American Fan Magazines in the 30s and the Glamorous Construction of Femininity

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Fan magazines. Popular culture's pulp fiction for women. Reading for millions of women and an important contributor to popular culture's construction of stardom and the star persona: the intermingling of star image and film character (cf. King 1991).

The rise of the fan magazine phenomenon coincide with the rise of the star system but fan magazines were most widely distributed in the heydays of the studio system, that is from 1920 to 1950. The first issue of the first magazine, *The Motion Picture Story Magazine,* came out in February, 1911, and, according to Studlar (1991), the largest fan magazine, *Photoplay*, claimed in 1922 that it had about 2 million readers. The magazines functioned often as the voice of the studios' public relations people but they were not published by the studios' PR-departments. They were their readers' voice from Hollywood and educated their own staff of writers (such as Dorothy Manners, Gladys Hall, Adele Rogers St. John, Ruth Waterbury, Elizabeth Wilson); likewise, the queen of Hollywood gossip, Louella O. Parsons, contributed from time to time. At the same time they were women's magazines, directly addressing themselves to *female* readers with first and foremost fashion material, and in that respect they reflected and constructed culture's ideas of femininity at the same time.[1]

Not much research has been done in the area of film fan magazines, despite the fact that they are an important research field if one wants to understand popular culture's construction of celebrity. Likewise, they are an invaluable source to the understanding of film as popular culture. Finally, a study of the fan magazines' stories about stars can contribute in an important way to the understanding of classic Hollywood's reception history and, thus, provide us with preliminary answers to questions about Hollywood and its female audience.[2] Fan magazines both contained and constructed (together with the newspapers' gossip columns) the extratextual part of film fascination. First, they contributed to the construction of the star persona: Not surprising, a very important part of their content were articles about the lives of the stars outside the studios and, just as important, various gossip columns containing rumours and details about the very same "private" life. Secondly, and almost as important part of the magazines material as the elaborate stories about the stars' doings, were extensively illustrated fashion articles, connecting films and filmstars with the female readers. Either the female stars posed in the dresses they had worn or

were about to wear in their newest film, or they posed in their ”private” wardrobe, thus illustrating the latest of fashion. In addition to the glamorous photographs, the readers could obtain information on how to make the clothes themselves or where to buy patterns to sew dresses that looked like the ones worn by the stars – on and off screen.[3] In this respect fan magazines are also, as Gaylyn Studlar (1991) notes, an important source to the understanding of different historical constructions of femininity, not least ideological struggle for definitions of femininity. Studlar's research material is 20s fan magazines and she argues that discussing the ”new woman” they balanced between acclaiming the modern, socially and sexually liberated woman, on the one hand and, on the other, domesticating her in the family kitchen and bedroom. Studlar also discusses ways in which fan magazines contributed to the construction of the female gaze. Here she argues in favor of a double reading position: the magazines invited readers to position themselves between belief and disbelief, *at the same* time engulfing themselves in the stories and yet be aware that it is all made up.

Focusing on 30s fan magazines and partly in continuation of Studlar's arguments and by means of a critical discussion of parts of Joshua Gamson's (1994) book about ”celebrity construction in contemporary America”, I am going to argue that stories about *artificiality* – Hollywood's, the stars' – were very conspicious in 30s fan magazines. The different stories about glamour and the magazines' many publicity stills contributed to the accentuation of artificiality at the same time as they projected feminine ideals. So, following from the first argument, I will, furthermore, theorize the concept of glamour in relation to a discussion of the glamorous publicity still, since it seems that no one really knows what glamour is all about.

Fan magazines functioned as mediators between Hollywood and the cinema audience. They built up interest in advance for new films to be released and they helped maintain film fandom. No doubt, the studio system had not been so powerful had it not been for the existence of fan magazines. They construct, and at the same time point to, different kinds of intertextual digression (cf. Klinger 1989); actually, they point towards *digression as a mode of reception*. In this respect they draw attention to the fact that not even classic Hollywood narratives makes sense only inherently, each textual segment gaining meaning only in relation to what comes before and after. From the point of view of reception classical narratives are not as coherent as film theory has understood them. Regarded as source material in a film historical reception study fan magazines contain – and make visible – an important part of female audiences' prior knowledge and interest that structured and made different forms of digressions in relation to narrative progression possible.

It is possible to understand stagings of fashion shows in 30s women's films (fx. *Roberta*, 1935, *Mannequin*, 1937, *The Women*, 1939) as an invitation to the female spectators to adopt a (female) digressive mode of reception. These fashion sequences interrupt narrative flow and construct a different space, just as song-and-dance sequences often do in a musical. Presumably Spencer Tracy's character in *Mannequin*, a millionaire in love, can be regarded as stand-in for the male spectator and Joan Crawford's mannequin's poses as the quintessential

symbolization of Laura Mulvey's (1975) thesis about the visual construction of the female character as to-be-looked-at-ness in front of and by means of the male gaze – within the filmic narrative and outside it. But Tracy's character can also be interpreted as a very conscious, ironic commentary to the film's gendered address. The character interrupts the fashion display and, thus, he disturbs the show as well, I will suggest, the female members of the audience in the cinema who want to watch this sequence – as exactly a fashion show. The Tracy character has arrived to persuade the beautiful model to marry him and he addresses her repeatedly during her show so that her poses continually are interrupted. The same must, consequently, go for the many supposedly admiring and fascinated gazes in the cinema audience.[4]

Sociologist Leo Handel (1950), in his study of primarily 40s sociological surveys of movie attendance and age and gender differences and genre preferences among the audience, draws attention to the fact that ”story type” ranks under ”cast” in ”drawing power” among women (Handel 1950: 118). Correspondingly, film mogul Samuel Goldwyn, in an article in *Photoplay*, March 1935 under the heading ”Women Rule Hollywood”[5] states:

> Men, no matter how much they enjoy seeing pictures, are by nature, and by training and habit, much more analytical. No matter how brilliant the cast, they are quick to detect and condemn story flaws. Instead of asking, ”Who's the star?” they are more apt to demand, ”What's the picture about?” The average man likes a western ... or a costume picture ... or any other type of story which appeals to his particular taste; the average woman likes *any* picture in which her favorite stars appear

and

> Thousands of women, every day, attend theaters – and conscript their husbands as escorts – because they want to see the styles which are being created by Hollywood's designers -

Through the fan magazines readers could mail order do-it-yourself patterns for the dresses they had watched and evaluated while, simultaneously, they followed the love story. If this ”consumer's gaze” attributed by Goldwyn to the female spectators – supposed to come from empirical facts – is understood as a digressing gaze, in line with the theorization of Barbara Klinger, then this leads to quite a different understanding of the female spectator than the one usually theorized by feminist film theory. Whereas the latter theorizes the implied feminine spectator position as overinvolved and, thus, rather: deprived of a gaze, then, according to Goldwyn, the female gaze is not blind at all, on the contrary. It is matter-of-fact, trying to obtain quite specific information from the films, first and foremost by means of a critical, evaluating gaze at the wardrobes of the star personas.[6]

Histories about the Stars – Truths or Lies? Who Cares!

One part of the questions Jackie Stacey (1994) raises in the questionnaire in her empirical study about Hollywood films and their female English fan audience is about fan clubs and fan magazines. The study is about female English spectators' memories about their fascination with Hollywood and its stars ind 1940s and 1950s England (”This is thus a study of white British women's fantasies about glamour, about Americanness and about

themselves" (p. 17)), and her empirical material is letters from 300 female fans and their answers to a semiopen questionnaire. Most of her respondents read *Picturegoer* and many of the women mention that they read another two or more magazines more extensively. Stacey concludes:

> These magazines were devoted to representing the lives of stars, as well as to other features on topics such as new releases, fashion tips and results of audience polls. But women cinema-goers in my study read them to find out about the stars. They featured photographs of stars and a mixture of press releases and inside gossip. The material possessions, wealth and leisure time of individual stars were a source of constant fascination for readers (s.107)

She does not, however, include a closer study of fx. *Picturegoer* in the interpretations of her material.

In his book, American sociologist and cultural researcher Joshua Gamson (1994) studies historical changes in what he calls "the discourse of celebrity". The first part of his discussion about "The Great and the Gifted: Celebrity in the Early Twentieth Century" – that is, before the decline of the studie system – is based on two collections of articles from American fan magazines (Levin ed., 1970 (1991) and Gelman ed., 1972). Object of his discussion is then, obviously, not fan magazines as magazines, rather it is articles once printed in magazines. Neither does he consider the fact that their overall address was women. Gamson analyzes *the celebrity text* but not *the fan magazine as text*, nor does he analyze fan magazines as communication to a well defined audience. He states that 20th century discourse of celebrity consists of two narratives – different but coexisting (and with roots in ancient history of the Western world):

> In one, the great and talented and virtuous and best-at rise like cream to the top of the attended-to, aided perhaps by rowdy promotion, which gets people to notice but can do nothing to actually make the unworthy famous. In this story, fame is deserved and earned, related to achievements or quality. In the second story, the publicity apparatus itself becomes a central plot element, even a central character; the publicity machine focuses on the worthy and unworthy alike, churning out many admired commodities called celebrities, famous because they have been made to be. (Gamson 1994, s.15-16)

Now, Gamson's main thesis is that equilibrium between the two narratives is gradually displaced in the course of the century and that this displacement causes trouble for the studios' public relation departments already in the early part of Hollywood's golden era. The story about stardom belonging to the gifted one who, precisely because he or she is gifted and unique, deserves fame, stardom and fandom, comes to ring more and more hollow, as the studios' publicity departments grew larger and more conspicuous. According to Gamson, film industrial development, thus, constitutes a threat to pupular culture's story about outstanding individuality. Likewise, visible publicity manufacturing threatens the idea, more or less explicitly inscribed in celebrity discourse that the star is created by the audience and therefore, in a certain respect, lives on borrowed time with its fans. This is the paradoxical logic behind the creation of a third, mediated story that invites the fan to take a closer

look at the star: The story about the person behind the facade, the individual behind glamour, gossip, persona, a story that is meant to show readers that the star is, basically, just like other people, just as human, just as special – with only the slight difference that he or she is (a little bit) richer:

> But the skepticism heightened by increasingly visible publicity activities was contained more commonly by being acknowledged: by pulling down ”the expensive mask of glamour”. Here we arrive at the key to the drive toward ”ordinariness” in early texts. By embracing the notion that celebrity images were artificial products and inviting readers to visit the real self behind those images, popular magazines partially defused the notion that celebrity was really derived from nothing but images. (ibid., s.38)

So this story does not exactly deny that a star is a studio construction; still, it isn’t thematized, either.

Gamson continues his argument by stating that focus is explicitly directed towards the star as product in fan magazines after the studio system’s decline, first and foremost by means of an ironic mode of distanciation in celebrity stories. Thus the reader is constructed as complicit to a cynical play with staged human bodies as saleable pawns. Readers are now not only invited behind the facade but back stage, right to the place where star persona production takes place. A star is no more than her image, or a star is a star is a star; this is celebrity discourses new truth.

In classical Hollywood fan magazines stories about *the ordinary* and *the extraordinary*, or a *democratic* and an *aristocratic* point of view must be kept in balance (cf. Dyer, 1979, as well). These stories are then part of what I will prefer to call the star discourse, consisting of a mixture of *authenticity discourse* and *celebrity discourse*. (Gamson understands celebrity discourse as the general whereas I chooses to let celebrity discourse form part of the star discourse). But the question is whether Gamson is right when he states that disclosing publicity manufacturing and image construction represents a ”threat” to the story about the ”gifted self” in the 30s, a threat that must then always be kept in balance by intermedaitory strategies. And, correspondingly, is it right that the story about ”the individual behind the facade” must be understood as a form of mediating textual praxis between discourses of authenticity and celebrity? To whom? And in relation to what? one must necessarily ask. For, as I mentioned earlier, if fan magazines are seen as voices from Hollywood these voices do not emanate from the public relation departments of the studios.

The precondition for Gamson’s analysis is the idea that fan magazine stories, basically, construct an ambivalent, yet coherent ideological system, a system in which ambivalences and contradictions are always mediated by certain textual operations. From this point of view Gamson’s interpretative approach reminds of 70’s structuralist analyses of popular literature, and, likewise, he implies that the female readers he inscribes in his analysis – although he speaks only in general about readers without any gender differentiations – want to be absorbed in ”realistic” human interest stories and do not want to be disturbed by any sort of distanciating reflexivity, such as economic calculations or images of Hollywood as imitation and artificiality –

precisely in the way classic Hollywood cinema absorbs its audience by means of disguising formal markers of enunciation. So even if Gamson only names the magazines' readers audience or fans, he inscribes the common understanding of the female spectator in his textual analysis: overinvolved, narcissistic, on the verge of blindness – and vice versa: He is able to construct this unambiguous reader position because he regards fan magazines as texts that continually, devouring their readers, work towards creating an unequivocal, coherent system.

But it seems to me that the 30s fan magazines did *not at all* construct this unambiguous, "feminine" reader position. On the contrary. My point is, that the magazines are *quite openly* deeply ambivalent. They do not construct one textual system but consist of *many* such systems. From this it is not possible to theorize a simple reader position; neither would it be possible to understand "behind the facade" stories as representations of ideological mediations. Already in the 30s there are far too many articles about the star persona as publicity construction for "behind the facade" stories to work. Articles which display no intentions of making the readers believe in any sort of authenticity as part of or behind the persona, but which, on the contrary, speak in a deeply ironic and sarcastic tone of voice about Hollywood, *and*, to a certain extent, about their own communication with their readers.

Two articles with exactly opposite view on the same material may be placed right after one another in an issue or in two succeeding issues. The last two articles in a series about "The Seven Deadly Sins Of Hollywood" in *Motion Picture* are called "The Unforgivable Sin of Failure" (February 1931) and "The Sin of Success" (March 1931). And this example is not an illustration of the work of an unprofessional editor, rather, it is a point. The magazines are filled with stories about the "private person", stories none have ever heard about this absolutely brilliant and natural human being, of course, but these narratives do not prevent the coexistence of quite another type of article warning readers that they should not believe a word of what they were reading.[7] Each fan magazine marketed itself as the only magazine reporting truths about "Hokumless Hollywood", to quote the title of a poem printed in *Motion Picture* February 1931, contrary to the newspapers' gossip columns – and the other fan magazines. As they were published monthly they competed with the daily papers for valuable news – what, after all, makes gossip gossip. Nevertheless, the recurring warnings to the readers against believing what they read draw attention to the magazines themselves, as they had all of them one or more sections containing dozens of pieces of gossip.[8] Finally, a very conspicious formal strategy in many 30s articles, in the wake of new journalism, is their self-reflexivity. They are just as much about the journalist and her effort to get her interview as they are about the star and what he or she actually says in the interview;[9] in "Chase Me!", printed in *Silver Screen*, July 1935, about Katharine Hepburn and her reluctance to meet the press, the journalist, calling herself Lisa, starts by telling extensively about her own naivety: initially, when arriving as a reporter to Hollywood, she saw only authenticity, but:

> After the first Great Illusion comes (mine came the day the newspapers carried headlines on a famous star's divorce,

> which happened to be the same day that my exclusive story of her happy marriage appeared in a fan magazine) you really don't care anymore – why it's just a lot of crazy fun after that [...] The first time that Katharine Hepburn screams at you, "I don't want any publicity. I hate publicity", you will be surely tempted to scratch her name out of your copy and scratch her while you're at it, but then you'll remember that this is Hollywood and that Katie, in the quaint way, is trying to tell you that she wants gobs and gobs and gobs of publicity [...] And Katie isn't the only one in Hollywood who goes in for dodging publicity, in order to get publicity. Why there's a whole school of them. Garbo is the headmistress, since it was her idea first [...] You can always tell the girls of the Publicity Dodging School by the peculiar clothes they wear, the peculiar cars they drive, and the fact that they are usually found running like mad in some public place, done up usually in an Inverness cap and dark glasses. I've never yet *seen* a movie star run in a chic gown.

It seems to me that Gamson's general point with his description of historical changes in fan magazine discourse, the construction of an idea of some sort of authenticity related to the star gradually disappering as 1950 comes closer, is questionable – or, at any rate, it needs further historical precision. My point is, contrary to this that, *in the 30s*, stories about publicity, about gossip as gossip and about the constructedness of stories about the stars' work and life, in all, ironic metacommentaries to Hollywood as dream factory coexist *unproblematically* together with "true stories" about the private life and every day joys and sorrows of stars. Correspondingly, their textual systems show no effort of trying to mediate distinctions and contradictions, rather, they seem to expose a kind of *deliberate schizofrenia.* And, finally, my point is that *all the histories may be read as equally good or valid.* Summarizing, I regard the textual contradictions as illustrations of a kind of accepted – and appealing – part-singing, not of tensions that necessitates formal strategies of ideological mediations in order for the system not to break down. And I consider this textual appeal, this part-singing an important point if one wants to understand both the ways in which magazines addressed their readers and the pleasures taken in reading them.

This deliberate schizofrenia corresponds to occurences of undisguised and ironic representations of the star as studio commodity in films from the early 30s, and Victor Flemings *Bombshell* (alt. *Blonde Bombshell*), from 1933, for example, is at the same time very conscious about the importance of fan magazines to the construction of star personas. Starring Jean Harlow in the title role, *Bombshell* is about a film star, whom it depicts with humour and solidarity. On one hand it is about the star as victim of publicity; she is run by an officious publicity agent who with his one hand is the stars' closest friend and the other makes up saleable stories about them to the press. In this respect the film is an example of Gamson's thesis about mediating stories in celebrity discourse. But this is not the film's only point of view. For on the other hand it deals with fan culture and fan magazines, representing these as powerful and mendacious communication channels between the star and her fans. The film's diva is determined to represent herself as sweet and authentic to a journalist from *Photoplay*, but when the harmoni-

ous image she wants to project dissolves in front of the journalist she concludes, with resignation, "I guess you know everything anyway". So the film stands by the idea of a person beyond the star persona, but it also says that fan magazine stories about authenticity are just as fabricatd as their stories about the glamourous life of a celebrity.

Discussing different representations of the glamorous staging of a female star in three Hollywood metafilms, Jeanine Basinger (1993) makes almost the same point as Joshua Gamson. Her examples are George Cukor's *What Price Hollywood* (1932 – starring Constance Bennett), William Wellman's *A Star is Born* (from 1937 – starring Janet Gaynor) and Cukor's *A Star Is Born* (from 1954 – starring Judy Garland), and she concludes that: "Bennett is born with it ... Gaynor gets it ... and Garland survives it" (p. 142). That is: Authenticity discourse recedes more and more to the background of popular cultural texts. But, again, on the other hand: This line drawn by means of three Hollywood films about Hollywood is not unchallenged. As a metafilm from the early 30s *Bombshell* discloses publicity manufacturing and Hollywood as producer of fabrications as well.

Jackie Stacey's study shows that identificatorial processes between her female respondents and the stars were quite complicated. The pleasure of identification was not synonymous with passive, narcissistic overinvolvement, but female spectatorship

> involves the active negotiation and transformation of identities which are not simply reducible to objectification. (Stacey, 1994: 208)

In rather a similar way I will suggest that 30s fan magazines, due to their undisguised ambivalences, made open invitations to interpretative negotiations. They offered, simultaneously, two different strategies of reading, one strategy not excluding the other, one not less enjoyable than the other, both reflecting that being a fan is part of the continuing construction and restructuring of identity:

One could choose to read the stories with involvement. In this case they consisted of truths brought to the fans by skilled journalists, and the pleasure of reading would then be the pleasure of gaining privileged insight into the private lives and psyches of stars. If the articles were read in this manner, then the self reflexive journalist was given the role of the reader's representative in the text. By means of the journalist, readers were almost placed in the middle of it all and they were given the opportunity of pleasurable fantasies about the stars and themselves as stars. Or one could read the articles distanciated. In this way they might be interpreted as good stories, that might or might not necessarily be true. With this strategy readers were offered a position of sovereignity, in control of the fan magazine discourse, enjoying the fantastic fictions at a sceptical distance of the articles' "informations". So the textual address of the magazines seems to invite their readers to relate to the contradictions as one of the pleasures of reading fan magazines. Studlar makes a similar point in her reading of *20*s magazines, a fact that adds to my critique of Gamson's thesis. It seems, thus, that a reflexive attitude became a common part of this fan discourse quite early.[10]

Adela Rogers St. Johns, in "Gossip Never Hurts" in the October issue of *Photo-*

play, reflects on the relationship between truth and lie. Besides representing Hollywood as a village whose inhabitants regard all privacy as public property and items for gossip, and besides, of course, reproducing lots of gossip, her point is to state that: Truth value! Who cares! Mendacious gossip is better than no gossip, and this goes for both stars and readers:

> The other stories may be true, but what of it? Unless they actually involve crime or one of those things that "aren't done" – like cheating at cards, they simply serve to add lusstre and glamour and a fictitious air of excitement and novelty to wellknown personalities.

What is stated in the quotation may illuminate precisely the pleasure of reading fan magazines. Readers gain privileged insight into the lifes of stars – that is the quintessense of fandom – and even if the stories are only partly true, they do offer themselves as actual and pleasurable "mise-en-scènes of desire". At the same time they reach beyond the cinema screen and right into its center offering readers an ambivalent identification with the star.

The Visual Construction of Glamour

In the following I will discuss 30s fan magazines' occupation with and construction of the concept of glamour. Partly, I am going to qualify my opening remarks about fan magazines and the historical construction of femininity. Partly, I shall use selected texts about glamour as further illustration of the intermingling of a discourse of authenticity and a discourse of celebrity in the overall star discourse. Finally, but not least important, I am going to look at the very concept of glamour, since it seems that it is used in many different ways in the film historical literature about Hollywood.

If anything, it seems that the Golden Age of Hollywood is connected to a pictorial idea about glamour, both in relation to the female stars and to Hollywood mise-en-scène. The word is repeated again and again, but researchers dealing with female stars and women and film have not been espe- cially interested in finding out, what the word glamour more specifically covers in this period, besides, obviously, agreeing that it has something to do with especially the female star and her beautiful appearance.

In The Oxford English Dictionary, glamour is explained as "A magical or fictitious beauty attached to a person or object". This understanding is repeated in a picture book like *The Glamour Girls* (1975); here glamour is associated with beauty, an inner flame, a certain photogenity, and to being unattainable:

> From the silent era on, the history of movie glamour comprises a series of changes in style, but regardless of differences in demeanor, all these women shared an aura of the undicperable, unattainable. (p.22)

Danish cultural researcher, Bodil Marie Thomsen, in her work about the rhetorical changes in the construction of the star from 1920 to 1940 only mentions glamour en passant as a question of style, of wrapping (p. 141), and as something having to do with the stars' personality, a historical new kind of sex-appeal marketing Hollywood stars. Jeanine Basinger (1993) titles one of the chapters in her book about the ways Hollywood films addressed their female audiences, "Fashion and Glamour" (p. 115 ff.). As

the title suggests, in Basinger's opinion glamour is not synonymous with fashion ("It ultimately involves more that what a woman puts on her body. It deals with the lady herself" (p. 137)) but involves an entire programme from the "Hollywood Glamour School" (p. 140). In Jackie Stacey's reception study, the respondents seldom use the word in their recollections of "star gazing" when they were young women in the 40s and 50s. But Stacey, herself, uses the word often when she interprets the letters; when I am discussing the understanding of glamour in her study below, I am therefore referring to the author more than to her respondents.

Glamour is used in order to explain the difference between American and English femininity, and, likewise, it is used to separate exotic Hollywood stars from English actresses.[11] The glamourous world of Hollywood is the desirable fantasy picture, which connects glamour to images of wealth and property (p. 154). So all that is different from the women's English everyday life is glamorous. In this respect, glamour stands essentially for Hollywood films as a utopian fantasy screen. Glamour is fairy tale, everything and everywhere you are not, difference envelopped in a mysterious and splendid light. But glamour is also more than just appearances; it is a sign of inner grace and qualifications such as self confidence, self-respect and sophistication (ibid.), that is, psychological qualities attached to the star persona. Glamour, thus, forms and expresses feminine strength.

Stacey states somewhat imprecise that "American femininity is frequently constructed as more desirable, be it in relation to clothes, glamour or sexuality" (p. 237), as if the three nouns were all syntagmatically related. But she also uses the word to describe her respondents memories of luxury and opulence ("the glamorous interiors of British cinemas" (p.99)). More precisely, though, she tries to interpret the women's memories in relation to what she terms a "discourse of feminine glamour":

> Stars are remembered through a discourse of feminine glamour in which deals of feminine appearance (slim, white, young and even-featured) were established and in comparison to which many spectators felt inadequate. (p. 152)

So a specific bodily ideal is constructed in these memories of female stars. It is contrasted to the women's own bodies and Jackie Stacey namess it glamorous.

In all, in Jackie Stacey's book glamour is partly used in an architectural-aesthetic sense to designate opulent mise-en-scène, on the screen and in the auditorium. But when the word is used in connection with the star persona, it points, partly, to feminine psychological qualifications such as strength and selvconfidence. Partly, it refers to a mysterious, unattainable beauty. And, finally, Jackie Stacey('s respondents) use glamour to designate a specific bodily appearance. What is interesting is that exactly this female appearance ("slim, white, young and even-featured") is staged and glorified in fan magazines from the end of the 1920s and onwards.

It is striking – but at the same time a very precise thematization of this design for femininity – that when fan magazines tell the story about the events that turned Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich into glamorous stars, it is underlined time and again, that they were extremely plump, before the Hollywood Glamour School took care of them: In an article called "The Inside Story of Garbo's Great Success!" (*Motion Picture*, June, 1932),

readers are told that when Greta Garbo arrived in Hollywood she was ”too plump to photograph well”; she was ”a plump, laughing girl with freckles” who, in front of the journalists, ”giggled as she answered their questions – and nothing is so unmysterious as a giggle”. It seems that without the enigma of the sphinx there is no glamour. The presence of laughter is too down-to-earth, because glamour encompasses distance and pathos. Without distance and a kind of frozen emotionality even the wildest of luxury is not glamourous.

In ”What Is This Thing Called X” (i.e. glamour) from *Photoplay*, April 1933, it is said about Garbo that:

> Certainly no young actress seemed to have less X than Garbo when she first made pictures in Sweden. She seemed just a nice wholesome, buxom country lass, Yes, we said *Buxom.* Milkmaid variety. Charming, but without that potent lure.

Glamour is here obviously associated with modernity; the lack of glamour in Garbo when she lived in the back of beyond, called milkmaid's charm, connects glamour to modern culture. And, obviously, the text regards with contempt a culture that allows natural growth for the female body.

In other words; glamour is associated with the slender female body, with bodily control. Glamour is inextricably bound up with this female body of modernity, in fact glamour is not possible without it.

If glamour is the ”Schein” constructed to market Hollywood in the 30s, as Bodil Marie Thomsen states, then maybe this fact explains why the career of the biggest star in the late 20s, Clara Bow, hit so low a relatively short while after her real breakthrough with *It* in 1927. It was rumoured that she was afraid of the microphone, and because of her temper and her impulsive behaviour she was constantly brought into the limelight of gossip journalists. All this was good enough reasons for failure. But maybe the most important reason is that Clara Bow was not capable of glamour manufacturing. Or maybe she was not interested. To begin with, she was too plump. And even though her increases and losses of weight were reported extensively in fan magazines this uncontrollable body was not photogenic enough compared with modern ideals of the female body. Secondly, it seems from publicity stills that the Bow persona could not encompass seriousness and distance in bodily posture, the precondition for creating pictorial glamour. Bow incarnated the energetic flapper and in some of her publicity stills she recreates it emblematically, hands cheerfully and firmly planted on the hips of her small and thickset figure, one eye winking cherful and ironic at viewers. This kind of uneven, self ironic, and lively body is not glamorous; it seems to escape references to staging; it is not abstract, controlled and stylized, and it is not moulding, it is even denying pathos, in short it opposes everything that visualizes the female body as glamorous. Whereas another 20s flapper, Lucille La Sueur, ”a biggish girl who weighed, by her own confession, a hundred and fifty pounds”[12] lost weight – and turned into Joan Crawford! The often reported story about Joan Crawford's rise to stardom was exactly constructed as a literal interpreted modern version of the fairly tale about The Ugly Duckling who became the beautiful swan. A fairytale about outer appearances and transformations due to hard work and willpower more than about the revelation of inner beauty.

However, if one looks at those ”before” and ”after” pictures often illustrating fan magazine stories about the rise to stardom, it becomes clear that glamour is not just a question of cultivating a certain bodily appearance. Glamour is also the very visual construction of this appearance by means of camera angles, light and bodily postures. In short, glamour can be understood as *a specific aesthetic visualization of femininity.* Pictures illustrating ”before”[13] are obviously amateur photos, which makes it so much more evident that glamour is not just beauty but the proper, stylized exposure of the face; the kind of exposure and the make up that made it into the perfect, invisible mask called feminine beauty; the mask, says Edgar Morin (1960) that depersonalizes the face in order to superpersonalize it. This glamorous face cannot be understood as stiffened ”Mienenspiel”, as conceptualized by Balazs (1924), on the contrary; the constructed typicality of the face confers distance, pathos and mystery on it, and, thus, bestows it with glamour – because the star’s face is never totally individualized and, threrefore, in a sense, never totally recognizable.

The pictures illustrating the article about Joan Crawford also tell that glamour is not about only the face’s but about a whole bodily stylization. Glamour is ”frozen femininity”, in two respects. Not only frozen by the camera in a fraction of a second but a body frozen in advance in honour of the photographic gaze, striking a pose of not-present presence. The photograph of smiling Lucille La Sueur with her stout thighs, looking at someone outside the frame, her body captured in a movement of dance or game, throwing a shadow because of sunlight not spotlight, is far too present, placed in actual time and space, too much a representation of a concrete individual to be glamorous. Whereas, on the other hand, the picture of Joan Crawford’s abstract femininity is essentially glamorous, her finished facial features illuminated by the spotlight and her slender body in the elegant gown placed in time and space beyond the world of realities.

In a sense, the glamorous publicity still denies Roland Barthes’ definition of the photograph in *La chambre Claire* (1983). The photograph, he says, bears witness to the fact that something was once present; the publicity still, on the contrary, attests to another matter, namely that a glamorous beauty was once constructed. If glamour represents the staging of the body as present and absent at the same time, then glamour cannot be brought into existence without a spectator and a stage. Glamour is the the camera’s star gaze, exemplified and visualized as the star’s to-be-looked-at-ness. The article ”If You Want to Be a Glamorous Beauty” in *Photoplay* (November 1937) has it that ”No other feminine star can hold the spotlight against Marlene’s spell”; here glamour is the light and the staging; glamour is a setting that at the same time requires a set piece and devours it. It is said in the same article that

> ”They say” that Marlene takes into consideration the coloring of the room into which her presence is to be projected, the lighting, the length of time she’ll be there, the type and favorite colours of the other women apt to be included in the guest line.

Glamour is the star-sign, at the same time a breath of something indefinable (”presence”) and a body, at the same time

brought to life by the camera gaze and preexisting as flesh and blood. But glamour is also frozen time, denying the historical determination of the very same gaze by trying to stage femininity in abstract, eternal terms. With glamour photography modernity has – in Beaudelaire's sense of the word – invaded publicity still aesthetic. Because in Beaudelaire, modernity is precisely at the same time the eternal and the passing, both what is not historicized, beyond time and place, and what is the dynamic symbolization of specific historical moments (cf. Frisby, 1985).

In this respect, glamour is as well a specific visual mythologizing of the female body as an aesthetic construction, a highly stylized and concentrated historical and cultural artefact. It points towards cultural realities and is at the same time "only" sign. But I will hypothesize that precisely because the glamorous publicity still is both concrete and abstract, placed in time and beyond time, it is very suitable as dream screen in relation to female readers' fantasies about stars and femininity.

Glamour in the Written Texts: Nature, Culture and Artificiality

However, one thing is the way publicity photographs construct glamour as stage and projection screen of femininity, quite another thing the written part of the texts. In fan magazine star discourse the word surfaces in articles providing the readers with advice and tips about beauty and how to come to look like the stars. This is why these articles do not understand glamour as the camera's staged beauty, but as an inner and outer radiance which is a possible attribute to every woman. But this glamour discussion is led, simultaneously, within the overall tension between authenticity and artificiality.

Partly, glamour is represented as female nature, something emanating from within, thus enabling a female actress – or anyone else – to rise to extraordinary stardom. And partly glamour is cultural, technical skills that every woman can acquire. But, finally, glamour is not only culture, it is also artificality. In this understanding, glamour represents the essence of studios' manufacturing of stars. None of these ideas about glamour are used in just one sense of the word, however; they are in most articles matched in different combinations. In the following I will discuss three articles about glamour in order to exemplify the different understandings.

The first and second understanding merge in "Any Clever Woman Can Develop Glamour". The initial part of the article states that

> If Lucille La Sueur could acquire Joan Crawford's glamour in a few short years, there is hope for you and You and YOU! Joan insists that any girl can learn to be attractive to men,

Joan Crawford insists that glamour is ten percent physique and ninety percent mental qualities. "Emotional force, poice and intelligence" are much more important qualities than beauty, and this is why glamour, as the headline tells, is a potential in every woman. Glamour emerges by cultivating (already existing) inner qualities.

So glamour is a possibility for any woman, according to Crawford; working with oneself makes it emerge. But the article is not only about the star's view of glamour. The overall aim seems, not surprisingly, to be to help maintain Joan Crawford's star persona. This is kept up

through publication of her ”personal” opinion that you are able to succeed if you really go for it. These statements fit in with the well known history about Crawford’s rise to the top by means of herself and hard work only. Likewise they are consistent with her film characters: In the early 30s she often portrayed the average young woman with big dreams and zest for life.

In ”Don’t Be Afraid To Be Yourself Says Bette Davis” (*Motion Picture*, September 1935) Bette Davis combines the first and second understanding of glamour, while she, simultaneously, denies the latter smartly by stating that

> It’s my personal belief that the studios have tried to make too many women glamorous. You can’t *make* a woman glamorous. You either have it or you haven’t [...] Glamour, to me, represents *something you can’t get at* – something mysterious – a little different [...] I contend that a lot of players are trying to live up to the *surface personality* given to them by make-up men. That’s the hardest and most idiotic job in the world. That means that many of them are so busy trying to be what they’re *painted* to be that they lose sight of their real selves! If one hasn’t glamour, why not come out and admit it?

In Bette Davis’s words, glamour is inner qualities, a kind of authenticity that belongs to few people – Davis mentions Greta Garbo as an example – which the studios try to *copy* in their star manufacturing. But these are only ”players” in Davis opinion. By implication: stars are those who do not need a surface personality because they are real personalities. So glamour is not the sign of stardom in Davis’ view. Either a star has glamour or she hasn’t, but star glamour is under no circumstances manufactured. In this respect the star is superior to studio manipulations, their ”tricks in trade” as she calls it; the star is immaculate individuality in show business. So the moral of all this is: Do not play roles! Or: Bring your own inner star to the light! It is obvious, that this interview, too, is contributing to Bette Davis’ star persona, the strong and self-sufficient woman who never compromise, just as much as it is about glamour. And Davis draws attention to herself as different from one of the other major stars, Greta Garbo.

An interesting and genuine example of celebrity discourse can be found in ”Dietrich is Still Selling Glamour” (*Motion Picture*, 1937). It is about ”Hollywood’s Number 1 Glamour Girl”; that is, it is a story about the construction of a star, ”one of the most amazing pieces of *glamour-manufacturing* ever perpetrated by Hollywood” (my italics).[14] It tells in no uncertain terms about a mask hiding nothing, about a star produced as a glamorous appearance by means of (von Sternberg’s) ”skilled lighting effects and magnificent photography”, an appearance that disappoints in the end, because it looks like any other when one takes a closer look.

”Built up” it the word most often occuring in the article. It is used negatively and contrasted to talent: ”But it is a career that has flourished on built-up glamour rather than talent”, and ”The problem of her acting ability still remains in doubt”. The star doesn’t seem to be much of an actress, and, furthermore, she is not even nice; she is reluctant to cooperate with the press, the writer says – so she does not possess the inner quality to legitimize her stardom. Finally, her looks are not that special, according to the writer: ”the difference between Miss

Dietrich in real life and Miss Dietrich in the photograph was between a handsome woman and one built up by studio artifice into a glamorous idol". Dietrich is in fact extremely ordinary and what is extraordinary about her is pure artifice; she is not democratic and her air of aristocracy is pure imitation. Neither is flattering and there is no glorious balance to establish between poles.

Like so many other fan magazine articles "Marlene Dietrich is Still Selling Glamour" is profoundly ambivalent. By using the phrase "simulating glamour", the author seems to imply that glamour, nevertheless, just like in the other two articles, contains something "real" and refers to inner qualities. But the aim of the article is, evidently, to stress Marlene Dietrich's artificiality and, likewise, to underline that her glamour comes fron nothing else but the studios' PR-departments. So Marlene Dietrich's position on the stellar firmament is solely the product of clever "glamour building"; the star is pure simulacrum in this article from 1937.

So, in summarizing, one article argues that it is important to be yourself – with or without glamour. Another states that glamour is the sign of inner strength. And a third that glamour is industrially fabricated imitation. Different constructions of the relation between fan and star, at every reader's disposal. And scattered in the magazines are glamorous publicity stills, emphasizing historically constructed ideals of femininity at the same time as these ideals are visually materialized in a utopian, abstract frame, lighted, and, thus, in a way, brought to life by the studio spotlight. These photographs do not conceal the fact that they are one of the manifestations of celebrity discourse; with their highly stylized visibility they point towards the star as construction. The stills are larger than life, but is there a person behind the mask? Who cares! On the contrary, I would suggest that it is precisely because of the figures' stylized, de-personalized stagings that is, their glamorous appearance, that they could function as a surface on which the female fans could project their fantasies and desires.

Notes

1. In the following I am only referring to American fan magazines, as these have been my research material. Moreover, I allow myself to speak of fan magazines in general. My study have included *Photoplay*, *Silver Screen*, *Motion Picture*, *Movie Classic* and *The New Movie Magazine*. The period studied is 1930 to 1940 except for *Photoplay* which I have studie from 1925. *Photoplay* was the biggest of the fan magazines but they were all more or less alike.
2. Another source for such a study is press book material. I am only discussing fan magazines in this article.
3. Jane Gaines (1990) discusses the fashion discourse in the context of classical film narrative. Charles Eckert (1991) the connection between films and fashion as commodities reciprocally marketing each other.
4. See Basinger (1993) and Herzog (1990) for discussions about fashion shows in Hollywood films.
5. The headline refers to information given by Goldwyn who underlines it with an exclamation mark, namely that more than 70% of the cinema audience in average is female in the middle of the 30s.
6. For further discussions about the construction of the female spectator as consumer see Doane (1989), Eckert (1991) and Gaines (1990).

7. For example the following articles: ”Don’t Believe All You Hear About Dietrich and Other Stars – It’s a Lot of Hokum”, *Motion Picture* (May 1932), ”Poison Pens”, *The New Movie Magazine* (December 1933), ”How Hollywood Manufactures a Star”, *Movie Classic* (July 1936), ”Misinformation”, *Photoplay* (June 1928), ”Meet the Press”, *Photoplay* (September 1930) and ”Those Awful Reporters”, *Photoplay* (May 1931).
8. The gossip columns constructed a discourse quite their own, addressing their readers directly, using a quick and almost intimate mode that, at least before Production Code also affected fan magazines, was almost frivolous.
9. Gossip journalists often made use of a self-reflexive rhetoric. The famous Walter Winchell who, like Louella Parsons, was also a member of the Hearst staff, was the most exaggerated. He started a paragraph called ”Mr. and Mrs. Columnist at Home” in his column in 1934, and here he reported small and large from the Winchell family! (cf. McKelway, 1940).
10. Henry Jenkins (1992) analyzes contemporary tv-fan cultures and ”fanish reading”, and his point is, too, both that their form of reading can be characterized as at once distanciated and involved and that fan cultures are active interpreters in relation to their favorite media products.
11. To Jeanine Basinger glamour is also connected to ”presence” (in contradiction to ”acting”): ”A serious performance by an actress molded by the Hollywood glamour school was defined by having her wear no lipstick. A first-rank star appearing on the screen without make-up, elaborate hairdo, or wardrobe was defined as realistic acting [...] an acknowledgment of the false nature of the Hollywood images implied by these ”honest performances” in which glamour is erased” (p. 140).
12. In ””Any Clever Woman Can Develop Glamour” – Joan Crawford”, *Motion Picture* (October 1934).
13. The examples are ””Any Clever Woman Can Develop Glamour” – Joan Crawford”, *Motion Picture* (October 1934), ”The Inside Story of Garbo’s Great Success”, *Motion Picture* (June 1932) and ”If You Want to Be a Glamorous Beauty”, *Photoplay* (November 1937).
14. The article is printed in Levin’s anthology which is without dates. I haven’t found the article in my research material, so I cannot give the exact date but as it talks about Marlene having ”taken out her first American citizenship papers” and about ”her new picture” *Knight without Armour*, it must be from a 1937 issue.