Introduction

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She who for almost four decades has symbolised, represented, personified, both in France and beyond its borders, not only French cinema but France itself; its classical elegance, haughty charm, its innumerable paradoxes.

(Celle qui, depuis pas loin de quatre décennies, symbolise, représente, personnifie, dans et hors de l'Hexagone, non seulement le cinéma français, mais la France elle-même, son élégance classique, son charme un peu hautain, ses innombrables contradictions.) (Fache 2004: 9)

Few screen icons have provoked as much commentary, speculation and adulation as the 'she' of this plaudit, Catherine Deneuve. In the printed media and the annals of cyberspace the most hackneyed and superficial myths of Catherine's celebrity are circulated and recycled. Her ubiquity in popular discourse has not been equalled by scholarly attention, despite the recent efflorescence of work in the field of French star studies. This, then, is the first full-length academic volume to analyse the significance of Deneuve's myth in modern screen culture, both in and outside France.

The volume begins with a brief overview of Deneuve's career, followed by a critical survey of the field of theoretical star studies, highlighting its potential and limitations for European, and particularly French, film scholarship. We argue the need for the single-star case study as a model for understanding the multiple signifying elements of transnational stardom, particularly as embodied by one of Europe's most enduring and exportable star commodities, Catherine Deneuve.

Being Catherine Deneuve

Catherine Deneuve, as legend demands, was born in proximity to stage lights and cameras. The third of four daughters, Catherine was born in Paris on 22 October 1943 to actors Maurice Dorléac and Renée Deneuve. Maurice was already a well-respected stage actor, and would go on to become a veteran of supporting roles in the ‘quality tradition’ of French cinema of the 1940s and 1950s. Later in his career he became the director of the Paramount–Paris dubbing operation, thereby finding himself at the heart of an industry in full post-war, pre-new-wave bloom. Renée Deneuve, Catherine’s mother, had been a stage actress since her childhood, and by the age of 18 was already a permanent member of the celebrated Odéon theatre company. Just as Renée had followed her own mother into the world of Parisian theatre, so by 1960, both Catherine (now armed with her mother’s maiden name) and her elder sister Françoise had abandoned their *baccalauréat* studies to embark on careers as actresses. Deneuve’s rise to stardom was swift and uncompromising: in 1961, still a relative unknown, she was part of a delegation of ten ‘promising young actresses’ selected to represent French cinema on the international stage; by 1968, the American magazine *Look* was proclaiming her ‘the most beautiful woman in the world’ (Fache 2004: 26–9). And by the mid-1970s, a series of personal relationships with high-profile directors, actors and artists (Roger Vadim, François Truffaut, Marcello Mastroianni, David Bailey) had endowed her with the dynastic credentials of European screen aristocracy: Catherine’s children Christian Vadim and Chiara Mastroianni have conformed to family type, going on to establish premium screen careers in their own right.

From the outset, Deneuve was engaged in provocative screen roles that highlighted questions of female sexual identity. Her first role, at the age of 13, was a brief appearance as a schoolgirl in André Hunebelle’s *Collégiennes/The Twilight Girls* (1956), a soft-erotic fantasy starring the semi-notorious Gaby Morlay. Her second film *Les Petits Chats* (Jacques Villa, 1958), was banned until 1965, as censors deemed the story of a planned murder within a group of schoolgirls too disturbing for general release. Deneuve’s trademark blonde hair was first seen in Marc Allégret’s *Les Parisiennes* (1961), in which she played a schoolgirl seduced by rising 1960s pop idol Johnny Hallyday’s youthful charms. Off-screen, the roles she

embraced were no less complicated; Catherine's romantic attachment to the scandalous Roger Vadim, fresh from his marriage to Brigitte Bardot, established a level of press interest in her private life that would never diminish: 'it was a rare interview indeed that didn't make mention of Deneuve's status as a young unmarried mother, a situation considered abnormal in pre-1968 France' ('rares sont les interviews où l'actrice n'est pas renvoyée à son statut de jeune mère sans mari, situation jugée anormale dans la France d'avant 1968') (Fache 2004: 62).

Deneuve's first serious success came with her role in Jacques Demy's contemporary musical fable, *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*/*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964). Eclipsing her sister's screen success (Dorléac was much admired in Truffaut's *La Peau douce*, released at the same time), the film won the prestigious Prix Louis Delluc and the Cannes Palme d'Or in 1964. With the achievement of the Academy Award for best foreign-language feature film in the same season, Deneuve found herself projected onto the international stage in a role that confirmed both her talent and her ability to take performance risks. The film proved to be a turning point for her screen persona, opening up the next years of her career to major auteurist film projects such as *Repulsion* (Polanski, 1965), *Belle de jour* (Buñuel, 1966), *La Sirène du Mississippi*/*Mississippi Mermaid* (Truffaut, 1969) and *Tristana* (Buñuel, 1970), as well as more work with Demy (*Les Demoiselles de Rochefort*/*The Young Girls of Rochefort*, 1967), in which she co-starred with Dorléac. She was even slated to work with Hitchcock on a film entitled *The Short Night*, a project which came to nothing, and which Deneuve has described as one of the greatest regrets of her career (Fache 2004: 153). By the beginning of the 1970s, Deneuve's already substantial filmography attested to her range and versatility as well as her growing celebrity. This celebrity, however, had been accelerated in a uniquely tragic way by Françoise Dorléac's very public death in a car accident in June 1967.

As her career advanced into the 1970s, Deneuve grew secure in her choice of projects, both on-screen and off-screen, and began to build significantly on the international profile she had begun to establish. Outside France she was a regular in Italian productions, a relationship cemented by her marriage to Mastroianni, and her relationship with Marco Ferreri. Her work in English-language films was also significant, particularly in terms of her collaborations with

high-calibre transatlantic stars. In *The April Fools* (Stuart Rosenberg, 1969) Deneuve shared the screen with Jack Lemmon, while *Hustle* (Robert Aldrich, 1975) saw her paired with Burt Reynolds. *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983), a neo-gothic vampire fantasy, saw her cast alongside David Bowie and Susan Sarandon. In France, she consolidated her career in home-grown dramas by French favourites like Jean-Pierre Melville (*Un Flic/Dirty Money*, 1972), Jean-Paul Rappeneau (*Le Sauvage/The Savage*, 1975) and Claude Lelouch (*A nous deux/An Adventure for Two*, 1979), among others. From the 1980s onwards, she found commercial success on a new scale with work in big-budget French costume drama (*Le Dernier Métro/The Last Metro*, Truffaut, 1980; *Indochine*, Régis Wargnier, 1992; *Est-Ouest/East-West*, Wargnier, 1999). Meanwhile, critical approval was consolidated in an ambitious return to the kind of auteurist projects with which she was identified in the first decade of her career: she has produced performances with directors such as André Téchiné, Lars von Trier, Raúl Ruiz, Nicole Garcia, Léos Carax and Arnaud Desplechin. These projects have conferred an enduring air of gravitas on the actress, bringing her acclaim and awards, and confirming her standing as an ambassador of French cinema on the world stage. Her celebrated selection as the model for the republican emblem Marianne in 1985, coupled with high-profile associations with Chanel, L'Oréal and Yves Saint-Laurent have cemented the popular perception of her as an ideal expression of the desirable qualities of French femininity. Her recent movement into more popular performance and broadcasting modes, including film comedy (*Belle Maman/Beautiful Mother*, Gabriel Aghion, 1999; *8 femmes/8 Women*, François Ozon, 2002; *Palais Royal*, Valérie Lemerrier, 2005); made-for-TV dramas (*Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Josée Dayan, 2003; *Princesse Marie*, Benoît Jacquot, 2004) is evidence of her continued versatility, as well as a desire to evade the late-career categorisation that is the lot of so many actors. In Deneuve's case a mature foray into new territory is rarely a risk, but, instead, a reiterated confirmation of stature and enviable longevity.

Deneuve's public profile has evolved in tandem with her film career. From her first public declaration as a signatory to abortion rights in the 1971 'Whores' manifesto' (*Le Manifeste des 343 salopes*), her commitment to political causes has remained in the public eye. Her energies have been directed into causes as diverse as AIDS research, homelessness, mental health, children's rights and 'Reporters without

frontiers'.¹ She has been a particularly vocal supporter of Amnesty International, and famously donated the proceeds from the use of her image as the Marianne to its campaign against the death penalty. In 1989 she provided the voiceover to an Amnesty documentary on this subject, and in January 2001 she delivered a petition of 500,000 signatures opposing the death penalty to the American Embassy in Paris. She opposed the 1996 'loi Debré' which sought to deport illegal immigrants from France, a cause to which many in the French arts world lent both voice and funds. In 1994 she was appointed as a goodwill ambassador for UNESCO, a position from which she resigned in 2003 following the controversial nomination of French businessman Pierre Falcone to the organisation.

The protection of her image has been a key concern of the actress, and France's strict privacy laws have worked to her advantage on many occasions. She has never feared litigation, suing the magazine *Lui* over publication of unauthorised images in the January 1973 issue (images that had previously appeared in *Playboy*), and taking Vadim to court in 1986 over the publication of his memoirs. She famously prevented the US lesbian magazine from using the name 'Deneuve' as a title. Being Catherine Deneuve – the person, the brand, the industry – is clearly a full-time job, both on-screen and off-screen.

As her recent forays into unexpected territory would suggest, Deneuve's capacity for self-reinvention and for undermining her familiar star image is undiminished by the longevity of her career. If stars exist primarily as fantasy images whose fixed construction is sustained by the apparatus of narrative, then Deneuve's rare capacity for visible self-deconstruction is perhaps the single most compelling aspect of her stardom.

Deneuve among the stars

This book takes as its methodological basis – and also, we will argue, significantly extends the remit of – the branch of film and cultural studies known as star studies. It is worth considering briefly here the history of star studies as a field of academic inquiry and the preoccupations and omissions of existing work in the domain, particularly where it concerns European and French stardom, in order to demonstrate the significance of this book, a single-star case study of Catherine Deneuve.

Studies of stars and stardom have tended to focus on Hollywood cinema, whose traditional studio system moulds, brands and markets individual stars as commodities whose personae are subject to rigid regulation and control.² The American studio-based star system provided the paradigmatic model of a signifying system of commodities moving within the capitalist marketplace, to allow Edgar Morin in 1957 to develop the first work of star studies, heavily influenced by a Marxist analytic framework. It is true that Morin also refers to French stars (mainly Brigitte Bardot), but he does so without analysing the material differences between the American and French systems. It is somewhat anomalous that it should have been a Frenchman who first analysed Hollywood stars since, subsequently, star studies has been primarily a facet of film and cultural studies within the Anglo-American tradition. The bias towards aesthetic and formal analyses in French academic studies of film has been, at least until recently, at the expense of any consideration of the significance of film texts and star texts as signifiers of cultural meanings and of national, gendered and ethnic stereotypes. Jacqueline Nacache points out that the absence prior to 2003 of a French translation of Dyer's seminal work of 1979, *Stars*, may account for the differences between the development of the study of actors in France and in the UK/USA (Nacache 2003: 155).³

In *Stars*, Richard Dyer developed Morin's idea that stars consist of an amalgam of on-screen and off-screen personae. (Morin distinguished the 'actor' from the 'star' on the basis of the latter's possession of this extra-filmic dimension.) Dyer took this further and argued that these personae reflect those fantasies of identity that are particularly pertinent to the culture and epoch that create and consume the star image in question. The idealised and glamorised star image exudes 'charisma', by means of which ideological contradictions and tensions are smoothed over and appear to be reconciled. However, the meanings of star texts are not unambiguous or straightforwardly readable and sometimes their function of 'managing' contradictions fails and flips over into subversion. Moreover, as they move from one film text to another, or bear sometimes incongruous on-screen and off-screen associations within the same image, star texts are unstable and polysemous. Later in *Heavenly Bodies* (1987), Dyer foregrounded the importance of audience reception in shaping the signifying power of star images, and in particular subcultural audience recuperation of the star images of such actors

as Judy Garland, for queer purposes. Thus, if stars articulate the ideals and anxieties of the mainstream, they are also available for readings against the grain, for viewings awry.

More recently, British scholarship within French film and cultural studies has turned its attention to the question of stars in French culture. The first full-length work on this subject, Ginette Vincendeau's *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema* (2000), offers a series of readings of French star texts, from Max Linder to Juliette Binoche, including a chapter on Catherine Deneuve. Vincendeau argues that the French star is a symbol of the nation, at once remote and aspirational on the one hand, and 'of the French people' on the other (she cites Alain Delon's claim that he likes to enjoy a baguette in his local café, much like any Frenchman). Vincendeau historicises French stardom citing Max Linder as the first star in the 1930s and positing that the rise to hegemony of US stars over their French counterparts occurred in tandem with the more general eclipse of French (European) power by American influence at the global level. Guy Austin's *Stars in Modern French Film* (2005) makes a different argument for the specificity of French stardom, arguing that it begins in 1950 (and thereby refusing to account for the widespread influence prior to that date of figures such as Linder and Gabin). Austin's argument, which is heavily indebted to Kristin Ross's *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (1996), contends that the birth of the French star is a product of the relatively late arrival of modern capitalism in French culture. The moment of French stardom for Austin, then, is specifically aligned with decolonisation and the rise of consumer society associated with the Gaullist presidency.

While acknowledging that France lacks a structured 'star system' such as that of Hollywood, both these studies of French stardom are principally concerned with the functioning of a 'national cinema'. They analyse the signifying function of French stars within a specifically French context, contributing to an understanding both of processes of national identity and of the economic and aesthetic workings of the French film industry. However, the 'national cinema' approach does not fully do justice to the analysis of stardom, particularly when it is a question of European star images, which, unlike their Hollywood counterparts, tend to float across a series of national cinemas, bearing the weight of representing their own nationality, often in a clichéd or stereotypical form (e.g. Deneuve as the internationally recognised face of 'French chic' (Vincendeau 2000: 198)).

The tendency of European stars to cross national boundaries and, where they appear in US films to portray a stereotyped image of their national character, suggests that a model for reading European star images may be needed which is not reducible to an analogy with the 'star system' as it exists in America; nor to a national cinema model.

The single star case study may be this method. It allows for a careful analysis of the way in which a given star text signifies in a number of contexts: (1) inside and outside their own national cinema; (2) within and between the cinemas of a series of directors; (3) as the object of mainstream and subcultural audience reception; and (4) as off-screen as well as on-screen personae. The model which considers stars only in the context of a national cinema risks perpetuating a hermetic idea of 'the nation' within and through which the star is uniquely understandable. It thereby risks closing down the meaningful potential of each of the four crucial star contexts listed above.

A single-star case study of Catherine Deneuve is a particularly rich endeavour. Previous accounts of Deneuve's stardom have focused on single elements of her star persona (in Austin's account, her associations of icy, clean 'whiteness', in contrast with Jeanne Moreau's earthy 'redness'); or have acknowledged the transformations and contradictions of her star persona, but without being able to account for the precise factors leading to the developments, breaks and lines of continuity that constitute her image over the course of a career (Vincendeau 2000: 196–214). Such accounts of Deneuve's persona run the risk of dividing Deneuve's career neatly into two phases: the innocent beauty tainted by misogynistic representations of nymphomania, madness and masochism in the early days ('from reverence to rape rolled into one image' (203), as Vincendeau puts it, neatly paraphrasing Molly Haskell); and the stately, maternal *grande dame* of the French nation in her maturity. While these associations and images do indeed represent Deneuve at given moments, the division they posit is a less than absolute one. A careful look at Deneuve as star image, both on-screen and off-screen, over a period of forty years, reveals previously undiscussed instances of prescience, lines of continuity and ignored fractures in her trajectory. Several of the chapters of this book read against the grain of accepted scholarship to highlight the ways in which the seeds of the later persona are sown in early works. In the first chapter of the book, Lisa Downing

argues that already in *Repulsion*, Deneuve's image functions to trouble discourses of female madness and frigidity and to foreground female subjectivity as a lens through which to critique the fantasies and neuroses of culture. A part that has been almost universally associated with misogyny by critics is reassessed in the light of a close reading of the film and a retrospective contextualisation of the Polanski-created role in light of Deneuve's later career.

Contributions by Peter Evans (Chapter 2) and Susan Weiner (Chapter 3) grapple with the young Deneuve's associations with extreme aspects of female sexuality, here perversion (particularly masochism) and idealised virginity, showing how the two apparently contradictory labels are almost – but not quite – reconciled within Deneuve's on-screen persona, as constructed and directed by Buñuel and Demy. Evans's chapter also offers insight into a moment in Deneuve's career when the 'Frenchness' of her star image is both placed in relief and troubled by its location in a Spanish setting or tradition. Weiner, on the other hand, returns to an archetypal French narrative (Demy's *Peau d'âne/Donkey Skin*, 1970), in which the purity associated with the young Deneuve is placed in the realm of enchantment and fairy tale. Via a discussion of costume and setting as cinematic masquerade, Weiner reveals the artifice of purity at the heart of Deneuve's spectacle.

Pauline Small's contribution (Chapter 4) revisits Deneuve's association with masochism, most usually linked to her work with Buñuel, via an exploration of the cinemas of Ferreri and Monicelli. Deneuve's Italian career has been largely ignored in previous critical accounts. Small highlights how these Italian directors, the first a maverick, difficult to classify in terms of Italian national cinema, the other a national veteran, both make use of Deneuve's status as a sophisticated actor of auteur cinema to break with the trend for largely popular filmmaking in the Italy of their epoch.

The films that Deneuve made during the 1970s, the period on which Bridget Birchall's chapter focuses, are seriously underrepresented in published accounts of Deneuve's career, despite the fact that some of her most interesting work dates from this decade. Deneuve's 1970s persona oscillates between the arch feminine (on-screen) and the actively feminist (off-screen). However, despite being aligned with certain women's debates of the age (abortion rights, marriage laws), Deneuve refused to commit to the label of feminist. Her inconsistent approach to feminism is read by Birchall

to reflect the wider conflicts regarding women's roles in France in the light of the burgeoning women's movement.

Moving beyond the obvious political ambiguities of the 1970s, Sue Harris turns in Chapter 6 to the 1980s, the decade when Deneuve was acknowledged both commercially and critically as the *grande dame* of French cinema. In adopting the vehicle of the heritage film (*Le Dernier Métro*, François Truffaut, 1980; *Indochine*, Régis Wargnier, 1992), she appears to embrace the most conservative version of screen femininity and the most exportable ideal of Frenchness. The idea of Deneuve as the embodiment of Frenchness was consolidated by her selection as model for the emblematic national figure of Marianne. Harris argues that the apparently implacable conservative agenda that Deneuve embodies both on-screen and off-screen is held in tension by the controversial qualities of her earlier screen images.

Chapters 7 and 8 – by Bill Marshall and Cristina Johnston, respectively – explore Deneuve's work with a new generation of international auteurs. Marshall's investigation charts Deneuve's associations with André Téchiné, worked out over a series of five films. For Marshall, Téchiné's are 'narratives of change, transformation, plurality and becoming'. He argues that in her collaboration with Téchiné, Deneuve's status moves from that of star to *acteur fétiche*; she becomes a site on which the director inscribes a continuity of meaning internal to his project. However, this deliberately deglamorised image is not untouched by the pre-existing meanings of Deneuve as a more mainstream star. Marshall's readings signal the emergence of Deneuve as ageing female actress, a concern picked up and developed by Johnston in Chapter 8. This chapter demonstrates how Deneuve's work in the 1990s with a range of directors (Lars von Trier, Gabriel Aghion, Philippe Garrel) offers a series of portraits of ageing; focusing on stereotypes of maternal and sexual relationships, as well as challenges to these. These roles offer an unusual level of exposure for an actress held by cinematic discourse to be the celebration of youth and beauty.

The final two contributions to the book – by Andrew Asibong and Fiona Handyside, respectively – treat elements of Deneuve's off-screen persona and the subtle relationships between her filmic and extra-filmic images. They engage in detail with the discourses surrounding reception of her multilayered persona. Following Dyer's assessment in 1987 of the importance of queer audiences in shaping the meaning of a star persona, Asibong assesses Deneuve's status

as lesbian icon, identifying at least two types of lesbian persona in Deneuve's career – a titillating but ultimately 'safe' presentation of vanilla lesbianism (in Têchiné's *Les Voleurs* and in the kiss with Fanny Ardant in Ozon's *8 femmes*) and a more complex lesbian persona, involving overtones of sadomasochism and power play in *Belle de jour*, *The Hunger* and Deneuve's character's relationship with Emmanuelle Béart's maid in *8 femmes*. It is this second mode, Asibong argues, which reveals the way in which Deneuve's persona can be read to reveal the ideological interplay between sexuality and class. The book reaches its conclusion with Handyside's chapter on Deneuve as fashion icon. This chapter examines the crucial part played by *haute couture* in defining Deneuve's persona and highlights how her apparently immaculate and glamorous off-screen image paradoxically includes elements of disruption and play that irreverently reference her more eccentric on-screen roles and disrupt the constricting image of 'perfection'.

While it is generally accepted since Dyer that stars embody paradoxes and resist linear or unitary meanings, it is by showing in detail how these characteristics function with regard to one star – in this case Catherine Deneuve – that we may be afforded a new and deeper insight into how star images *in general* function in culture. Until recently, very few single case studies of stars existed in the field of academic publishing. The appearance of Graham McCann's *Marilyn Monroe* (1998), Rachel Moseley's book on Audrey Hepburn (2002) and Susan Hayward's monograph on Simone Signoret (2004) bears witness to a currently nascent academic interest in the signifying power of individual stars in culture.⁴ This is perhaps unsurprising since, as Richard Dyer put it in 1987, 'being interested in stars is being interested in how we are human now' (Dyer 1987: 17). This may be truer in the first decade of the twenty-first century than ever before. In a Europe that is increasingly obsessed with celebrity and fame, the task of analysing the relationship between the glamour of stars and everyday culture becomes increasingly urgent. In the mass media (popular TV interviews, celebrity magazines, online fanzines), stars are often sites around which normative and mainstream discourses of gender, beauty, class, ethnicity and sexuality are shored up. Popular discourses about stars offer an aspirational and commodified ideal of masculinity or femininity, wealth, style and capitalist values. Politically informed star studies, on the other hand, can offer a powerful corrective tool with which to show up the

workings of these ideologies and may offer alternative and resistant readings of star images that also cast fresh light on the workings of the cultures that produce them. The star text 'Catherine Deneuve' emerges in the set of readings that follow as an unstable and shifting sign that problematises as much as it perpetuates the associations that accrue to the image of this beautiful star.

Notes

- 1 Deneuve was the first celebrity to broadcast a message of support on French TV for abducted journalists Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot, in September 2004.
- 2 So rigidly enforced was James Stewart's 'nice guy' persona in 1960s Hollywood, for example, that he could not be cast a murderer, with the result that Hitchcock's *Vertigo* had to be made with an alternative ending to the murderous denouement of Boileau and Narcejac's novel *D'entre les morts*.
- 3 In a review article of recent scholarship in French film studies (Handyside, 2003), Fiona Handyside notes that Martine Beugnet's *Marginalité, sexualité, contrôle dans le cinéma français contemporain* (Beugnet, 2000), by importing the English terms 'star studies' and 'cultural studies' into her French-language book, and by putting the concerns of these Anglo-American inquiries into dialogue with more traditional French analytic methods, may have inaugurated a long-awaited and significant *rapprochement* between the Anglo-American and European models of film analysis.
- 4 A precursor to these titles that deserves acknowledging, not least because it is a French study of a French star, is Claude Gauteur and Ginette Vincendeau's *Jean Gabin: anatomie d'un mythe* (1993). (Republished by Le Nouveau Monde, 2006.)

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