

a more determined and focused actor on the set. We are also told that, as he grew up with no father present and only sisters, Cruise is very protective of his family, in a very paternal way. Published profiles of Cruise have mentioned these kinds of private details since his appearances in *The Color of Money* and *Top Gun* in 1986.<sup>53</sup> It is also evident that there is a general lack of information about Tom Cruise. There have been very few interviews, and those few that have been granted have invariably been closely connected to the film project being promoted at that time. Both his agent, Mike Ovitz, and more particularly his public relations manager, Pat Kingsley, have protected Cruise; they conduct one of the most elaborate screening processes used by any Hollywood star before granting any interview.<sup>54</sup> There is also very little merchandise made and promoted that celebrates the star Cruise outside his film roles. For example, there are no posters that work to maintain and concretize Cruise's independent value from his films. In this way, Cruise maintains his aura, the enigmatic quality of the star.

It is only with his most recent work that Cruise's maintenance of image control has been broken. Various celebrity-attended functions, the work of the paparazzi, and gossip columnists, among others, are operating in the space between the film image and the supposed "real" person. He is "caught" by these investigators of public personalities as he leaves special events, restaurants, and film premieres, where the defenses of publicity agents are supposedly lacking. Various magazines and television programs compete in conducting elaborate investigations for the truth of a character, for the way in which they can reveal the intimate realm of the star. The interview, a strategy in which the celebrity maintains apparent control, is often used by the more mainstream and entertainment-oriented press. Magazines such as *People* and *Us* tend to ensure the compliance of the stars on whom they produce feature articles. Such a piece may involve a tour of the inner sanctum of the star: we see the inside of the star's home, or perhaps we are taken on a "typical" day with the star. In a 1990 cover story on Cruise in *Us*, the photos of the interior space of his cavernous living room are artfully done. The rest of the photos are publicity stills from his various movies. The text is an interview that attempts to uncover the authentic Tom Cruise. Part of the questioning attempts to determine the validity of rumors and gossip that have circulated about the star, as a function of the more respectable entertainment maga-

zines is to operate as more legitimate sources of knowledge than the supermarket tabloids. We discover that Cruise's nickname is Laser-head, because of the intensity he can muster for any project. As well, there is a discussion about the importance of his dogs:

*Us*: They also said that your dog was in therapy.

*Cruise*: (laughing) My dog?! Get the hell outta here! Are you serious?

*Us*: Dead serious.

*Cruise*: Oh my God, give me a break! Where do they get this stuff?

*Us*: So it's not true?

*Cruise*: Yeah right, like my dog is sneaking out and going to therapy!

*Us*: Do you have a dog?

*Cruise*: I have two golden retrievers. They travel with me wherever I go. They're really good. They're just kinda there and they're always happy to see me. I love them.<sup>55</sup>

A *National Enquirer* article typifies the other type of story about Tom Cruise. With the lack of compliance of the celebrity, the story is seen to be more uncensored, less controlled by the star himself. It is in this story that we discover that Cruise's friends consider him a "womanizer" and that he has, after only a few short months, as the headline proclaims, bought a \$200,000 diamond ring for his future bride. The scandal, of course, is that his previous marriage has been so quickly supplanted by his relationship with the costar of his last film, *Days of Thunder*. Accompanying the text is a series of snapshots of Cruise embracing his new love, Nicole Kidman, outside a Hollywood restaurant. In contrast to the pictures appearing in the glossy *Us* feature, these are black-and-white photos, clearly unsolicited by either Cruise or his companion. The *Enquirer* photos allow us entry into the private world of Cruise. This visual entry is enhanced by the inside reports on the difficulty Cruise had in convincing Kidman to marry. There are also secondhand quotes from Cruise, from these inside sources, that further the illusion of intimacy for the reader. For example, "I couldn't be happier. Nicole's a one in a million girl and I knew that if I didn't propose to her, I might lose her to somebody who did. Even though marriage didn't work out with Mimi [Rogers], I love being married. And I know in my heart that Nicole and I are made for each other."<sup>56</sup>

For the current argument, the details of Cruise's personal life are not significant; what is significant is that these various constructions of Cruise that appear in the different presses establish the distinction

between Tom Cruise on the screen and Tom Cruise the celebrity. In other words, whether the stories and images are controlled by his personal management team or have emerged out of the heightened presence of his image as a cultural commodity in the selling of magazines, newspapers, and advertising, Cruise's public persona begins to be distinct from his screen persona. This form of autonomous subjectivity is very important for establishing the power of the film star as a distinct cultural commodity that is transferable to other domains, other cultural projects, and can be separated from his past films.

As Brownstein has chronicled, film stars have also worked actively to situate themselves in activities generally unrelated to the film industry. Cruise, along with other stars, has aligned himself with a number of what are described as liberal political positions on the environment and nuclear disarmament.<sup>57</sup> In fact, a whole political consultancy business has developed in Hollywood to aid celebrities in choosing issues with which to become involved. Although Cruise is not a prominent member of the politicized community among film stars, movement into the political sphere generally works to establish the relative independence of any film celebrity. The connection with charities or political campaigns deepens the character profile of the celebrity. Instead of being characterized as simply beautiful, handsome, or a mouthpiece for the screenwriter, the celebrity with a connection to these more serious domains adds the possible connotations of depth, intelligence, and commitment to his or her public persona. The public personality then demonstrates a subjectivity that goes beyond the self to the conception of selflessness and public leadership.

The autonomous Cruise is only partially constructed by these extratextual documents that establish his distinctness from his screen presence. Principally, Cruise has focused on establishing his depth of personality through the code of acting. Cruise's transgression into a form of autonomous subjectivity that bestows upon him a certain economic power in the film industry is modalized through his performing in films that work to shatter his picture personality construction. This can be characterized as acting "against type," which means working against how one is constructed in terms of physical presence, and also acting in what are labeled quality films. In terms of the trajectory toward some level of autonomous stardom, this form of acting transgression follows the construction of a clear film personality. In order for a star to transgress, a clear delineation of his or her screen presence

must be firmly in place; thus, Cruise's first film that begins to break the boundaries of his film character, *The Color of Money*, is produced and released several years into his career. The difference in this first transgressing film is quite subtle: although Cruise continues to play the talented and naturally successful character, he is surrounded by an actor and director who are both known to be serious and well respected. Paul Newman, Cruise's costar, is an actor who has a very legitimate and lengthy list of film acting credits. As well, Newman is known to be a "serious" individual who has been involved in a number of liberal political campaigns over the past twenty years. In addition, the film builds on the sediments of Newman's own career and film history: Newman re-creates the character of "Fast Eddie" Felson from the 1961 film *The Hustler*, twenty-five years later. Finally, the director, Martin Scorsese, is the preeminent "quality" American director of the past twenty years. The various layers of meaning that surround Cruise's performance construct the atmosphere for the invocation of the acting code.<sup>58</sup>

With *Rain Man*, a 1988 film, Cruise further constructs a tension between his overcoded screen personality type and the transgression of the type through the discourse of acting. Once again, Cruise is surrounded by quality. Dustin Hoffman, his costar, is an Academy Award winner; he will win a second Oscar for his role in *Rain Man*. Barry Levinson, the director, has produced a series of "thoughtful" and artistic comedies. The code of acting is central to the construction of the entire film. Cruise continues to play within the general range of his previously constructed screen personality; however, it is the content of the film that ensures a different reading of Cruise. Hoffman's portrayal of Raymond Babbitt, the autistic brother of Cruise's character, Charlie Babbitt, has been described as "acting non-stop," with Hoffman immersed in the mannerisms of his character.<sup>59</sup> This is the textual detail that becomes the central theme of most reviews of the film in the critical and noncritical movie press. From *People* we are given to understand that Hoffman stayed in character in everyday life in his complete employment of the psychological aspects of the Method form of acting. The *New York Times* labels the film a star vehicle for Hoffman in his continuous quest for the accolades of the Academy. Cruise is carried in this tour de force of the film acting profession. However, Vincent Canby asserts in his *New York Times* review that although Hoffman upstages everyone in the film, Cruise is "the real

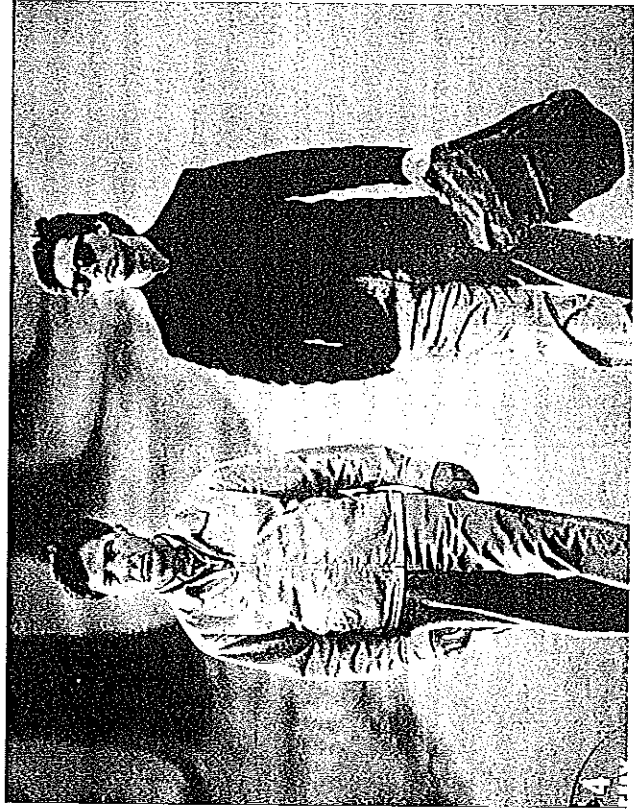


Figure 1. The principal publicity and promotional still for *Rain Man* (1988). Brilliantly embodied in this shot (and the film) are Cruise's acknowledged picture personality and a form of transgression and transcendence of his typical film persona. The sunglasses echo back to his *Risky Business* (1983) days, whereas his connection to Method actor and Oscar winner Dustin Hoffman moves Cruise into the orbit of credibility and autonomous stardom.

center. . . . It may be no accident that Charlie (and Mr. Cruise) survived *Rain Man* as well as they do.<sup>60</sup> Cruise, through this film, is working to transform his public image from malleable and predictable male film star to serious actor who chooses very carefully the productions with which he is involved. A new series of connotations become associated with a Cruise film. Because of his newfound capacity as an actor as well as his proven ability to attract other quality actors and directors to any given project, Cruise now becomes a moniker that has a certain guarantee of quality. Within the cultural production of films, the name Cruise develops a brand-name status that not only includes his promise of alluring filmic masculinity, but also is symbolic of serious and quality films. It is in this brand-name status that the star's subjectivity becomes melded with his commodity status. The estab-

lishment of brand-name status that represents quality also is a sign of star autonomy. It indicates that the actor has in fact moved to the center of the production and that his or her status may be equivalent to that of the auteur or the producer or both.<sup>61</sup>

Cruise ensures this construction of his autonomous power through his involvement in *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). It is in this film that Cruise employs the acting code to transgress fully his "naturalized" film persona. Indeed, the very plot of the film is organized around the transformation of an athletic young man into a paraplegic Vietnam veteran. Cruise, in portraying this changed man, also indicates his ability to provide a sense of his own commitment to the code of acting that in its intensity rivals the work of Dustin Hoffman in *Rain Man*.<sup>62</sup> Much of the textual material written about *Born on the Fourth of July* is concerned with Cruise's complete transformation of self in the role: this transformation indicates how deeply he has committed to the character. Often pointed out in background articles is the fact that Cruise, like Hoffman in *Rain Man*, stayed in character to test his believability in everyday life. For Cruise, the success of the test was determined by his unrecognizability as the star "Cruise," to the point that he was treated "like any other wheelchair confined person": he wanted to feel the frustration and anger that would arise from the disability and the inaccessibility of the world to physically handicapped people.<sup>63</sup> To be able to dismantle the star's image in the "real" world is the clear mark of a star able to transgress his or her categorization as star and integrate the professional dimension of serious actor into his or her celebrity and concurrent commodity status.

In the latest stages of Cruise's construction of public subjectivity, one sees the capacity for an indulgent integration of public and private life to be played out in his new films. *Far and Away* (1992), a sweeping gesture by Cruise and director Ron Howard to construct a dramatic Irish/American period piece in the tradition of *Doctor Zhivago*, unites as costars Cruise and his "real" wife, Nicole Kidman. Cruise's autonomous economic power permits the development of such a project; his perceived-to-be-stable audience operates as the risk capital insurance that leads to the film's production and distribution. Cruise is also building a unity between his filmic presence and his "real" life. The romantic dyad so crucial to the Hollywood film is doubly celebrated through this film.<sup>64</sup> Cruise maintains his clear relationship

to his constructed picture personality, which, through his new autonomy as star producer, can envelop a version of his private life.

His 1993 releases provide further evidence of his centrality in the organization of Hollywood productions. Both films rely on best-selling novels for their advance publicity and their cultural significance. Cruise manages to merge in these films the integrity of acting performance with the recognizable personality he developed in his 1980s films. As in *The Color of Money*, Cruise costars in *A Few Good Men* (1992) with a major and therefore legitimate screen star in Jack Nicholson. In *The Firm* (1993), Cruise reestablishes his persona as the successful young man destined for further success. In both of these "serious" films, Cruise operates as the connecting fiber from an older generation of audience to a younger generation that happens to be more central to the industrial organization of the film industry.

By far the most interesting of Cruise's transgressions, both within the film text and extratextually, is his 1994 film *Interview with the Vampire*. Cruise's being cast as the star of the film version of Anne Rice's 1976 novel became a source of hysterical controversy. The author herself was outraged that Cruise was to play the Lestat character, but having sold the film rights to the book—and considering Cruise's contractual involvement with the film—there was little Rice could do to remove Cruise. Rice saw the image of Cruise—his essential picture personality as an all-American, wholesome, and youthful star—as antithetical to her character Lestat, a being motivated by homoerotic companionship and baroque bacchanalia in his insistent bloodsucking killing as a vampire. In effect, before it went into production Rice disowned the film publicly, along with countless fans of her books who were equally vocal about the casting of Tom Cruise. Further controversy stirred as Cruise was believed to have eliminated from his character the possibility of explicit homoeroticism in the film (later attributed to Rice's original screenplay and subsequently suppressed and reinserted into the movie by the director, Neil Jordan).<sup>65</sup> With the release of the film, Rice recanted equally publicly, dramatically endorsing the film and its star through an advertisement in *Daily Variety* that was subsequently reprinted by Geffen Pictures in the *New York Times*. In the ad, she said, in part: "I loved the film. I simply loved it. . . . I never dreamed it would turn out this way. . . . The charm and humor, and invincible innocence which I cherish in my beloved hero Lestat are all alive in Tom Cruise's performance."<sup>66</sup> She then went on



Figure 2. Crossed audiences: Cruise as Lestat in the video version of *Interview with the Vampire* (1994). A public revolt spurred on by author Anne Rice and proliferated by her fans intensified around the casting of Cruise in this film version of Rice's novel. The controversy served as advance publicity for the film and underlined the creative "risks" Cruise was taking with his core audience in playing a dark character.

to thank her readers for their concern about the cast and the production of the film, and attempted to allay their fears and pumped-up desires to boycott the film.

Cruise's star construction in *Interview with the Vampire* provides a wonderful blend of transgression and maintenance. The novel's homoeroticism, though muted, is still found in the film. Also, Cruise as Lestat is not a pleasant character. Cruise thus evokes once again a form of transgression through the code of acting. Yet both he and his costar Brad Pitt are depicted for the most part as beautiful and handsome representations of masculinity, which ultimately facilitates their success at procuring a succession of victims. It is the conflict between Cruise's dominant picture personality and the transgressive nature of the text that produces a massively proliferating discourse about Cruise and his suitability in the press. Cruise's star construction becomes the site upon which a number of fears about norms and sexual morality are activated.



Figure 3. Cruise as Lestat seducing Louis, Brad Pitt's character, into eternal vampiredom. The camp sensibility and homoeroticism provided an intriguing enigmatic shift in Cruise's star persona. His public appearances reinforced an embrace with a rougher and far from clean-cut image that emphasized aura and distance.

Subsequent to the film's release, Cruise was involved in a number of interviews. The most noteworthy of these took place on Oprah Winfrey's television show, where Cruise, with a goatee and long hair, answered questions from an audience that had just seen the film. The separation from his overcoded image of a clean-cut American star perplexed Oprah's audience. Indeed, the dominant theme was "How could you produce such a dark character and such a dark film? We don't need any more of that." Cruise's response became his defensive mantra throughout the program: while smiling (an appeal to his dominant picture personality), Cruise responded, "It was a vampire movie, and vampires act that way." The homoeroticism was also mentioned by a gay audience member, who thanked Cruise for the film and how it related to his experiences. Cruise, looking appropriately embarrassed, explained that it was acting and that the male companionship made sense for the Lestat character. The postrelease interviews and new image of Cruise produced a deepening of the Cruise persona; that very deepening through both acting and controversy continues to

produce the autonomy of Cruise in the public sphere. His face and his actions continue to produce interest and become the nodal point for a wider range of discourses on individuality, sexuality, morality, and, self-reflexively, the celebrity himself.

### Conclusion

What must be remembered about these various constructions of a film celebrity is that they are modalized or operationalized in the audience. The film industry, the coterie of personal agents surrounding the star, and the star him- or herself are involved in this active building of a public personality. Integrated into that structure is some measure of the response of a public and then the reformulation of that response (in whatever form) into the further cultural production of the celebrity. The audience, then, for Tom Cruise is not necessarily very involved in the meanings of his public personality. For some in the possible audience, there is an absolute abhorrence of his physical presence. For others, there is mild acceptance of his various constructions of self. The audience then moves in and out of using the film celebrity to represent idealizations of self or alternatively dystopian visions of self and others, or even of allowing the celebrity's public personality to mean nothing at all. The full complexity of the interaction of the audience with the celebrity apparatus is beyond the bounds of this analysis; what can be seen are the outlines of celebrity construction that are actively used by the audience.

The film celebrity emerges from a particular cultural apparatus. In its diverse incarnations, the film celebrity represents the building and dissipation of the aura of personality. The filmic text establishes a distance from the audience. The extratextual domains of magazine interviews, critical readings of the films, television appearances, and so on are attempts at discerning the authentic nature of the film celebrity by offering the audience/public avenues for seeing the individual in a less constructed way. It is important to realize that these other discourses that try to present the "real" film star are in themselves actively playing in the tension between the film celebrity's aura and the existence of the star's private life. The will to knowledge about the star's private and personal domains is coexistent with and dependent on the constructed aura or controlled domain of knowledge provided by the narratives of his or her film texts.

Finally, the film star has been constructed to represent the ultimate independence of the individual in contemporary culture. In the most obvious way, the film star is granted economic power to fabricate a lifestyle of wealth and leisure through the income earned from film releases. In a less obvious way, the film star's private life is chronicled to demonstrate the star's relationship to the normative center of the society. Film stars, collectively and historically, have been granted this normative leeway in the organization of their personal lives. Their lives become the idiosyncratic markers that demonstrate the expansive limits of individual independence in the culture. However, the normative leeway is granted only to those who can actively construct their individual autonomy from other constraining apparatuses. The ultimate film star or celebrity, then, has *individually* transgressed the constructions of public personality that have been placed by the film apparatus and the public. With this status, the film star is constructed to possess a great deal of power to determine his or her own future, film projects, and public image.

## 5

### Television's Construction of the Celebrity

Compared with the film industry, the institution of television has positioned its celebrities in a much different way. Whereas the film celebrity plays with aura through the construction of distance, the television celebrity is configured around conceptions of familiarity. The familial feel of television and its celebrities is partially related to the domestication of entertainment technologies from the 1920s to the 1950s. Like radio, its precursor, television brought entertainment into the home. And in terms of the common space of the family, the television occupied a privileged location in the living rooms of most homes in North America. The uses made of television were also modalized around its position as a family entertainment technology.<sup>1</sup> The work of television production in its first two decades (from the late 1940s to the late 1960s) was the maintenance of a large mass audience, so that the same programs would be acceptable to all members of the family. Although different time periods were targeted by producers and advertisers for different audiences (e.g., daytime for women with the correlative program, the soap opera; Saturday morning for children; Saturday afternoon for men and sports), there was a relative lack of audience differentiation beyond this level.

The television celebrity embodies the characteristics of familiarity and mass acceptability. Part of the expression of the celebrity in the televisual world has emerged from the way in which personalities were constructed in the period prior to and in the War. Radio, like television, had become a forerunner and a source of information. In the 1920s and 1930s, the domestic quality of broadcast technology of the home mass audience of radio that vied for attention. The way television disseminated its broadcast—also established a similarity with radio stars, and also made both groups

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