

the Star

Daily life is harsh, and most of us constantly seek escape from it in fantasies and dreams. Stars feed on this weakness; standing out from others through a distinctive and appealing style, they make us want to watch them. At the same time, they are vague and ethereal, keeping their distance, and letting us imagine more than is there. Their dreamlike quality works on our unconscious; we are not even aware how much we imitate them. Learn to become an object of fascination by projecting the glittering but elusive presence of the Star.

The Fetishistic Star

One day in 1922, in Berlin, Germany, a casting call went out for the part of a voluptuous young woman in a film called *Tragedy of Love*. Of the hundreds of struggling young actresses who showed up, most would do anything to get the casting director's attention, including exposing themselves. There was one young woman in the line, however, who was simply dressed, and performed none of the other girls' desperate antics. Yet she stood out anyway.

The girl carried a puppy on a leash, and had draped an elegant necklace around the puppy's neck. The casting director noticed her immediately. He watched her as she stood in line, calmly holding the dog in her arms and keeping to herself. When she smoked a cigarette, her gestures were slow and suggestive. He was fascinated by her legs and face, the sinuous way she moved, the hint of coldness in her eyes. By the time she had come to the front, he had already cast her. Her name was Marlene Dietrich.

By 1929, when the Austrian-American director Josef von Sternberg arrived in Berlin to begin work on the film *The Blue Angel*, the twenty-seven-year-old Dietrich was well known in the Berlin film and theater world. *The Blue Angel* was to be about a woman called Lola-Lola who preys sadistically on men, and all of Berlin's best actresses wanted the part—except, apparently, Dietrich, who made it known that she thought the role demeaning; von Sternberg should choose from the other actresses he had in mind. Shortly after arriving in Berlin, however, von Sternberg attended a performance of a musical to watch a male actor he was considering for *The Blue Angel*. The star of the musical was Dietrich, and as soon as she came on stage, von Sternberg found that he could not take his eyes off her. She stared at him directly, insolently, like a man; and then there were those legs, and the way she leaned provocatively against the wall. Von Sternberg forgot about the actor he had come to see. He had found his Lola-Lola.

Von Sternberg managed to convince Dietrich to take the part, and immediately he went to work, molding her into the Lola of his imagination. He changed her hair, drew a silver line down her nose to make it seem thinner, taught her to look at the camera with the insolence he had seen onstage. When filming began, he created a lighting system just for her—a light that tracked her wherever she went, and was strategically heightened by gauze and smoke. Obsessed with his "creation," he followed her everywhere. No one else could go near her.

The cool, bright face which didn't ask for anything, which simply existed, waiting—it was an empty face, he thought; a face that could change with any wind of expression. One could dream into it anything. It was like a beautiful empty house waiting for carpets and pictures. It had all possibilities—it could become a palace or a brothel. It depended on the one who filled it. How limited by comparison was all that was already completed and labeled.

—ERICH MARIA REMARQUE,
ON MARLENE DIETRICH,
ARCH OF TRIUMPH

Marlene Dietrich is not an actress, like Sarah Bernhardt; she is a myth, like Phryne.

—ANDRÉ MALRAUX, QUOTED IN
EDGAR MORIN, *THE STARS*,
TRANSLATED BY RICHARD
HOWARD

When Pygmalion saw these women, living such wicked lives, he was

revolted by the many faults
which nature has
implanted in the female
sex, and long lived a
bachelor existence, without
any wife to share his home.

But meanwhile, with
marvelous artistry, he
skillfully carved a snowy
ivory statue. He made it
lovelier than any woman
born, and fell in love with
his own creation. The
statue had all the
appearance of a real girl, so
that it seemed to be alive,
to want to move, did not
modesty forbid. So cleverly
did his art conceal its art.

Pygmalion gazed in
wonder, and in his heart
there rose a passionate love
for this image of a human
form. Often he ran his
hands over the work,
feeling it to see whether it
was flesh or ivory, and
would not yet admit that
ivory was all it was. He
kissed the statue, and
imagined that it kissed him
back, spoke to it and
embraced it, and thought
he felt his fingers sink into
the limbs he touched, so
that he was afraid lest a
bruise appear where he had
pressed the flesh.
Sometimes he addressed it
in flattering speeches,
sometimes brought the kind
of presents that girls
enjoy. . . . He dressed the
limbs of his statue in
woman's robes, and put
rings on its fingers, long
necklaces round its
neck. . . . All this finery
became the image well, but
it was no less lovely
unadorned. Pygmalion
then placed the statue on a
couch that was covered with
cloths of Tynan purple,
laid its head to rest on soft
down pillows, as if it could
appreciate them, and called
it his bedfellow. • The
festival of Venus, which is
celebrated with the greatest

The Blue Angel was a huge success in Germany. Audiences were fascinated with Dietrich: that cold, brutal stare as she spread her legs over a stool, baring her underwear; her effortless way of commanding attention on screen. Others besides von Sternberg became obsessed with her. A man dying of cancer, Count Sascha Kolowrat, had one last wish: to see Marlene's legs in person. Dietrich obliged, visiting him in the hospital and lifting up her skirt; he sighed and said "Thank you. Now I can die happy." Soon Paramount Studios brought Dietrich to Hollywood, where everyone was quickly talking about her. At a party, all eyes would turn toward her when she came into the room. She would be escorted by the most handsome men in Hollywood, and would be wearing an outfit both beautiful and unusual—gold-lame pajamas, a sailor suit with a yachting cap. The next day the look would be copied by women all over town; next it would spread to magazines, and a whole new trend would start.

The real object of fascination, however, was unquestionably Dietrich's face. What had enthralled von Sternberg was her blankness—with a simple lighting trick he could make that face do whatever he wanted. Dietrich eventually stopped working with von Sternberg, but never forgot what he had taught her. One night in 1951, the director Fritz Lang, who was about to direct her in the film *Rancho Notorious*, was driving past his office when he saw a light flash in the window. Fearing a burglary, he got out of his car, crept up the stairs, and peeked through the crack in the door: it was Dietrich taking pictures of herself in the mirror, studying her face from every angle.

Marlene Dietrich had a distance from her own self: she could study her face, her legs, her body, as if she were someone else. This gave her the ability to mold her look, transforming her appearance for effect. She could pose in just the way that would most excite a man, her blankness letting him see her according to his fantasy, whether of sadism, voluptuousness, or danger. And every man who met her, or who watched her on screen, fantasized endlessly about her. The effect worked on women as well; in the words of one writer, she projected "sex without gender." But this self-distance gave her a certain coldness, whether on film or in person. She was like a beautiful object, something to fetishize and admire the way we admire a work of art.

The fetish is an object that commands an emotional response and that makes us breathe life into it. Because it is an object we can imagine whatever we want to about it. Most people are too moody, complex, and reactive to let us see them as objects that we can fetishize. The power of the Fetishistic Star comes from an ability to become an object, and not just any object but an object we fetishize, one that stimulates a variety of fantasies. Fetishistic Stars are perfect, like the statue of a Greek god or goddess. The effect is startling, and seductive. Its principal requirement is self-distance. If you see yourself as an object, then others will too. An ethereal, dreamlike air will heighten the effect.

You are a blank screen. Float through life noncommittally and people will want to seize you and consume you. Of all the parts of your body that draw this fetishistic attention, the strongest is the face; so learn to tune your face like an instrument, making it radiate a fascinating vagueness for effect. And since you will have to stand out from other Stars in the sky, you will need to develop an attention-getting style. Dietrich was the great practitioner of this art; her style was chic enough to dazzle, weird enough to enthrall. Remember, your own image and presence are materials you can control. The sense that you are engaged in this kind of play will make people see you as superior and worthy of imitation.

She had such natural poise . . . such an economy of gesture, that she became as absorbing as a Modigliani. . . . She had the one essential star quality: she could be magnificent doing nothing.

—BERLIN ACTRESS LILI DARVAS ON MARLENE DIETRICH

The Mythic Star

On July 2, 1960, a few weeks before that year's Democratic National Convention, former President Harry Truman publicly stated that John F. Kennedy—who had won enough delegates to be chosen his party's candidate for the presidency—was too young and inexperienced for the job. Kennedy's response was startling: he called a press conference, to be televised live, and nationwide, on July 4. The conference's drama was heightened by the fact that he was away on vacation, so that no one saw or heard from him until the event itself. Then, at the appointed hour, Kennedy strode into the conference room like a sheriff entering Dodge City. He began by stating that he had run in all of the state primaries, at considerable expense of money and effort, and had beaten his opponents fairly and squarely. Who was Truman to circumvent the democratic process? "This is a young country," Kennedy went on, his voice getting louder, "founded by young men . . . and still young in heart. . . . The world is changing, the old ways will not do, . . . It is time for a new generation of leadership to cope with new problems and new opportunities." Even Kennedy's enemies agreed that his speech that day was stirring. He turned Truman's challenge around: the issue was not his inexperience but the older generation's monopoly on power. His style was as eloquent as his words, for his performance evoked films of the time—Alan Ladd in *Shane* confronting the corrupt older ranchers, or James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*. Kennedy even resembled Dean, particularly in his air of cool detachment.

A few months later, now approved as the Democrats' presidential candidate, Kennedy squared off against his Republican opponent, Richard Nixon, in their first nationally televised debate. Nixon was sharp; he knew

pomp all through Cyprus, was now in progress, and heifers, their crooked horns gilded for the occasion, had fallen at the altar as the axe struck their snowy necks. Smoke was rising from the incense, when Pygmalion, having made his offering, stood by the altar and timidly prayed, saying: "If you gods can give all things, may I have as my wife, I pray—"he did not dare to say: "the ivory maiden," but finished: "one like the ivory maid." However, golden Venus, present at her festival in person, understood what his prayers meant, and as a sign that the gods were kindly disposed, the flames burned up three times, shooting a tongue of fire into the air. When Pygmalion returned home, he made straight for the statue of the girl he loved, leaned over the couch, and kissed her. She seemed warm: he laid his lips on hers again, and touched her breast with his hands—at his touch the ivory lost its hardness, and grew soft.

—OVID, *METAMORPHOSES*,
TRANSLATED BY MARY M. INNES

[John F.] Kennedy brought to television news and photojournalism the components most prevalent in the world of film: star quality and mythic story. With his telegenic looks, skills at self presentation, heroic fantasies, and creative intelligence, Kennedy was brilliantly prepared to project a major screen persona. He appropriated the discourses of mass culture, especially of Hollywood, and transferred them to the

news. By this strategy he made the news like dreams and like the movies—a realm in which images played out scenarios that accorded with the viewer's deepest yearnings. . . . Never appearing in an actual film, but rather turning the television apparatus into his screen, he became the greatest movie star of the twentieth century.

—JOHN HELLMANN, *THE KENNEDY OBSESSION: THE AMERICAN MYTH OF JFK*

But we have seen that, considered as a total phenomenon, the history of the stars repeats, in its own proportions, the history of the gods. Before the gods (before the stars) the mythical universe (the screen) was peopled with specters or phantoms endowed with the glamour and magic of the double. •

Several of these presences have progressively assumed body and substance, have taken form, amplified, and flowered into gods and goddesses. And even as certain major gods of the ancient pantheons metamorphose themselves into hero-gods of salvation, the star-goddesses humanize themselves and become new mediators between the fantastic world of dreams and man's daily life on earth. . . . The heroes of the movies . . . are, in an obviously attenuated way, mythological heroes in this sense of becoming divine.

The star is the actor or actress who absorbs some of the heroic—i.e., divinized and mythic—substance of the hero or heroine of the movies, and who in turn enriches this substance by

the answers to the questions and debated with aplomb, quoting statistics on the accomplishments of the Eisenhower administration, in which he had served as vice-president. But beneath the glare of the cameras, on black and white television, he was a ghastly figure—his five o'clock shadow covered up with powder, streaks of sweat on his brow and cheeks, his face drooping with fatigue, his eyes shifting and blinking, his body rigid. What was he so worried about? The contrast with Kennedy was startling. If Nixon looked only at his opponent, Kennedy looked out at the audience, making eye contact with his viewers, addressing them in their living rooms as no politician had ever done before. If Nixon talked data and niggling points of debate, Kennedy spoke of freedom, of building a new society, of recapturing America's pioneer spirit. His manner was sincere and emphatic. His words were not specific, but he made his listeners imagine a wonderful future.

The day after the debate, Kennedy's poll numbers soared miraculously, and wherever he went he was greeted by crowds of young girls, screaming and jumping. His beautiful wife Jackie by his side, he was a kind of democratic prince. Now his television appearances were events. He was in due course elected president, and his inaugural address, also broadcast on television, was stirring. It was a cold and wintry day. In the background, Eisenhower sat huddled in coat and scarf, looking old and beaten. But Kennedy stood hatless and coatless to address the nation: "I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it—and the glow from that fire can truly light the world."

Over the months to come Kennedy gave innumerable live press conferences before the TV cameras, something no previous president had dared. Facing the firing squad of lenses and questions, he was unafraid, speaking coolly and slightly ironically. What was going on behind those eyes, that smile? People wanted to know more about him. The magazines teased its readers with information—photographs of Kennedy with his wife and children, or playing football on the White House lawn, interviews creating a sense of him as a devoted family man, yet one who mingled as an equal with glamorous stars. The images all melted together—the space race, the Peace Corps, Kennedy facing up to the Soviets during the Cuban missile crisis just as he had faced up to Truman.

After Kennedy was assassinated, Jackie said in an interview that before he went to bed, he would often play the soundtracks to Broadway musicals, and his favorite of these was *Camelot*, with its lines, "Don't let it be forgot / that once there was a spot / For one brief shining moment / That was known as Camelot." There would be great presidents again, Jackie said, but never "another Camelot." The name "Camelot" seemed to stick, making Kennedy's thousand days in office resonate as myth.

Kennedy's seduction of the American public was conscious and calculated. It was also more Hollywood than Washington, which was not surprising:

Kennedy's father, Joseph, had once been a movie producer, and Kennedy himself had spent time in Hollywood, hobnobbing with actors and trying to figure out what made them stars. He was particularly fascinated with Gary Cooper, Montgomery Clift, and Cary Grant; he often called Grant for advice.

Hollywood had found ways to unite the entire country around certain themes, or myths—often the great American myth of the West. The great stars embodied mythic types: John Wayne the patriarch, Clift the Promethean rebel, Jimmy Stewart the noble hero, Marilyn Monroe the siren. These were not mere mortals but gods and goddesses to be dreamed and fantasized about. All of Kennedy's actions were framed in the conventions of Hollywood. He did not argue with his opponents, he confronted them dramatically. He posed, and in visually fascinating ways—whether with his wife, with his children, or alone onstage. He copied the facial expressions, the presence, of a Dean or a Cooper. He did not discuss policy details but waxed eloquent about grand mythic themes, the kind that could unite a divided nation. And all this was calculated for television, for Kennedy mostly existed as a televised image. That image haunted our dreams. Well before his assassination, Kennedy attracted fantasies of America's lost innocence with his call for a renaissance of the pioneer spirit, a New Frontier.

Of all the character types, the Mythic Star is perhaps the most powerful of all. People are divided by all kinds of consciously recognized categories—race, gender, class, religion, politics. It is impossible, then, to gain power on a grand scale, or to win an election, by drawing on conscious awareness; an appeal to any one group will only alienate another. Unconsciously, however, there is much we share. All of us are mortal, all of us know fear, all of us have been stamped with the imprint of parent figures; and nothing conjures up this shared experience more than myth. The patterns of myth, born out of warring feelings of helplessness on the one hand and thirst for immortality on the other, are deeply engraved in us all.

Mythic Stars are figures of myth come to life. To appropriate their power, you must first study their physical presence—how they adopt a distinctive style, are cool and visually arresting. Then you must assume the pose of a mythic figure: the rebel, the wise patriarch, the adventurer. (The pose of a Star who has struck one of these mythic poses might do the trick.) Make these connections vague; they should never be obvious to the conscious mind. Your words and actions should invite interpretation beyond their surface appearance; you should seem to be dealing not with specific, nitty-gritty issues and details but with matters of life and death, love and hate, authority and chaos. Your opponent, similarly, should be framed not merely as an enemy for reasons of ideology or competition but as a villain, a demon. People are hopelessly susceptible to myth, so make yourself the hero of a great drama. And keep your distance—let people identify with you without being able to touch you. They can only watch and dream.

his or her own contribution. When we speak of the myth of the star, we mean first of all the process of divinization which the movie actor undergoes, a process that makes him the idol of crowds.

—EDGAR MORIN, *THE STARS*,
TRANSLATED BY RICHARD
HOWARD

Age: 22, Sex: female,
Nationality: British,
Profession: medical student
"[Deanna Durbin] became my first and only screen idol. I wanted to be as much like her as possible, both in my manners and clothes. Whenever I was to get a new dress, I would find from my collection a particularly nice picture of Deanna and ask for a dress like she was wearing. I did my hair as much like hers as I could manage. If I found myself in any annoying or aggravating situation . . . I found myself wondering what Deanna would do and modified my own reactions accordingly. . . ." • Age: 26, Sex: female, Nationality: British "I only fell in love once with a movie actor. It was Conrad Veidt. His magnetism and his personality got me. His voice and gestures fascinated me. I hated him, feared him, loved him. When he died it seemed to me that a vital part of my imagination died too, and my world of dreams was bare."

—J. P. MAYER, *BRITISH
CINEMAS AND THEIR
AUDIENCES*

*The savage worships idols
of wood and stone; the
civilized man, idols of flesh
and blood.*

—GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

*Jack's life had more to do with myth, magic, legend, saga,
and story than with political theory or political science.*

—JACQUELINE KENNEDY, A WEEK AFTER JOHN KENNEDY'S DEATH

Keys to the Character

*When the eye's rays
encounter some clear, well-
polished object—be it
burnished steel or glass or
water, a brilliant stone, or
any other polished and
gleaming substance
having luster, glitter, and
sparkle . . . those rays of
the eye are reflected back,
and the observer then
beholds himself and
obtains an ocular vision of
his own person. This is
what you see when you
look into a mirror; in that
situation you are as it were
looking at yourself through
the eyes of another.*

—IBN HAZM, *THE RING OF
THE DOVE: A TREATISE ON THE
ART AND PRACTICE OF ARAB
LOVE*, TRANSLATED BY A.J.
ARBERRY

*The only important
constellation of collective
seduction produced by
modern times [is] that of
film stars or cinema
idols. . . . They were our
only myth in an age
incapable of generating
great myths or figures of
seduction comparable to
those of mythology or art. •
The cinema's power lives in
its myth. Its stones, its
psychological portraits,
its imagination or realism,
the meaningful impressions
it leaves—these are all
secondary. Only the myth
is powerful, and at the
heart of the
cinematographic myth lies
seduction—that of the
renowned seductive figure,
a man or woman (but*

Seduction is a form of persuasion that seeks to bypass consciousness, stirring the unconscious mind instead. The reason for this is simple: we are so surrounded by stimuli that compete for our attention, bombarding us with obvious messages, and by people who are overtly political and manipulative, that we are rarely charmed or deceived by them. We have grown increasingly cynical. Try to persuade a person by appealing to their consciousness, by saying outright what you want, by showing all your cards, and what hope do you have? You are just one more irritation to be tuned out.

To avoid this fate you must learn the art of insinuation, of reaching the unconscious. The most eloquent expression of the unconscious is the dream, which is intricately connected to myth; waking from a dream, we are often haunted by its images and ambiguous messages. Dreams obsess us because they mix the real and the unreal. They are filled with real characters, and often deal with real situations, yet they are delightfully irrational, pushing realities to the extremes of delirium. If everything in a dream were realistic, it would have no power over us; if everything were unreal, we would feel less involved in its pleasures and fears. Its fusion of the two is what makes it haunting. This is what Freud called the "uncanny": something that seems simultaneously strange and familiar.

We sometimes experience the uncanny in waking life—in a *déjà vu*, a miraculous coincidence, a weird event that recalls a childhood experience. People can have a similar effect. The gestures, the words, the very being of men like Kennedy or Andy Warhol, for example, evoke both the real and the unreal: we may not realize it (and how could we, really), but they are like dream figures to us. They have qualities that anchor them in reality—sincerity, playfulness, sensuality—but at the same time their aloofness, their superiority, their almost surreal quality makes them seem like something out of a movie.

These types have a haunting, obsessive effect on people. Whether in public or in private, they seduce us, making us want to possess them both physically and psychologically. But how can we possess a person from a dream, or a movie star or political star, or even one of those real-life fascigators, like a Warhol, who may cross our path? Unable to have them, we become obsessed with them—they haunt our thoughts, our dreams, our fantasies. We imitate them unconsciously. The psychologist Sandor Ferenczi calls this "introjection": another person becomes part of our ego, we internalize their character. That is the insidious seductive power of a Star, a power you can appropriate by making yourself into a cipher, a mix of the real and the unreal. Most people are hopelessly banal; that is, far too real.

What you need to do is etherealize yourself. Your words and actions seem to come from your unconscious—have a certain looseness to them. You hold yourself back, occasionally revealing a trait that makes people wonder whether they really know you.

The Star is a creation of modern cinema. That is no surprise: film re-creates the dream world. We watch a movie in the dark, in a semisomnolent state. The images are real enough, and to varying degrees depict realistic situations, but they are projections, flickering lights, images—we know they are not real. It as if we were watching someone else's dream. It was the cinema, not the theater, that created the Star.

On a theater stage, actors are far away, lost in the crowd, too real in their bodily presence. What enabled film to manufacture the Star was the close-up, which suddenly separates actors from their contexts, filling your mind with their image. The close-up seems to reveal something not so much about the character they are playing but about themselves. We glimpse something of Greta Garbo herself when we look so closely into her face. Never forget this while fashioning yourself as a Star. First, you must have such a large presence that you can fill your target's mind the way a close-up fills the screen. You must have a style or presence that makes you stand out from everyone else. Be vague and dreamlike, yet not distant or absent—you don't want people to be unable to focus on or remember you. They have to be seeing you in their minds when you're not there.

Second, cultivate a blank, mysterious face, the center that radiates Starness. This allows people to read into you whatever they want to, imagining they can see your character, even your soul. Instead of signaling moods and emotions, instead of emoting or overemoting, the Star draws in interpretations. That is the obsessive power in the face of Garbo or Dietrich, or even of Kennedy, who molded his expressions on James Dean's.

A living thing is dynamic and changing while an object or image is passive, but in its passivity it stimulates our fantasies. A person can gain that power by becoming a kind of object. The great eighteenth-century charlatan Count Saint-Germain was in many ways a precursor of the Star. He would suddenly appear in town, no one knew from where; he spoke many languages, but his accent belonged to no single country. Nor was it clear how old he was—not young, clearly, but his face had a healthy glow. The count only went out at night. He always wore black, and also spectacular jewels. Arriving at the court of Louis XV, he was an instant sensation; he reeked wealth, but no one knew its source. He made the king and Madame de Pompadour believe he had fantastic powers, including even the ability to turn base matter into gold (the gift of the Philosopher's Stone), but he never made any great claims for himself; it was all insinuation. He never said yes or no, only perhaps. He would sit down for dinner but was never seen eating. He once gave Madame de Pompadour a gift of candies in a box that changed color and aspect depending on how she held it; this entrancing object, she said, reminded her of the count himself. Saint-Germain painted the strangest paintings anyone had ever seen—the colors

above all a woman) linked to the ravishing but specious power of the cinematographic image itself. . . . The star is by no means an ideal or sublime being: she is artificial. . . . Her presence serves to submerge all sensibility and expression beneath a ritual fascination with the void, beneath ecstasy of her gaze and the nullity of her smile. This is how she achieves mythical status and becomes subject to collective rites of sacrificial adulation. • The ascension of the cinema idols, the masses' divinities, was and remains a central story of modern times. . . . There is no point in dismissing it as merely the dreams of mystified masses. It is a seductive occurrence. . . . • To be sure, seduction in the age of the masses is no longer like that of. . . Les Liaisons Dangereuses or The Seducer's Diary, nor for that matter, like that found in ancient mythology, which undoubtedly contains the stories richest in seduction. In these seduction is hot, while that of our modern idols is cold, being at the intersection of two cold mediums, that of the image and that of the masses. . . . • The great stars or seductresses never dazzle because of their talent or intelligence, but because of their absence. They are dazzling in their nullity, and in their coldness—the coldness of makeup and ritual hieraticism. . . . • These great seductive effigies are our masks, our Eastern Island statues.

—JEAN BAUDRILLARD,
SEDUCTION, TRANSLATED BY
BRIAN SINGER

If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it.

—ANDY WARHOL, QUOTED IN
STEPHEN KOCH, *STARGAZER:
THE LIFE, WORLD & FILMS OF
ANDY WARHOL*

were so vibrant that when he painted jewels, people thought they were real. Painters were desperate to know his secrets but he never revealed them. He would leave town as he had entered, suddenly and quietly. His greatest admirer was Casanova, who met him and never forgot him. When he died, no one believed it; years, decades, a century later, people were certain he was hiding somewhere. A person with powers like his never dies.

The count had all the Star qualities. Everything about him was ambiguous and open to interpretation. Colorful and vibrant, he stood out from the crowd. People thought he was immortal, just as a star seems neither to age nor to disappear. His words were like his presence—fascinating, diverse, strange, their meaning unclear. Such is the power you can command by transforming yourself into a glittering object.

Andy Warhol too obsessed everyone who knew him. He had a distinctive style—those silver wigs—and his face was blank and mysterious. People never knew what he was thinking; like his paintings, he was pure surface. In the quality of their presence Warhol and Saint-Germain recall the great trompe l'oeil paintings of the seventeenth century, or the prints of M. C. Escher—fascinating mixtures of realism and impossibility, which make people wonder if they are real or imaginary.

A Star must stand out, and this may involve a certain dramatic flair, of the kind that Dietrich revealed in her appearances at parties. Sometimes, though, a more haunting, dreamlike effect can be created by subtle touches: the way you smoke a cigarette, a vocal inflection, a way of walking. It is often the little things that get under people's skin, and make them imitate you—the lock of hair over Veronica Lake's right eye, Cary Grant's voice, Kennedy's ironic smile. Although these nuances may barely register to the conscious mind, subliminally they can be as attractive as an object with a striking shape or odd color. Unconsciously we are strangely drawn to things that have no meaning beyond their fascinating appearance.

Stars make us want to know more about them. You must learn to stir people's curiosity by letting them glimpse something in your private life, something that seems to reveal an element of your personality. Let them fantasize and imagine. A trait that often triggers this reaction is a hint of spirituality, which can be devilishly seductive, like James Dean's interest in Eastern philosophy and the occult. Hints of goodness and big-heartedness can have a similar effect. Stars are like the gods on Mount Olympus, who live for love and play. The things you love—people, hobbies, animals—reveal the kind of moral beauty that people like to see in a Star. Exploit this desire by showing people peeks of your private life, the causes you fight for, the person you are in love with (for the moment).

Another way Stars seduce is by making us identify with them, giving us a vicarious thrill. This was what Kennedy did in his press conference about Truman: in positioning himself as a young man wronged by an older man, evoking an archetypal generational conflict, he made young people identify with him. (The popularity in Hollywood movies of the figure of the disaffected, wronged adolescent helped him here.) The key is to represent a

type, as Jimmy Stewart represented the quintessential middle-American, Cary Grant the smooth aristocrat. People of your type will gravitate to you, identify with you, share your joy or pain. The attraction must be unconscious, conveyed not in your words but in your pose, your attitude. Now more than ever, people are insecure, and their identities are in flux. Help them fix on a role to play in life and they will flock to identify with you. Simply make your type dramatic, noticeable, and easy to imitate. The power you have in influencing people's sense of self in this manner is insidious and profound.

Remember: everyone is a public performer. People never know exactly what you think or feel; they judge you on your appearance. You are an actor. And the most effective actors have an inner distance: like Dietrich, they can mold their physical presence as if they perceived it from the outside. This inner distance fascinates us. Stars are playful about themselves, always adjusting their image, adapting it to the times. Nothing is more laughable than an image that was fashionable ten years ago but isn't any more. Stars must always renew their luster or face the worst possible fate: oblivion.

Symbol: The

*Idol. A piece of stone carved into the
shape of a god, perhaps glittering with gold
and jewels. The eyes of the worshippers fill the stone
with life, imagining it to have real powers. Its shape allows
them to see what they want to see—a god—but it is actually
just a piece of stone. The god lives in their imaginations.*

Dangers

Stars create illusions that are pleasurable to see. The danger is that people tire of them—the illusion no longer fascinates—and turn to another Star. Let this happen and you will find it very difficult to regain your place in the galaxy. You must keep all eyes on you at any cost.

Do not worry about notoriety, or about slurs on your image; we are remarkably forgiving of our Stars. After the death of President Kennedy, all kinds of unpleasant truths came to light about him—the endless affairs, the addiction to risk and danger. None of this diminished his appeal, and in fact the public still considers him one of America's greatest presidents. Errol Flynn faced many scandals, including a notorious rape case; they only enhanced his rakish image. Once people have recognized a Star, any kind of publicity, even bad, simply feeds the obsession. Of course you can go too far: people like a Star to have a transcendent beauty, and too much human frailty will eventually disillusion them. But bad publicity is less of a danger than disappearing for too long, or growing too distant. You cannot haunt people's dreams if they never see you. At the same time, you cannot let the public get too familiar with you, or let your image become predictable. People will turn against you in an instant if you begin to bore them, for boredom is the ultimate social evil.

Perhaps the greatest danger Stars face is the endless attention they elicit. Obsessive attention can become disconcerting and worse. As any attractive woman can attest, it is tiring to be gazed at all the time, and the effect can be destructive, as is shown by the story of Marilyn Monroe. The solution is to develop the kind of distance from yourself that Dietrich had—take the attention and idolatry with a grain of salt, and maintain a certain detachment from them. Approach your own image playfully. Most important, never become obsessed with the obsessive quality of people's interest in you.