

came recognized by the audience and was used to link films together to provide a consistency around the actor's public persona. As DeCordova reveals in his reading of the popular press of the early twentieth century, the first biographical profiles of the screen stars of the 1910s were focused on this link between their screen presence and their personal lives: a homologous private world was established that would not challenge their filmic characters. It is interesting to see in the genealogy of the construction of current film celebrity that the same substantiation occurs as the physical performer begins to be constructed as a public personality. The example of Tom Cruise's transformation is exemplary.

Tom Cruise as Picture Personality

For Cruise, the line of demarcation between physical performer and recognizable screen personality, which identifies his representation beyond the screen, is drawn with the release of the feature film *Risky Business*.⁴² Through this film, Cruise generates a great number of newspaper and magazine articles, not about the film, but about the star. The process of working out the internal nature of Tom Cruise begins. Articles start appearing first in youth-oriented magazines.⁴³ The film role becomes the basis for determining the real Tom Cruise, as something of a homology is constructed. Cruise, in publicity photos, plays with the image portrayed in the film—his public image becomes conflated with the Ray-Ban sunglasses used extensively by the character. For more mainstream magazines and reviewers, the movie provides the centerpiece for discussion. In these magazines, Cruise is interpreted as representing not only a role, but a generation of youth through his role and his "cool" attitude, best articulated through his use of the Ray-Bans and his relative detachment and distance from indicating the significance of experience. Again there is a conflation of the role with the public world; a connection is made to the resonance of the star's image and deportment in the film and life with the audience segment that has celebrated the film. The image of youth proliferates in other ways, as the look of the star becomes the way in which "Youth" and the interests of youth are represented in various forms of mediated culture.

Critical at this point in the development of the film celebrity is the necessity not to present contradictory evidence concerning the nature

of Tom Cruise. His "real" persona is, at this stage, very much connected to that portrayed on the screen. Thus, the elaborate extratextual discourse on Cruise that appears in newspapers and magazines works to bolster the new screen personality. Cruise's own publicists also guard the integrity of the screen persona in an effort to maintain Cruise as a significant and marketable commodity. His commodity status is dependent still on the screen presentation, or what the character on the screen embodies. The production company, the studio, and the star's developing team of publicity agents begin to manage the consistency of the image. In this way, Cruise establishes a new variation on the male film celebrity, one that builds on the previous constructions but provides markers of distinction and differentiation. The form of those distinctions relates to the way in which a new "structure of feeling" envelops the production of new film celebrities.⁴⁴

This new structure of feeling lends a certain vagueness to the way a new film celebrity emerges. The vagueness relates to the manner in which the audience may interpret this constructed subjectivity embodied in the celebrity as well as the temporality of that construction, where the concrete reality of the celebrity is grounded in the moment. Through his screen image, Cruise has been positioned as part of a new generation of male stardom that has been connected to the way in which youth has rethought their imbrication in the social world. We can see in this formative version of Cruise as a celebrity sign/text that there are certain elements that provide a correlation of Cruise to this new attitude.

Youth—which connoted rebellion in previous film stars—is re-constructed through Cruise: youth is correlated with confidence and savvy. The difference between youth and the adult world in this new configuration is not based principally on challenging the models of success and value in contemporary society, as previous youthful male heroes emphasized; rather, the Cruise persona makes coherent the inherent value of a higher sensitivity to the way in which the system of success works, so that one can use it more effectively to gain personal success. The connection of youth and confidence through Cruise's persona can be characterized as a celebration of personal will, not to transform the system, but to move smoothly through the system to occupy already designated positions of power and influence. Cruise's screen personality has had a certain consistency since 1983. The film texts have worked to reinforce the reconstruction of this new conception

of the power of youth, youthful action and agency. It is significant that the character in *Risky Business*, which has been so formative for Cruise's public personality, is depicted as a relatively well-off, probably upper-middle-class teenager. It is the type of image that indicates a clear connection and affinity to forms of cultural and economic capital and the forms of influence they imply. Most of Cruise's subsequent films rarely represent images of the upper classes; but they do present Cruise's characters as embodying the outward features and appearances of wealth as well as clear aspirations to assert their apparent natural right to be part of the wealthy. In most cases the films emphasize the ease with which Cruise can become comfortably successful.

In the filmic texts, this relationship to the ease of success is manifested around either sports/athleticism or the managing of sophisticated technology. In all cases, Cruise is something of a natural, but also a natural risk taker who goes beyond the bounds of the technology or game to demonstrate ultimate human dominance of will. In *All the Right Moves*, Cruise is a high school football hero who, through his sheer talent, can transcend his humble origins. In the enormously successful *Top Gun* (1986), Cruise portrays a character whose nickname is Maverick. He is chosen for an elite fighter squadron because of his capacity to supersede the talents of a technically good pilot. Cruise has not had to work hard to develop this skill; he manifests a natural affinity for handling this technical hardware.

Reinforcements of Cruise's screen personality can be seen in other films. In *The Color of Money* (1986), a more sophisticated film than his earlier vehicles, Cruise plays a naturally gifted pool player who is relatively unaware of the more subtle techniques he could use to win money at the game until he meets an older pool hustler played by Paul Newman. There are a number of layers of meanings in this film, which I will return to later in this chapter. What is significant with reference to the construction of a screen personality is that there is a consistency in the representation of Tom Cruise between *The Color of Money* and his earlier films. The organization of his public persona coheres among these various filmic texts. A particular and idiosyncratic celebrity sign is clearly established that intersects with a given set of values concerning youth, success, and appearance.⁴⁵

Top Gun established the stability of the commodity aspect of Cruise's celebrity sign. It signaled its differentiation from other constructions of stardom that predated Cruise and its clear relationship

to a general restructuring of the attitudes of youth and success in the 1980s. It also heralded the power of this particular configuration of screen personality to produce, virtually on its own construction of character, a successful film. Two years following the release of *Top Gun* and *The Color of Money*, Cruise starred in a film that demonstrated his commodity power in the construction of audiences. *Cocktail* (1988), in its opening scenes, seems to provide a narrative continuity for the character, as if this character in this distinct movie has, in fact, emerged like Tom Cruise from *Top Gun*. In the opening sequence, we see Cruise as Brian Flanagan being dropped by his army buddies to catch a bus to "New York": he has completed his army service and is about to go on and achieve fame and fortune in the big city. The Flanagan character in this film never separates from our image of the Cruise star and, in fact, the film—through camera angles, obsessive shots of the Cruise smile and grin, and a celebration of Cruise's body and movement—actively plays and integrates the Cruise screen personality into the meaning of the text. Cruise as Flanagan becomes very quickly a bartending star, which allows him to act within the narrative as the star. The character is thronged by adoring fans in several sequences in the film. These fans, the bar patrons, are predominantly women, and their adulation of Flanagan for his acrobatic bartending skills is connected through the film text to the sexual aura of Cruise as male star. He acknowledges their looks and responds with greater histrionics. His success is further measured in the film by his success in sleeping with women. The women bar patrons in the filmic text represent for the producers of the movie a construction of the form of female adulation perceived to exist in the film audience (the public) for Cruise himself. Through an uncomplicated plot, Cruise's character is constructed as a divided personality, where physical prowess and beauty become separated from the moral integrity of character. The film ends with a reconciliation of the Cruise character, so that his outer beauty is matched by his inner morality and integrity. With this unification, the plot is resolved and Cruise as Flanagan is permitted his version of success: he owns his own bar and possesses his own woman. In terms of a developing screen personality, the meaning of Cruise's celebrity sign is also unified: his physical attractiveness is constructed to be contained by his strength of personality.

Cruise's 1990 film *Days of Thunder* represents the triumph of his "picture personality," or the overcoming of the filmic text with the

consistency of his form of public personality/celebrity. The actual filmic text is surrounded with extratextual detail about Cruise and this very personal project. Magazines, in their efforts to anticipate the success of the film at the box office, provide this deepening of the significance of the film before the film's release. These anticipatory stories contain little analysis of the content of the film—the dearth of information ensures that what is discussed coheres with the strategies of the publicity agents and the production company behind the film. In this particular film production, the organization of production is inevitably connected to Tom Cruise's management.

What we find in this reportage is the building of a homology between the film content and the person and personality of Cruise. For instance, we learn that Cruise's interest in auto racing stems from his involvement with actor and professional race car driver Paul Newman during the making of *The Color of Money*.⁴⁶ Although this interest is outside any filmic text, it is inside the world of public personalities and celebrities—it is in the realm of public knowledge. *Days of Thunder* works to maintain the coherence of personality on-screen and off-screen. Again, this personality emerges fundamentally in the realm of filmic texts. We also are told that Cruise has indeed become a respectable racer. In several articles, his track time is mentioned as the fastest nonprofessional lap clocked at the track.⁴⁷ The truth of the movie text is borne out in the “real” Cruise. Likewise, we are made aware in this extratextual discourse that Cruise is credited with the “story idea.” This connection is further substantiated in the film's opening credits.

The extratextual discourse that is coordinated with the release of the film is organized specifically around the star and the star's relationship to the content of the film. Several interviews and features are written on the set. One female writer centers her story on her experiences as a passenger with Cruise in the stock car used in the film. What is being articulated in this story is the proximity of the writer to the “real” Cruise. Although no real interview was conducted, the writer provides evidence for the establishment of the real Cruise personality. Very few words were spoken; instead, there was the evident action and experience of driving at high speed around a track. Cruise, like his filmic characters in most of his previous movies, is a man of action. Words then become extraneous to the experience.⁴⁸ This story also provides ample evidence that the film character and Cruise have

certain common interests and common characteristics. The separation of the private world of Tom Cruise and the public world of his filmic characters is not constructed. The screen personality predominates in the decoding of the Cruise celebrity sign.

Forms of Transgression: Establishing the Autonomous Nature of the Film Celebrity Sign

In the intense construction of a screen personality, the star builds, in effect, an overcoded representation of him- or herself. This has a certain utility for the recirculation of the screen personality in future films. With Tom Cruise, we can see this most evidently in films like *Cocktail* and *Days of Thunder*, where he reinvents variations of his previous performances. There continues to be the risk, however, that, as in the category of the physical performer, the screen personality will be arrested in his or her construction of a type, even though that type has been particularized and deepened by the actor into a coherent personality.

The maintenance of celebrity status for the film actor involves what I call transgression. DeCordova asserts that the development of stardom is related to the way in which Hollywood actors of the 1920s became the object of intense search for their meaning and coherence beyond the screen into their private lives. There was a proliferation of extratextual discourse concerning stars' lives and lifestyles, a discourse that began to fill the entertainment pages of newspapers and the motion picture magazines of the period.⁴⁹ To a degree, these exposés complemented the characterizations the screen actors represented in their films. There were other tendencies as well, for example, as described in the earlier discussion of the screen apparatus and its construction of stardom, the stars were depicted in all their grandeur. Their mansions and their extravagant lifestyles became objects of intense scrutiny. Their lives, though sometimes presented as ordinary in their rituals, were more regularly represented as quite extraordinary. DeCordova notes that stardom was intimately connected to this heightened scrutiny of the actors' private lives. From that close examination, a whole discourse on their transgressions of the norms of behavior became available to the public. Knowledge of their marriages and their divorces, hints of improper liaisons, and scandals that involved sexual indiscretions were commonplace in the press.⁵⁰ Film

stars, like their theatrical forebears, began to be examples of how the perversions of wealth led to the breakdown of norms. The extratextual discourse that was intensely involved in mapping and charting the private lives of the stars provided a public discourse on intimacy and a constructed narrative or morality tale that implicitly expressed where the normative center of that discourse should be.

Transgressions that emerged from the search of the private lives of stars could lead to several scenarios for the construction of the film celebrity sign. In the instance of Fatty Arbuckle and his trial for manslaughter after one of his "famous" wild parties, the transgression virtually destroyed his power as a celebrity sign. The scandal represented too large a moral transgression.⁵¹ Reporting on Hollywood life rarely reached this level of normative transgression. More typical in style were reports on affairs of the heart and, if those were impossible or implausible, revealing portraits of the everyday lives of the Hollywood stars. In these cases, the levels of revelation would not destroy any actor's sign as a celebrity. Rather, such reporting would function primarily to enhance actors' independence from their screen images. A common form of discussion of stars concerned how they lead normal lives, and in this way, their lives were in contradiction to their screen personalities' extraordinary lives. Another common area was the development of a discourse that served to deepen the text of the star as glamorous. Gossip columnists and Hollywood reporters for magazines and newspapers would chart the public appearances of the stars at restaurants, premieres, galas, and parties. Elizabeth Taylor's elaborate off-screen life, with marriages and divorces, appearances, charity involvement, and spectacular oscillations in weight and substance abuse, eventually made her completely autonomous as a public personality from her screen roles; indeed, her acting is now virtually forgotten in most articles about her. In all these cases, the actors achieve independence from the ways in which their films have painted them. I describe this transformation as a kind of transgression that builds into the star an autonomous subjectivity.

A second form of transgression must also occur in order for the film celebrity to construct a certain autonomy of his or her cultural sign: the celebrity must break the filmic code of his or her personality. The screen personality must be denaturalized into a code of acting. The roles chosen must break the conventional mold of the specific screen personality. This construction of the autonomous film star through

acting is analogous to the historical development in the industry of invoking the code of acting to legitimate the cultural form. Producer Adolph Zukor's Famous Players Company, as discussed above, epitomizes this use of theatrical codes of acting to deepen the cultural significance of the filmic text. Zukor brought in stars of the theater to sell film to a "cultured" audience. In a similar fashion, screen stars, in order to demonstrate that they have abilities that go beyond the limited construction of their screen personalities, work to establish their abilities as actors by playing roles that transgress their previous sign constructions. For example, a comedy star like Robin Williams plays a dramatic role, and thereby works to establish his range as an actor. Female stars such as Farrah Fawcett in *The Burning Bed* and Jessica Lange in *Country* play roles that quite deliberately soil their images of beauty with mutilations of their faces and bodies as a way to transgress their "picture personalities," which have given them little room to maneuver and negotiate. The code of acting serves to deepen the celebrity text by demonstrating that skill and talent are elemental in the actor's fame.

Transgressions are also forms of risk in achieving autonomous status. The original connection to the audience is tampered with and the degree to which the star can transform, the limits within which an extratextual life can be tolerated by an audience, is an unknown. As Richard Dyer has emphasized, the trials and tribulations of an actor such as Judy Garland can reconfigure a new core audience that relates directly to the experiences of tragedy: gay culture's embrace of Garland as misunderstood, as maintaining a false exterior, is now the classic case of how extratextual transgressions can form a committed though differently motivated audience for a particular celebrity.⁵²

Tom Cruise as Transgressor

The mode of transgression takes on a number of forms and narratives. For Cruise, as for other film celebrities, this implies an extensive study of his personal life. We begin to find out about the development of the Cruise personality outside of the filmic texts, in the images of mass-circulation magazines and newspapers. Biographical details begin appearing that establish the autonomy of the star personality. We learn that Cruise grew up dyslexic and continues to have difficulty reading scripts. We learn that this disability has led him to be