13) is an expression Fonda often uses in relation to political issues. They detect it in *Tout va bien* ('when as an actress she was listening to one of the film extras singing a text written by Lotta Continua') and *Klute* (when 'she looked at her friend, a policeman played by Donald Suther-



13 Jane Fonda in Vietnam.

land, with a tragic sense of pity on her face, and made up her mind to spend the night with him'), as well as in her father's films (including *The Grapes of Wrath* - Fig. 14 - and *Young Mr Lincoln*) and in John Wayne as he 'expresses his deep regrets about the devastation of the war in Vietnam' in *The Green Berets* (Fig. 15). They continue:

In our opinion this expression has been borrowed, principle and interest, from the free trade mark of Roosevelt's New Deal. In fact, it's an expression of an expression and it appeared inevitably by chance just as the talkies were becoming a financial success. This expression talks but only to say how much it knows about the stock market crash for example. But says nothing more than how much it knows. (From a transcript made by Nicky North)

This negative view (which, incidentally, remains purely formalist - it does not examine the situation within which Fonda works), not so much of the political issues Fonda is involved in as of Fonda-as-politico, is widespread on the left and on the right. As an example of the latter, it is interesting how often the press quote Henry Fonda's remarks, such as: 'She's the instant cause girl, working for the right causes for what I think are the wrong reasons. She won't be satisfied until they burn her, like Joan of Arc' (*Sunday Mirror*, 24 September 1972).

Something of the same unease can be found in feminist views of her feminism, although much feminist writing is largely supportive of her. This ambiguity is perhaps because feminism puts the nature of personal involvement in politics very much more centrally on the political agenda than do traditional politics, where the 'personal' is discarded in the face of the actual 'issue' of struggle. It is not

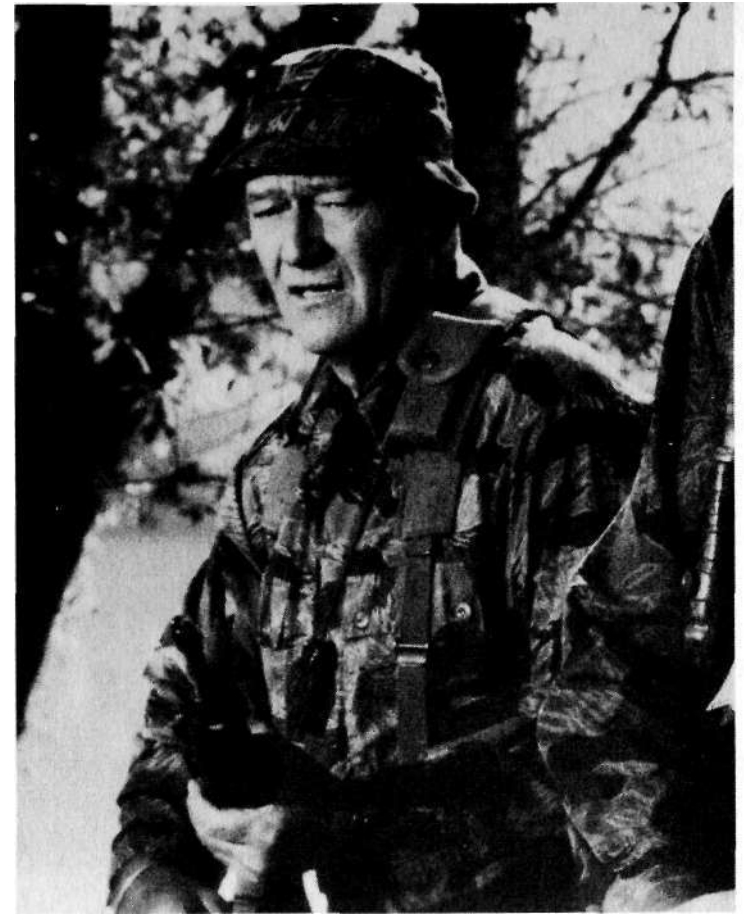


14 Henry Fonda in *The Grapes of Wrath*, 1940.

so much that feminists all acknowledge her as a model, as that she dramatises what it is like to be political - she does not dramatises an issue, but the question, itself political, of involvement with an issue. Tracy Young develops this point. She compares Fonda to other contemporary women stars who may embody something of the 'new' woman, but: 'Unlike Faye Dunaway ... Fonda has a willingness that isn't sharp. Unlike Lily Tomlin ... Fonda seems infinitely straighter, seems to still believe in the positive aspects of Ego ... unlike Diane Keaton ... Fonda is not insecure' ('Fonda Jane', p. 57). Ambiguously she concludes:

In many ways [Fonda's] current box-office appeal is an indirect result of the women's movement, a movement that has been in constant search of role models, and a movement that was up until recently (and like the left-over Left) composed mainly of the well-intentioned middle class. And in many ways it is their values she both celebrates and validates all over again, (ibid.)

Like Helen Reddy, Fonda can be seen to reconcile the aims of the women's movement with 'acceptable', 'normal' behaviour. The all-American connection here is important, as is the validation of her as a good actor, but perhaps most important is the sexual connection. Throughout the 'kinky' French films, her 'healthy', American' qualities were applauded, and Fonda has remained unerringly 'normal', i.e. heterosexual. The importance of this became particularly clear with *Julia* (1977). As Jennifer Selway observed in a *Time Out* blurb (7-13 July 1978), in *Julia*: 'no-one bothers to mention that lesbianism is central to *The Children's Hour*, which Hellman tries to write while, as per synopsis, "her memory returned again and



15 John Wayne in *The Green Berets*, 1968.

again ... to Julia"' (p. 39). And in an interview in *Telerama* (18 December 1976), Fonda herself says:

On m'a dit a Londres qu'il s'agissait d'homosexualite. Je ne le crois pas: c'est seulement l'histoire d'une amitie profonde. D'ailleurs, c'est moi-meme qui me suis proposee pour le role. [They told me in London that it [*Julia*] was about homosexuality. I don't think so; it's just a story of a deep friendship. Besides it was me who put myself forward for the part.]

One of the biggest 'taints' that the women's movement has acquired, courtesy of the mass media, is that of lesbianism. While many women in the movement have discovered lesbianism in themselves through the movement and while the movement is certainly formally committed to the defence of lesbianism, it clearly remains a stumbling block to many women (and men). I do not wish to propose that Fonda's image is an anti-gay one, but it is certainly an ostensibly *non-gay* one, and this, together with her parentage and acting skill, makes her politics, especially her feminism, seem more ordinary and normal. (In this context the omission in



16 Jane Fonda in *Cat Ballou*, 1965.

the popularisation of Freud, noted above, of the Freudian understanding of mother/daughter relationships in terms of lesbianism is particularly suggestive.)

Fonda's image's career can be seen as representing the journey of Fonda-as-person through various possibilities and problems that I have organised under the headings of father, sex, acting and politics. The argument of the last few pages suggests that her image in the period discussed reconciles these various elements, that the 'journey' has come to an end. Clearly I cannot get into predictions on this score here, but it does seem that, with *Julia* and *Coming Home*, her standing as a star has reached a peak, and the theory of charisma advanced in this book places particular emphasis on the star as the reconciler of contradictions. Beyond this, I'll end by noting a further possible element that provides a certain continuity to her image and that one might call 'tomboyism'. Several women stars have had this quality - compare Fonda (Fig. 16) with Debbie Reynolds and Nancy Sinatra (Figs. 17 and 18) - and Fonda's most successful roles with the public before *Klutewere* basically tomboys, as in *Walk on the Wild Side*, *Cat Ballou* and *Barbarella*. Images



17 & 18 (left) *Debbie Reynolds: 'Just one of the boys!'* (right) *Nancy Sinatra in Wild Angels*, 1966.

from different points in her life have emphasised this element, from promotional photographs of the Fonda family to depictions of her at political meetings with cropped hair and wearing jeans (Fig. 19). Tracy Young also suggests that in playing Lillian Hellman in *Julia* she was playing a 'legendary tomboy' ('Fonda Jane', p. 57), and her scenes with Dashiell Hammett/Jason Robards Jr are played with her dressed in sweater and slacks shouting and cursing at him. This is not the place to enquire into the roots of the acceptability of the tomboy image in general, but the following observations can be made. It clearly is acceptable for a girl to be a tomboy (whereas it is not acceptable for a boy to be a sissie), presumably because it is admirable for a person to wish to take on the attributes of the superior sex but not vice versa; the woman as tomboy retains something of the 'immaturity' of a boy, hence she does not prove a threat to a grown man. When, as with Fonda, the image is highly charged sexually we may want to speculate on this psychically in terms of phallic substitution (see the discussion by Laura Mulvey, in the section on the 'independent woman') or upon the homosexual appeal of this to heterosexual male fans - and to other women, thus providing a possible contradiction at the level of appeal to the non-gay element of her image at the level of representation (i.e. she embodies a non-gay woman, who may none the less make an appeal to gay feelings in the audience - for further discussion of this, not specifically in relation to Fonda, see Caroline Sheldon in 'Lesbians and Film: Some Thoughts'). Such speculations are risky, but it may be that her charisma - which evokes extremes of hate as well as love¹² - can be accounted for not only in the reconciliation of radicalism and feminism with Americanness and ordinariness but also in her ability to suggest (as a tomboy) redefinitions of sexuality while at the same time overtly reasserting heterosexuality.



19 Jane Fonda addresses a political meeting.

Notes

1. Richard Griffith (ed.), *The Talkies*; Martin Levin (ed.), *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines*; Barbara Gelman (ed.), *Photoplay Treasury*.
2. *Film Pictorial*, 30 September 1933; reprinted by Peter Way Ltd. in 1972 as part of the series 'Great Newspapers Reprinted'.
3. Griffith, *Talkies*, pp. 106-7, 302-4.
4. Solutions to the production of surplus include the expansion of overseas markets and war, but also the stimulation of home consumption through advertising, product differentiation, etc., all leading to an emphasis on consumption, hence the tag, 'the consumer society'. See J. K. Galbraith, *The Consumer Society* and Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*.
5. See note 1 to Part One concerning King's work.

6. Griffith, *Talkies*, pp. 136-7, 331; Griffith, *Talkies*, pp. 140-2, 337; Gelman, *Photoplay Treasury*, pp. 144-7; Levin, *Great Fan Magazines*, pp. 94-6.
7. In Tony Jefferson *et al.* (eds.), *Resistance through Rituals*, originally published as *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 7/8.
8. See Jack Babuscio, 'Screen Gays' in *Gay News* nos. 79 (Dean) and 104 (Clift).
9. The *locus classicus* of the view that 'culture is male' is Simone de Beauvoir: *Le Deuxieme Sexe*. For a discussion of more recent, psychoanalytically oriented theorisations, see Elizabeth Cowie, 'Woman as Sign'.
10. See also Richard Dyer, 'It's Being So Camp as Keeps Us Going', pp. 11-13.
11. Godard does not use performers in an 'actorly' way - the point here is that the fact of Fonda being in a film directed by a name European director would be widely taken as indicating an 'acting' job.
12. See Ronald D. Katz, 'Jane Fonda: A Hard Act to Follow', *Rolling Stone*, 9 March 1978.