

The Keanu Effect

Stardom and the Landscape of the Acting Body: Los Angeles/Hollywood as Sight/Site

by Carmel Giarratana

Hollywood is indeed the city of the marvelous, in which the heroic ideal of life is real and real life mythic. Here are the Elysian fields: a legendary city, but also a city living its legend. A ship of dreams anchored in real/reel life. A Californian Shangri-La from which flows the elixir of immortality.
—Edgar Morin

A movie star is mythic—like no-one you've ever seen in your daily life.
—John Waters

THE LANDSCAPE THAT IS KEANU AND THE SPACES THAT ARE *SPEED*

Keanu Reeves's films are almost always about locating spectacle and display: of his actual body, of the acting body, of the body of the star. We cannot, however, begin to comprehend the phenomenon of Keanu Reeves's stardom without understanding the ways in which, upon the body of the star—and this star in particular—reside several discourses about site and sight, about notions of landscape and spectacle. Because both the Hollywood landscape and the body of the actor are discursive spaces that act out notions of utopian and dystopian space, the actor's body as readable landscape is therefore a metaphor entirely appropriate to the discussion of Hollywood and its stars. This chapter will explore some of the landscape dimensions associated with the body of Keanu Reeves.

Cinema, from its inception, has been a rich source of spectacle and of the representation of actual and mythic landscapes. And Hollywood, with "more stars than there are in heaven" has always been its premier site.¹ From the beginning, it has been a place for "stars" and for filmmaking and that has continued to be its *raison d'être*. As a site, "Hollywood exists ... as a state of mind, not [just] as a geographical entity" (Carey quoted in Davis, 1999, p. 392). Indeed, for writers in cultural geography, the term "landscape" means more than just an actual site or a pleasing view of scenery. Landscape is about the interaction of people and places. It speaks about a social group and its spaces, particularly the spaces to which the group belongs, and from which its members derive some part of their shared identity and meaning (Groth, 1997, p. 1).

According to cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove (1991), "landscapes are cultural images, whether we are speaking of actual topography or of its representation in words, pictures or even music [and film], moreover, the representation of landscape can help share feelings, ideas and values, most particularly those which refer to the relation between land and life" (p. 8). The actual and mythical place that we understand as "Hollywood" functions exactly as this sort of multilayered landscape, so much so that, as Mike Davis has noted, the concept of Hollywood as a place is "difficult ... to come to grips with, (it is) elusive and elastic at the same time" (1992, p. 394).²

In the Western world we do not just inhabit or see landscapes, we "perceive" them. We are the point from which the "seeing" occurs. The Western landscape is therefore an ego-centered landscape, a perspectival landscape, a landscape of views and vistas. In cinema, the depicted figures/characters act as mediators between the viewer and the events portrayed. Like other visual artists, filmmakers (i.e. screenwriters, directors, actors, cinematographers, and production designers) create ego-centered landscapes through their manipulation of time and space. Sometimes these created spaces are mimetic representations of real spaces endlessly rearranged or re-envisioned, and other times they are "new virtual worlds" designed to (re)present or (re)place reality. As both a producer of culture and a cultural production, cinema is one of the preeminent manipulators of subjectivity, of vision and visibility, and of time and space, and therefore, it partakes in both the politics of vision and of dispossession.

Cinema creates and offers up both utopian and dystopian landscapes. In the essay "Of Other Spaces," Michel Foucault outlines the distinction between utopian, heterotopian, and dystopian spaces to show how particular types of space enact social and power relations. In this essay, Foucault names "utopias" as sites with no *real* place. They are theatrical sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. They present society itself a perfected form, or society turned upside down; but in any case, these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces (Foucault. p. 24).

Individual films are capable of presenting us narratively and visually with many such utopias and their opposite - dystopias. Heterotopias, on the other hand, according to Foucault, are the siting of the partial, the contingent, the specific, and the peculiar. They are capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. In effect, they disallow a utopian claim to universality and completion. And though it is often utopian in a narrative sense, cinema (i.e., the operation of cinema as an activity) is a heterotopian space par excellence. In other words, it is a contradictory site that brings together a whole series of places that are foreign to one another. It is a three-dimensional space in which one sees projected on a two-dimensional space, three-dimensional images. Filmed landscapes, and the characters who inhabit them, are always at the same time utopias (since utopias are sites with no real place) and heterotopias (which are simultaneously mythic and real).

The geography of the cinematic landscape is, therefore, imbued with the spatial and the spectacular and not just the psychic.³ In this way one can talk about the body of the star as being tied up with materiality, with spectacle, and with the geography of the "surface" and not necessarily, or exclusively, with the psychic identification that is the basis of much psychoanalytic film theory. Being open to multiple readings and desires, Keanu's body, for example, is both a utopian and a dystopian landscape. He can be seen/perceived in a variety of ways depending on one's point of view. A visit to some of the Web sites devoted to him reveals that he has been heroized by Asians, Anglo Saxons, and African Americans alike, and his sexuality and/or sexual appeal is variously interpreted as being gay, bisexual, or heterosexual.⁴ Likewise, as a box-office drawing card, he can be both mainstream and marginal.

It is in its representation of utopian, heterotopian, and dystopian spaces that cinema is able to present both the hegemonic and the oppositional. Such simultaneity may be found, for example, in the film *Speed* (1994) in which, to use Michel de Certeau's rather evocative phrasing, "Every story is a travel story - a spatial practice" (p. 115). What is most striking about the film is the way it moves the body of its star, Keanu Reeves, through its spaces and

the kinds of political messages that this might consciously and unconsciously suggest. For example, *Speed* is about the laterality of Los Angeles. It could only have been filmed in L.A. with its extensive freeways and its ineffective public transportation system, which, in the film, becomes a metaphor for poverty. The film presents us with a cartography of the often intangible social relations that are acted out in its spaces. It is like: an atlas that reveals some of the invisible spaces that are not locatable on official maps.⁵

In *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985). David Bordwell begins his chapter, "Narration and Space," by outlining the various approaches taken in film theory to account for the effects of filmic space on the viewer, and also for the formal, spatial manipulations and operations that are intrinsic to it as a medium. He argues that "each adjustment of distance and perspective in cinema is invested with exquisite sensibility" (p. 99). *Speed*, like many other popular fictions, chooses the spaces of the city, in this case Los Angeles, as its narrative and actual site. This film shows transgressions of the boundaries of city spaces as well as those of genre. It is part detective film, part melodrama, and part action film. But primarily, this film is all exploration of the landscape of Los Angeles and of the body of its star, Keanu Reeves. The screen's exploration of his body and its operation in the landscape is a narrative that spills out above and beyond the "action" of the story. And while the city itself is one of the major "characters" in *Speed*, it is Keanu's movement through the city that is of most interest.

While landscape and cityscape shots construct a narrative space in which the characters in a film can perform the various actions of the plot, these location shots, which are more than just neutral spaces, often demand to be read as real historical places (Higson, p. 3). At the same time, as Andrew Higson argues, the narrative compulsion in films works continually to transform specific *place* once more into abstract *space*. In the case of *Speed* this means that over and above the narrative, the visuals, including our vision of the actor/star body, are often the film's real stars. This tension is "transcended by the incorporation of landscape shots into, and as, the movement of the narration itself: place becomes a signifier of character, a metaphor of the state of mind of the protagonist" (p. 3).⁶ Via the body of Reeves's character Jack Traven[sic - *Traven*], Los Angeles, through its transportation systems, becomes not a utopian vista but a dystopian place to be investigated, intersected, interrogated, surveyed, and policed, a space that is full of social and criminal dangers.

Bordwell and Thompson have argued that

in the classical paradigm, the system for constructing space (that is, the continuity style) has as its aim the subordination of spatial (and temporal) structures to the logic of the narrative, especially to the cause/effect chain. Negatively, the space is presented so as not to distract attention from the dominant actions; positively, the space is "used" up by the presentation of narratively important settings, character traits ("psychology") or other casual agents. Space as space is rendered subordinate to space as a site for action. (quoted in Higson, p. 8)

It may also be argued, however, as Higson does, "that the narrative system of a film is never as simple as Bordwell and Thompson's formalism would allow. There is (as both Stephen Heath and Steve Neale also suggest), always an undertow of meanings pulling against the flow of the narrative, always more than the narrative can use, whether it is in the form of the spectacular, or in the form of descriptively authentic detail" (p. 8). In other words, because there is a surplus of "realistic detail" in the film's narrative, we tend to read the narrative

space of the film as a real historical space, even though, as Higson suggests, much of that detail is actually structurally redundant to the narrative. This immediately raises the problem of the relationship between character and environment, between the protagonists of the fiction and the spectacle of the real historical conditions of the place that they inhabit (p. 8).

Speed is very much a film about the fragmentary, spaces through which characters interact (usually in a transgressive way), with environments both visibly represented and unrepresented. David Bass has suggested that "a movie has neither presumptions nor obligations to encyclopedic completeness, and so its choices of fragments and their mode of assembly is relatively free. What is selected for inclusion is often less revealing than what is excluded - lost, as it were, in the interstices between chosen fragments" (no page). Where we *are not* taken in *Speed* is just as interesting as where we *are* taken. We are not driven through Bel Air or Beverly Hills, for example, because the public transportation system has no social, cultural, or political place in these neighbourhoods.

According to Diane Ghirado, professor of architecture at U.C.L.A., the city bus system is used mainly by the Hispanic population. It is significant, therefore, that the white, obviously middle-class, Annie (Sandra Bullock) is only riding the bus because she lost her driver's license - for speeding! *Speed* becomes about the spectacle that *is* Los Angeles; and that spectacle, I would argue, is finally caught up in a vision that traverses/constructs not only the narrative spaces of the film, but also situates and conflates our vision with that of the narrative protagonists. This view forces us to investigate the space of their actions, to interrogate the kinds of political messages and anxieties that are implied in the film's use of space, because, ultimately, the "identity" of Los Angeles has often rested on its being a space that is continually contested and recontested.

That Los Angeles has an enormous social and material complexity makes the number of possible literary, historical, and cinematic takes on the city limitless, and its history as a cultural palimpsest has been well documented by various writers, including Mike Davis and Merry Ovnick. But it was Reyner Banham who prophetically claimed that Los Angeles' polymorphous landscapes and architectures were given a "comprehensible unity" by the freeway grid in a metropolis that "spoke the language of movement not monument" (quoted in Davis, 1992, p. 73). As a film about Los Angeles, *Speed* maps a baroque, layered and multidimensional reality in which the city and its star, Keanu Reeves, are both liminal and endless texts - always promising meaning, but ultimately only offering hints and signs of a possible and final reality. It is like an unfinished freeway - one of the most common actual sights in Los Angeles, and one of the most potent metaphorical sites in the film. As Richard Dyer writes in a review of the film, "this is the movie *as* roller-coaster: all action and next to no plot" (p. 8). But, rather than seeing *Speed* as mindless entertainment, Dyer argues that what is just as important as narrative is its function as spectacle. For Dyer,

the cinema has always had the potential to be like this. Whether or not it is true that the first audiences for the Lumiere Brothers' film of a train entering a station ducked in terror as it advanced towards them, the idea that they did has often seemed emblematic of what film is about. The Lumieres ushered in a new technology, that has become ever more elaborate, reveling in both showing and creating the sensation of movement. *Train Arriving at a Station* and *Speed* belong to a distinguished lineage. . . . The celebration of sensational movement, that we respond to in some still unclear sense "as if real," for many people *is* the movies. (p. 7)

As Dyer notes, the price is not just in people but elsewhere in things and places. In *Speed* it is the transportation system that is smashed about: cars, trucks, freeway barriers, planes, and even the roadway in a final eruption of a subway train from below the city. This spectacle of destruction makes visible one of the great frustrations of modern urban living - moving through space and time (Dyer, p. 8). However, through the body of its star, Keanu Reeves, we are guided triumphantly through the dystopian spaces of Los Angeles, which, as Matt Wray has noted, construct public space as a restrictive and dystopian zone of conflict (p. 2). It is no wonder that we relish the way *Speed* takes us through public spaces that still bear the traces of "openness" and "danger," and that the film seems so much like a wild theme park ride, complete with a fantasy ending on Hollywood Boulevard.

The ironic, self-reflexive ending where Reeves and Bullock end up beneath a movie marquee and a Hollywood "Tours of the Stars's Homes" bus, doubly conflates star/landscape and site/sight. It thereby undercuts the political and social dilemmas of the film, and presents Hollywood cinema and the star body as appropriate utopian solutions to deal with the dystopia that is the real Los Angeles/Hollywood. In other words, the "not real" heterotopia of filmic space undercuts the politics of real place, suggesting utopian fantasy as a solution to real social problems. As the film producer played by Steve Martin says in Lawrence Kasdan's *Grand Canyon* (1992), "All of life's riddles are answered in the movies." In that film, the proliferating symptoms of social collapse can only be counteracted by small acts of individual well-meaning, while in *Speed*, the "buffed and beautiful" action hero Traven/Reeves saves not only the people on the bus (including co-star Sandra Bullock) but also prevents the imminent destruction of Hollywood (symbolized here by its namesake, Hollywood Boulevard) as a site/sight.

Through its astounding success *Speed* made Keanu a legitimate star; it reinvented the "action hero," and it revitalized Hollywood cinema through its massive box-office takings. It shows its viewers (particularly the residents of Los Angeles) that the only safe space is cinematic space. As Matt Wray notes,

The ideology of the film shows itself in how it constructs and resolves conflicts in public space. The narrative first works to create a moral panic and paranoia about violence in the public realm, conjuring up fantastic dangers and frenzies of violence, in large part caused by and visited upon both the underclass and working-class psychopaths. (p. 3)

Wray suggests that for the spectator the meaning of the film is clear: no one, including the middle class, is safe in Los Angeles. The solutions offered by the film include increased surveillance of the public realm along with more police "force," masked as rugged individualism in the figure of Reeves's Jack Traven (Wray, p. 3). Ultimately, despite the entertainment appeal of its spectacle, and the utopian cinematic fantasies it offers about the resolution of social conflict, *Speed* also draws our attention to the role of space in defining and maintaining divisions and hierarchies of power, and is thereby a part of the culture and politics of space.

Along with the political aspects of cinematic space, another advantage to thinking spatially about film is that our physical environment matters so much because it shapes both our material and our psychic lives. Siegfried Kracauer has convincingly argued that "spatial images are the dreams of society. Wherever the hieroglyphics of any spatial image are deciphered, there the basis of social reality presents itself" (p. xv). Thus, the real and

imagined spaces we define in man-made landscapes, in architecture, in literature, or in films *produce* us at least as much as we produce them. Politics and social relations do not merely use the organization of space to their own ends; politics *is* the organization of spatial relationships.

This is particularly so in Los Angeles/Hollywood where the identity of "place" both actual and narrative, is so much tied to the economics of the film/entertainment industry.⁷ There is an implicit politics of identity in the way that all cinema, but particularly Hollywood cinema, represents certain spaces and landscapes. Los Angeles/Hollywood is a literal "mediascape" in which the politics of identity and space are played out. As Giuliana Bruno (1993) has noted in relation to the Neapolitan city films of Elvira Notari, there is a strong comparison to be made between our aesthetic experience of the cinema and our subjective experience of the city (pp. 35-38).

THE SITE AND SIGHT OF BEAUTY

As a Hollywood star, Keanu Reeves's star/acting body functions, in Richard Maltby's (1995) terms, as a dialectic of cinema's warfare between personality and mechanism {p. 237}.⁸ His body is both a literal (real/reel) and a metaphorical (not real) landscape on which is inscribed the politics of place, the aesthetics of beauty, and the act of performance. Underpinning each of these is the economic imperative of "stardom" as a function of the Hollywood film industry and its global networks. His "star" body, like the literal and metaphoric landscape of Hollywood, is both a utopian and a dystopian place, while remaining at the same time, like the screen upon which it appears, a heterotopia, a nowhere land. Keanu's body, because of its actual and potential beauty, is utopian, like the Los Angeles/Hollywood sites it occupies, but also dystopian in its potential for violence and acts of transgression, and finally, heterotopian in its literal nonreality.

Keanu's bodily presence on the screen is an important feature of his function as "star." Most critics and many viewers tend to agree that he has no real acting range.⁹ His performances are notable for their poor critical reviews. However, despite his reputation for "poor acting," it appears talent has little to do with his being cast in a role. Although he has been a convincing clown in *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1989), an angst-ridden teenager in *River's Edge* (1987) and *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), and a cartoon-like action/sci-fi hero in *Point Break*, *Speed* and *The Matrix* (1999), in actuality, his body acts as a liminal space that can cross genres and defies critical reception. The question needs to be asked: Why do we continue to want to *see* Keanu on the screen despite his notorious "lack of acting talent?" The answer lies not in the act of performance, but in his performance of beauty. It is his appearance that seems most attractive to both the lesser- and well-known directors he has worked with. For these directors Keanu Reeves is more than just an actor - he is a star!¹⁰

The myth of stardom was created by Hollywood from the beginning, and it continues to be supported by Hollywood's restructured studio system. Stars guarantee financial success and, as was noted in *Premiere* magazine, "In Hollywood today, a star's endorsement is often the only real fairy dust that can make a project spring to life" (Horne and Spines, p. 62). In an age where film budgets have skyrocketed, the studios have come to rely more heavily on the pre-sold popularity of stars in an attempt to make their corporate strategies as risk free as possible, and this has led ultimately to a complete realignment of Hollywood power structures (Horne and Spines, p. 59). As Richard Dyer notes, "Hollywood wants the sure thing - the genre, the star - but people don't want exactly the same thing; they want the same

only different." As a star, this is what Keanu Reeves does best. He is literally a body of variable expectations, and his body functions as a textual, narrative (cinematic), and economic (box-office) device.¹¹

The star/acting body is also constructed for maximum economic return so that "artistic performance" is not the only, or even a necessary, precondition or measure of a star. In Keanu Reeves's case, like many stars before him, including the legendary Greta Garbo, beauty, in fact, works against any objective evaluation of performance. As a star, Reeves often appears merely to be *present* on the screen. His *acting* ability does not seem to be paramount, even though from time to time a director like Kathryn Bigelow in *Point Break* manages, some would argue, to wring out of him a genuine "performance" rather than just a "presence." The aesthetics of beauty of the star/acting body, like the beauty of the filmed landscape, are the fodder of narrative cinema, and Keanu Reeves's beauty/face/body have been utilized for maximum narrative potential in films like *Point Break*, *Speed* and *The Matrix*.

Speed, in particular, appears to conflate the acting body of Keanu Reeves with the narrative and actual landscape of Los Angeles/Hollywood. It is a film about the disjunction between utopian and dystopian spaces, where the freeway and other transport systems act as heterotopias - no man's lands - spaces existing between the violent dystopia of the city and the apparently safe utopia of the suburbs.¹² In the same way that this film charts the differing cultural and political aspects of Los Angeles, Keanu's body is a map on which are written the differing desires or needs of the audience. His body "acts" as a safe place on which can be written many different discourses - gender, sexuality, freedom, economics, aesthetics, and politics.

Perhaps part of the intense interest in him lies in his "mysterious" racial appearance - part Asian and part European - which gives him the malleable facial features out of which several directors have seen fit to construct a persona. Or perhaps his universal appeal lies in the way his face is changeable in the same way that a landscape is changeable and open to interpretation. As his co-star in *Speed*, Sandra Bullock noted, "Everything about him is laced with mystery - that's his charm" (quoted in Bassom, p. 74).

Unlike Tom Cruise whose acting persona always seems to be a fixed social, cultural, political sign (Cruise excels at portraying variations of white, middle and upper-class manhood), Keanu's performances have been shaped and framed in various ways to express a variety of social, cultural, and political roles (gay, straight, ethnic, working class, and middle class). He is, in fact, a variable landscape that directors like Bertolucci, Bigelow, Coppola, Branagh, and others have seen fit to place within a frame. Indeed, in the majority of Keanu Reeves's films the most successful performances by him are those where he is allowed to "be beautiful" rather than to "act".

If, then, presence rather than performance is one of the conditions of stardom, then so is the beauty of the Star. In *The Most Beautiful Woman on the Screen - the Fabrication of the Star Greta Garbo*, Michaela Krutzen establishes a close connection between human beauty and the specifics of the film medium. "Film shapes the production of the star through the characteristics inherent in the medium; its affinity for the surface, the possibility of close-ups or the filmic interpretation of a role" (p. 4). Like Siegfried Kracauer, she believes that film defines itself as an art form more suited than any other to the visual representation of physical reality. As such, film is "*the* representative form for Beauty" (Krutzen, p. v). Krutzen argues that in addition to its capacity for showing reality in great detail, film, in contrast to theater,

can incorporate the close-up, a device by which the human face can be reproduced in previously unknown perfection. Therefore it is no accident that the myth of Greta Garbo is most concretely expressed in the evocation of her face (Krutzen, p. v). "By means of the close -up," Krutzen writes, "the human face acquires new and special meaning. Actors know this and they energetically insist upon the greatest number of close-ups before signing a contract" (p . v).¹³

The affinity of film for showing the superficiality of things, whether a landscape or a face, is a feature of cinematography that cannot be matched by any other medium, including still photography. It acts as an exemplar for the filmic representation of beauty, because the beauty of the star is almost always external, despite its occasional presentation in fan magazines as "inner quality." Beauty is, in Krutzen's terms, "an element of the surface splendour of the star" (p. 15). The technical possibilities of film for producing beauty are its affinity for the surface, and the possibility of the dose-up - two features that have been used to good effect by those directors who have worked with Keanu Reeves. Although lingering close-ups of Keanu's face are consistent features of most of his films. *Speed's* love affair with Keanu's face prompted one critic to note:

Keanu Reeves's *Travertine* lacks not merely a tragic dimension or even an ironic one, but any dimension at all; experience has left no imprint on his beautiful features Dennis Hopper is almost more than the movie can survive It is extremely difficult to connect this pudgy, vacant-eyed ranter with the sophisticated devices that the movie is all about. (Berardinelli. n.p.)

Likewise, in *Point Break* Kathryn Bigelow consistently makes Keanu's face and body the constant object of the camera's movement. In this film when he is pursuing or being pursued through the landscape, it is he who is of prime visual interest. He seems to transgress the borders of the frame - because when he is not in the frame we momentarily lose interest, and so we are forced to search him out. His body, therefore, is not only of prime visual interest, it also moves the narrative forward - it literally constructs the landscape of the film. When his body is threatened with violence and breach, as in the stakeout scene where Utah is thrown to the: ground and nearly meets his end pinned underneath a slicing lawn mower, the crisis for the viewer seems to be, "Oh no, what will happen to Keanu's beautiful face?" In scene after scene in *Point Break*, Keanu's co-stars, Patrick Swayze, Gary Busey, and the female lead Lori Petty, act as mere mirrors reflecting the power of his "star" presence. This is the essence of the "Keanu Effect" - his is the power of the surface, where the display of physical beauty achieves the level of a dramatic act.¹⁴

To say that someone is superficial almost always means to devalue him or her - it suggests a lack. of depth, of subtlety, or meaningful content. Many critics have made it clear that this is true of Keanu's ability, or lack of ability, as an actor, whether on screen or on stage.¹⁵

However, in Krutzen's terms, "The surface is always only a totality of edge points, the shell of a core which is understood as essential ... philosophical reflection then means penetrating and going beyond the surface" (p. 285). Siegfried Kracauer also assesses the surface as the place that exhibits the fewest solidifications. He: assumes films mirror society and therefore "film finds medial fulfilment in the depiction of the external - the cinema seems to come into its own when it clings to the surface of things" (quoted in Krutzen p. 285). Though arriving at their conclusions from different angles, both Kracauer and Krutzen believe (and it seems, so do most of Keanu's critics) that "the basis of the work of a film performer is appearance [rather than performance]" (Krutzen, p. 94).

Australian cinematographer Ellery Ryan (1999) notes, for example, the difference between the impression a cameraman may get of an actor whose performance seems lackluster or even ordinary on the set, and the filmed dailies of that performance, which often reveal a perfection or radiance not obvious in real life. According to Ryan, sometimes the "beauty" of the most beautiful of "real" faces (especially some television or soap stars) does not necessarily translate to the big screen, while on the other hand, someone who appears "ordinary" in front of the camera actually surprises, and shines, on the screen. Mystically he or she appears to become a star.

Mysticism is a trait that has often been associated with the star. Hollywood invented the star, and while the supremacy of Hollywood's celebrities in cinema worldwide is a testament to the marketing skills of the industry, there needs to be a more coherent explanation of what makes a star, to explain why particular actors are stars and others are not. It cannot simply be marketing, or inherent beauty, or sex appeal that creates stars - there must also be other forces at work.¹⁶ If acting ability is not a condition of stardom then what is it that makes Keanu Reeves a star? What is the essence of the Keanu Effect? I would argue that apart from beauty, "largeness" is the key. The largeness of the cinema screen, is opposed to the smallness of the television screen or the photograph, changes the dramatic weight of everything.

In his discussion of what makes a film star, Ellery Ryan suggests that cinema works with the dimensions of faces and bodies in a way that no other medium, including large-scale painting and billboards, can. This "mythical and technical largeness" has significant repercussions for the representation of cultural and political spaces not only within the imaginary or narrative space of cinematic representations, but also for the way in which we identify with actors/characters, and the spaces - both metaphoric and literal - that they inhabit. Ryan suggests that what is larger than life on the movie screen becomes smaller than life on television.

Leaving aside considerations of story situation and setting, which in practice are also considerably diminished, the size of the screen also limits the visual style of the medium.¹⁷ The long shot and the extreme close-up are rarely used in television production. There is an over-reliance on the two shot, the head shot, and the zoom. The aim is most often to present an "easy" image, one that the eye can easily accommodate without disorienting the viewer. There is always an emphasis on a smooth continuity of images with few surprises and no real difficulties (Ryan).

"Largeness" appears to affect which people are considered cinematic stars and why. Writer Bruce Cook notes, "In the movies everybody is bigger than life . . . one is either a movie star or a television star - never both" (p. 58). Although one might question this dictum in light of the successful transition recently of some television stars like George Clooney and the cast of the U.S. sitcom *Friends* to the big screen, Cook's anecdote about the actor Richard Dreyfuss is still a rather telling one in this respect. He notes that "when *Jaws* was being shot on Martha's Vineyard, [Steven] Spielberg was said to have become miffed that Dreyfuss was so much more successful than he was in getting dates with girls on the island. Dreyfuss, who had already been seen in *American Graffiti*, consoled Spielberg: 'Look at it this way, Steve. I've got a face that's forty feet high. You haven't'" (quoted in Cook. p. 58). Like Ryan, Cook also suggests that largeness "has done much to dictate the technique of the film actor who must become a reductionist, and who has to discipline himself or herself to hold his or her histrionic effects down to an absolute minimum (p. 58).

In the same vein, most writers on stardom, including Edgar Morin and Richard Dyer, also argue that the movie star is one who "behaves" rather than "acts." Cook suggests that

it is his [*sic*] vocation, his function, to serve as a vessel for the fantasies of the audience. The more he can contain, the greater star he will be. There is almost necessarily an element of the mythic in every movie star . . . like all mythic heroes, his character must remain somewhat generalized and undefined, even perhaps (in an odd way) sexually neuter. (p. 59)

As a condition of stardom, Keanu Reeves has definitely been characterized in this way. Rumors and anecdotes about his sexuality abound, and continue to be the core of most stories written about him. Keanu appears to be living proof of Cook's belief that a star chooses a role to fit the persona he or she has created (p. 69). This may certainly have been the case in his choice of roles with a "gay" subtext like *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), or grunge roles in *Feeling Minnesota* (1996) and *The Last Time I Committed Suicide* (1997).

According to Morin, "The star is more than an actor incarnating characters, he incarnates himself in them, and they become incarnate in him" (p. 44). Because of his choice of roles, Keanu has been constructed as aloof and unintelligent or misunderstood. So effective was Keanu's incarnation as Ted in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* that the: persona of the "himbo" has dogged him ever since and has become a stereotype that he is not able to shake off - in the eyes of most critics at least.

However, following the enormous worldwide box-office success of *Speed*, which prior to its popular discovery by fans was known derisively in industry circles as "that bus movie,"¹⁸ both the quantity and quality of writing about its undoubted "star," Keanu Reeves, has reached hagiographic proportions. Even film critics and cultural theorists whose aim it often is to analyze and deconstruct such phenomena appear to have bought into the Keanu Effect. Many respected critics and film theorists seem mystified and yet still caught up in the mystery that is Keanu's stardom. Almost all appear to be seduced by the beauty of his face.

Even more interesting is the hagiographic turn taken by many writers and critics on Keanu. His fan worship has reached cult status and, befitting such a status, his life (or "vita") has been constructed (part truth and part myth) and embellished by his followers who view him as having on saintly virtues. In the same way that the Renaissance art historian Giorgio Vasari traced and elevated to heroic stature: the lives of the great artists Michelangelo, Raphael, and others in his *Lives of the Artists*, Keanu's life has been charted and described like that of a great painter or sculptor. This is a mode of talking and writing about stars that has persisted throughout the history of Hollywood cinema. As Edgar Morin noted,

The star is profoundly good, and this cinematic goodness must be expressed in her private life as well. . . . the idealization of the star implies, of course, a corresponding spiritualization . . . the mythology of the romantic stars associates moral beauty with physical beauty. The star's ideal body reveals an ideal soul. (pp. 47-48)

Keanu's "goodness" and "moral beauty" are depicted in writings on Keanu, like the unauthorized biographies by Sheila Johnston and David Bassom, which follow the traditional "rise and fall" cycle attributed to performers - usually artists and saints - but now more commonly celebrities and cult figures like Mother Theresa, Princess Diana, or Kurt Cobain.

In this manner of writing everything associated with the star, whether quirky or mundane, takes on significant meaning. Hence, Keanu's unusual name has been consistently examined for its mystical meaning.¹⁹ His rise to success, fame, and worship as star is meticulously charted and sprinkled liberally with quotes from his "followers" and true believers. For example, Johnston quotes John Mackenzie, who directed Keanu in the television movie *Act of Vengeance* (1986), as having said, "I bet that guy's a star in five years. I cast him as soon as I saw him. The instant you put him on film, he burns up the celluloid. He's not consistent; I don't think he's a very good actor. But when he hits the moment, he's just got a God-given thing" (p. 44).

Keanu's path to fame follows the traditional trajectory outlined in such artist/star biographies. First, glimpses of raw talent in the untutored youth are sported early by the cognoscente; and it merely remains to be discovered by some master or great director (and he has worked with several). An apprenticeship for the novice "star" follows, which includes several flawed but significant works, such as *River's Edge* (1987), *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), *The Prince of Pennsylvania* (1988), and *Point Break*. This apprenticeship is then followed by a breakthrough performance (*Speed*), which cements his reputation and/or star status and brings his asking price (commensurate with his newly emerging box-office appeal) up to \$7 million per picture.

Like many stars and artists, much of what is written about Keanu is apocryphal and intended to show his "specialness," his ability to rise above the rest.²⁰ What are consistently noted and lauded are his beauty, his modesty, his unfulfilled talent, his patronage by noted directors, and, of course, the inevitable fall from grace. This "fall" comes about because Keanu fails to live up to his star status (refusing to do *Speed II*) and bastardizing his talent by making less than spectacular - or "quirky" and "personal" films like *Feeling Minnesota* (1996), *The Last Time I Committed Suicide* (1997), *Chain Reaction* (1996), and *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995).²¹

The decline and fall of the star presages a triumphant return in the tradition of all Hollywood legends. As Jeannie Basinger notes, "enduring stars keep remaking themselves" (quoted in New York Center for Visual History, "The Star"). In the words of Dyer, "Star images themselves have a history. The successful star career endures by finding new inflexions - by doing something that is basically the same but different enough to be interesting" (quoted in New York Center for Visual History, "The Star"). Accordingly Keanu's star rises following the reprise of his "action hero" role in the huge critical and box-office success of *The Matrix*. As a result, Keanu makes it to number 78 in *Premiere* magazine's "The Power List - The 100 Most Powerful People in Hollywood" in the June 1999 issue, behind Sandra Bullock, his co-star in *Speed*, at number 76 but *ahead* of Hollywood "legend" Robert De Niro at number 79.²²

Despite his rise in the star firmament, Keanu refuses to play by stardom's rules, which, according to Morin,

in the dialectics of actor and role, the star contributes her own beauty to the heroine of the film form [from] whom she borrows imaginary moral virtues. Beauty and spirituality combine to form the mythic. This super personality must unceasingly prove it[self] by appearances, elegance, clothes, possessions, pets, travel, caprices, sublime loves, luxury, wealth, grandeur, refinement - and seasoned to taste with exquisite simplicity and extravagance. (p. 48)

So while Keanu is noted for his collection of classic Norton motorbikes and his love of vintage French Bordeaux, he refuses to conform to star "elegance" and deliberately eschews it, cultivating instead an anti-glamour. He dresses badly, has no permanent address, and lives in the seedy and "fashionably" unfashionable Chateau Marmont, home of the notoriously "dark side" of Hollywood. As James Kaplan [notes in *Premiere*](#),

[In real life] for a movie star, Reeves has a surprisingly neutral presence. He doesn't suck all the air out of a room; he hangs back and ponders the options. In his scuffed hiking boots, wrinkled black jeans, black V-neck sweater, and dark gray T-shirt, he might be your brother, home from college for the weekend, or the painter from down the hall, over for a friendly game.

Ironically, it is Keanu's stardom that allows him to refuse to buy into the "public needs to know all about my private life" game, and he makes himself deliberately inaccessible in that sense, so much so that it has led to consistent speculation about his sexuality.²³ For the star, unapproachability is an important quality and is maintained through the attributions of loneliness, mysteriousness, and melancholy (Morin, p. 48). Keanu is known to be obsessively reclusive - to say little about himself; therefore, in the manner of all saints, artists, and cult heroes, his "true" self has to be "divined," sought out by journalists and fans.

However, the truth is rarely ever apparent and what emerges in published articles and Internet sites is most often a version of Keanu that is most desirable or applicable to a particular individual or group. The strength of his appeal as a star lies in this malleability. [As Kaplan notes](#),

More than most of us, Keanu Reeves is a mass of ambiguities: He's masculine and feminine; decisive and waffling; focused and goofy; crisp and turgid. Some men become movie stars by dint of looks, a scrap of talent, and sheer, dogged persistence. But every once in a while, a star comes along - a Montgomery Clift, a James Dean - who has such an elusive, help-me quality that audiences - are drawn into the vortex of an enigmatic soul.

Keanu Reeves has all this, but what he has in addition, as the world first discovered with *Point Break* in 1991, is the ability to play action heroes, men of little hesitation, anti-Hamlets. His easy physicality is a side of him that - in an age of action pictures, and layered over the subtext of his sensitivity and exotic good looks - is pure gold. It's an ability Reeves confirmed three years later with *Speed*.

But while the film medium guarantees a distance between the Hollywood star and the audience, stars nevertheless can have no secrets. Film magazines, popular culture magazines like *Vanity Fair*, *The Face*, *Details*, infotainment programs like *Entertainment Tonight* and *E!*, and fan sites on the World Wide Web transform film viewers into voyeurs who behave as if they are continuously present in a virtual landscape/movie of the star's private and professional life. The reader/voyeur is able to persecute the star in every sense of the term, because there is no hiding place for the star.²⁴ Keanu is a captive of his fame because, as in the early days of the film industry, the Hollywood studio/star system demands the systematic organization of the private-public life of the stars.²⁵ In [a 1995 edition](#) of the "hot" celebrity magazine *Vanity Fair*, a reporter asked Keanu how he coped with the constant attention of fans and the media. Keanu allegedly shrugged and said, "I'm Mickey [Mouse]. They don't

know who's inside the suit." Kamen replied, "But you're a movie star." Keanu laughed. "So's Mickey" (quoted in Shnayerson. p. 112).

Despite Keanu's protests to the contrary, however, as an actor he can never entirely immerse himself in a role because the viewer's prolific knowledge about him unconsciously influences his performance on the screen. Director Gus Van Sant is said to have cast River Phoenix and Keanu Reeves in *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) not just because of their beauty, but because he believed the audience would be captivated by an intensity that came from their past lives (Kaplan, p. 66). In fact, Keanu's public "largeness" is inescapable, and in Bruce Cook's terms, "it is his vocation, his function, to serve as a vessel for the fantasies of the audience" (p. 59). Several writers have argued that like some of the legendary stars of the past - Humphrey Bogart, Henry Fonda, and John Wayne - Keanu has an open stony-faced quality that asks, indeed demands, of the moviegoer that he or she fill in the details. In the legendary stars this was thought of as a quality of mystery or of innocence; in Keanu it is variously seen as an absence of qualities or a lack of talent.

A supposed lack of talent notwithstanding, Keanu Reeves continues to legitimate his stardom by what is considered to be in today's terms the: only true marker of stardom - success at the box office. In Keanu's case, his unusual beauty compensates for what is understood to be an imperfect acting technique. What is of interest to us on the screen is the geography of his face - a face that appears to conform to a canon of beauty that can be Hellenic or Oriental, exotic or ordinary. His very blankness allows directors, cinematographers, and viewers to construct upon his "star" features the richest human geographies.

According to film historian Joseph Boggs,

The grammar and vocabulary of body language include a vast array of non-verbal communication techniques, but the motion picture is perhaps unique in its emphasis on the eloquence of the human face. Although the face and facial expressions play a part in other storytelling media, such as novels and plays, in film the face becomes a medium of communication in its own right. Magnified on the screen, the human face with its infinite variety of expressions can convey depth and subtlety of emotion that cannot be approached through purely rational or verbal means. (p. 263)

Given the largeness of the cinema screen, the art of film acting (particularly for the star) is in *reacting* rather than acting. It is in this sense that Keanu's "acting" is a spectacular form of non-acting and, consequently, in the reception of his "performances" there are almost unlimited possibilities for scenic interpretation.²⁶ His face is the same but somehow always different. This sameness/difference is what audiences look for in stars. As Rick Nicita, head of CAA (Creative Artists Agency) says, "In this business, stars are human nature exponentially magnified."²⁷

KEANU AS STAR AND HOLLYWOOD AS SITE

I return to the connection between Keanu, the body of the star, and the landscape of Los Angeles/Hollywood via Louis Marin, who argues that a particular site is the result of a product, of a construction that is at once real, imaginary, and symbolic (p. 164).²⁸ Marin's

argument, that "body" and "site" are conflated, is entirely applicable to Hollywood as a site, and Keanu's presence there as "body/star" (p. 168). Marin asks the question, "What is a place and how is a place different from space?" (p. 169). He notes the extreme polysemy of the notion of place in the seventeenth century where "place is a primary and immobile surface of a body which surrounds another or, more clearly, the space in which a body is placed. A spot intended for setting something either by nature, or by art" (p. 169). Los Angeles and Hollywood, as sites of stardom, are polysemic in just this sense.²⁹

The key to any city is literally and metaphorically linked to an architectural notion of place - to the sociocultural understanding of the term - and therefore a place is distinguished by the privileges attributed to the various uses it is intended for (Marin, p. 170). Like Marin's example of Versailles, and its situating of the body of the prince, Los Angeles/Hollywood, too, is a place for situating stars and for filmmaking. It is a place that, in Michel de Certeau's terms, "obeys the law of the proper and of property" (quoted in Marin, p. 170). Thus, there is present there, as Marin argues, "a classicism of [the] place" (p. 170). In just this sense, Los Angeles/Hollywood appears to be the only legitimate site for stars. It is a place determined by its industry and its subjects - that is, the stars and the narratives of the films it produces, and of the industry it supports - whether as a site or industry with its studios and production facilities and narrative locations; or as a tourist location that feeds off the former in the form of commercial theme parks/locations like Disneyland, the Universal Studios Theme Park with its utopian quasi-urban Universal City Walk, tours of the stars' homes, or the re-development of specific sites/sights like Hollywood Boulevard, the Beverly Hills shopping precinct, and Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade.

As Marin suggests, the act of "representation is thus essentially an organization of movements in space, movements whose effects are spaces" (p. 171). In other words, in the case of Hollywood and its stars the acting body of the "star" would appear to designate Hollywood space in every sense of the term. The star's body points to the strategic site it occupies by becoming one of Hollywood's sights/sites. It is not surprising, therefore, to find an overt self-reflexivity in the final sequence of *Speed*, making reference to Hollywood Boulevard as both a utopian and dystopian street of dreams. As Marin suggests, place, space, event, and the dialectic at play between these three notions are what constitute any idea of place (p. 171).

Los Angeles, for example, constructs itself literally in *Speed* as a dialectic between a real place as Hollywood narrative space and as Keanu's body as spectacle/event. As star, he too is doubly of the landscape - as actual actor, star, beautiful face and fictional character. *Speed's* narrative and ending on Hollywood Boulevard right outside a movie marquee and a studio tour bus, also doubly conflate the site and sight of both Los Angeles/Hollywood and of Keanu as its narrative protagonist and actual Hollywood star. Utopia and dystopian spaces meet in this filmic finale in the heterotopia (not real) of the cinema screen.

Through its narrative representation of Hollywood cinema literally and metaphorically constructs Los Angeles as theatrical sight/site, which, because of its global exposure, literally subjugates the eye of the beholder - whether that beholder sits in a theater miles or even continents away from Los Angeles, or is actually present on site. According to Marin, "representation develops a visual theatricality which strikes the eye and subjugates the gaze" (p. 173). So, for Marin, "to represent means also to show, to intensify, to redouble a presence" (p. 174). This is the same for cinema. It is the legitimating force or paradigm in

which stars (both living and dead) can operate. For example, both Marilyn Monroe and Humphrey Bogart continue to signify "Hollywood" many years after their deaths.

It is the site of Los Angeles/Hollywood as home of cinema that legitimates the activity and function of stardom - it is the physical and metaphorical site that gives the "sight" of the star its power. "Through 'place' space is transubstantiated into a body" (Marin, p. 178) and the star's body, and thus the functioning of the apparatus of cinema as industry is located and revealed. The layout of Los Angeles/Hollywood as a playground to the stars presents the geographic space of Los Angeles/Hollywood as matrix, or as a universal metaphorical cinematic space that can be transported outside Los Angeles and Hollywood through film and its byproducts, and still retain its meaning and power.

Through topographic representation, the architecturally visible is totally legible and the descriptively legible is visible; image and symbol are founded and merge in a same *reality* of discourses and places, that of a perfect simulacrum which manifests an identical prosopography, the portrait of the [star] Sun-King. (Marin, p. 181)

The star carries the site/sight of Los Angeles/Hollywood with him or her wherever he or she goes. So, one might legitimately ask, what did Keanu's visit to Australia for major location shooting of *The Matrix* in 1999 mean for the law of place that signifies "Los Angeles/Hollywood star"? Did it simply mean the transportation of Hollywood to Australia in the very literal sense of industry and physical star body? Ian Sands, the managing director of its distributor, Roadshow Film Distributors, gave the power of Keanu Reeves's presence in Australia as one of the key reasons for that film's huge box office success there. "We hope people will want to see *Mission Impossible 2* for the same reason" (quoted in Bodey, p. 6). Meanwhile, United International Pictures' marketing manager, Sam Hamilton, noted, "the result also shows what a year of pre-publicity can do. That reason being that Keanu was in Australia and his location and whereabouts were under constant scrutiny" (quoted in Bodey, p. 6).

Reeves's and his co-stars' presence became, in fact, the preoccupation and fodder of the entire spectrum of Australian publishing and broadcasting - from women's magazines to infotainment programs, including the national nightly news. Even stories of Keanu's ill health (presumably as a result of his enforced "relocation" from "home") made tabloid headlines, suggesting perhaps that, although you can try to take the star out of Hollywood, you can't take Hollywood out of the star without affecting his or her bodily and symbolic "presence."

Foucault notes, "the spaces in which we live, which draw us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our times and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space ... [We] live inside a set of relations that delineates sites" (p. 26). Foucault's notions of "sites," whether literal or metaphorical representations, may help us to understand landscape as organizing metaphorical representations, as an organizing principle in culture, and in film, where space and bodily action are integrated with the question of identity and spectatorship. In this sense, Los Angeles/ Hollywood, and the bodily presence and mobility of its stars, like Keanu Reeves, provide us with a richly symbolic experience of landscapes that are ambiguously utopian and dystopian, one fully orchestrated in relation to the surrounding environments and their rich history as sites that manufacture spectacle and attractions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The theme and general argument of this chapter are indebted to Michel Foucault's (1984) essay, "Of Other Spaces," and to Louis Marin's "Versailles and the Architecture of the Prince" (1991). Both these authors argue strongly for the body "in situ" as signifier of meaning. They suggest that we can neither understand nor see the body as *not* being implicated politically and, aesthetically in the spaces in which it resides, moves and acts.

NOTES

1. This has long been the motto of MGM, a studio once synonymous with Hollywood stars. Its logo continues to identify the studio along with its trademark lion across all of the studio's inter- and intra-corporate structures, including the MGM Hollywood Grand hotel/casino complex in Las Vegas.

2. In the chapter, "Beyond Blade Runner," Davis (1992) argues that today Los Angeles/Hollywood, or rather its idealization, has become the subject of simulation and caricature. Mega corporations like MCA and Disney have turned both the actual sites and sights of Los Angeles and Hollywood into theme parks. In this sense, there are multiple hyper-realities known as "Hollywood": (1) "Hollywood" as social reality (slum); (2) Hollywood as movie made spectacle; (3a) Hollywood as Disney-MGM (Florida); (3b) Hollywood as Universal (Florida); (4) Hollywood as City Walk (Los Angeles); and (5) Hollywood as redevelopment project (pp. 393-94).

3. Hein Lefebvre uses the term "spatio-analyse" for its echoing on an alternative to "psychoanalyse" or psychoanalysis (pp. 1-2).

4. There are hundreds of sites devoted to Keanu, including these very specific sites from certain interest groups: The Asian American Celeweb at <http://geocities.com/Tokyo?temple/1500/reeves.html>; Keanu Reeves' Italian Fans at <http://www.keanu.simplenet.com/menu.html>; and the Keanu Reeves Island Surfing School at <http://geocities.com/SoHo/square/7335/surfing.html>.

5. For an interesting discourse on the "intangible cartography" of cities, see Doug Henwood (1994). This is an acute analysis of how atlases although they present the official and statistical often fail to represent the political hierarchy of spaces.

6. Higson (1984) makes this point in relation to the British "kitchen sink film."

7. Foucault (1984) makes this point about space in general, but I think that it applies as much to the categories of space making that I am suggesting.

8. Maltby (1995) refers here to Frank McConnell's paradox of film presence, "the presence of absence, a 'reality' which is not there (p. 174).

9. Typical of these kinds of review is this one for *Johnny Mnemonic*. "Just in case you hadn't realized, Keanu Reeves is in imminent danger of brain collapse. It's the twenty-first century, the planet Earth is in lousy shape and not only does everyone want to chop off Keanu's head

and freeze it, but if he doesn't get rid of what's stored inside it on a micro-chip, the basically, he'll blow up. Or melt down. Or possibly both. Reeves is Johnny, a jet setting courier of top-secret material, which he loads into his re-modeled brain through a little hole drilled in his head. in order to perform this unpleasant but well-paid task, J. J. has jettisoned his childhood memories and therefore has no personality - a made-in-heaven role for Reeves, who attacks it with gormless voracity" (Paviour p. 56).

10. Typical of the response to Keanu's performance in *Speed* is the following from a review by Scott Renshaw. "Since the dawn of time, three Great Questions have defied the greatest minds: Is there a God? Is there existence after death? And how does Keanu Reeves continue to get work as an actor? All right, that might be a slight exaggeration I have some ideas about that life after death thing. Reeves remains a mystery, a physically striking but mush-mouthed thespian who has been cast by Coppola, Bertolucci and Branagh. A post *Bill and Ted* star-making vehicle has eluded him, however - until now. Arriving with more buzz than a swarm of killer bees is *Speed*, and you can believe the hype. Thrilling and relentless to a fault, *Speed* seems destined to score big box office and make Reeves a very hot property." Later on in the review, he notes, "Jack Traven is the perfect role for Reeves. He is asked to do little more than set his jaw and look good in a tight T-shirt, and he's good at both."

11. Richard Maltby (1995) has noted that "a movie performance is also constructed out of the performance of the camera, the editing, the mise•en•scene. . . . A movie is a performance and not a text. If movies were texts, we could write about them with much more critical confidence than we do. But all attempts to reduce movies to texts, whether through analogies between film language, shots and words, or through formal analysis, ultimately fail to resolve the interpretive complexities of performance signs and thus to resolve the dialectic of cinema's warfare between personality and mechanism" (p. 237).

12. In "Of Other Spaces" (1984) he outlines the distinction between utopian, heterotopian, and dystopian spaces to show how particular types of space enact social and power relations. Foucault's essay, along with the works of de Certeau, Bachelard, Focillon, and Lefebvre, and the writings of phenomenologists have each in some way tried to deal with the changing conceptualization of space in cultural life and/or art.

13. It is also worth noting that in a recent interview series for the Australian Cinematographers' Society, award-winning cinematographer John Seale spoke about the increasing control being taken by actors of their screen images, especially of close-ups. "You have to look after your young leading ladies. That's the little edict of the studio system and producers are very adamant about that - that's the money up there and they want to see it. Meg Ryan demanded that a tight close-up of her from *City of Angels* be pulled unless it was digitally enhanced, because she believed it showed her in an unflattering light - "with pores and creases." He is speaking specifically of women but the same trend can be seen in the control of image by male actors. For developments of this trend, see Horne and Spines (1999).

14. Kruttszen (1992) makes the same point about Greta Garbo's "non-acting" style (p. 27).

15. See review of *Johnny Mnemonic* in Paviour (1995). But almost any review of a Reeves's film will be sure to mention either the wooden quality of his acting or the fact that his acting is not acting at all.

16. For a discussion of the economic imperatives of "stardom," see Sherwin Rosen. Rosen notes: "The phenomenon of superstars, wherein relatively small numbers of people earn enormous amounts of money and dominate the activities in which they engage, seems to be increasingly important in the modern world. . . . The elusive quality off 'box-office appeal,' the ability to attract an audience and generate a large volume of transactions, is the issue that must be confronted" (pp. 845-46). However, Rosen also notes the limits of his economic model and warns that "prospective impresarios will receive no guidance here on what makes for box-office appeal, sometimes said to involve a combination of talent and charisma in uncertain proportions" (p. 846). For an interesting legal and cultural approach to celebrity and stardom, see Rosemary J. Coombe.

17. One could argue that some mini-series, which often present us with sweeping historical sagas, are an exception to the rule.

18. Sandra Bullock, in an interview with David Letterman, *The David Letterman Show*, ABC Television, United States, 1994.

19. Almost all writers on Keanu make mention of his unusual name, which is meant to translate from Hawaiian as "cool breeze over the mountains," a claim that is under some dispute, but that nevertheless gives rise to much talk about his mystical "specialness".

20. There is even a college course on Keanu Reeves. In the unauthorized biography, Sheila Johnston (1996) notes, "In 1994, the artist-lecturer Stephen Prina launched a course on 'The Films of Keanu Reeves' at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, a few kilometers down the road from San Dimas, Ted's stamping ground. . . . In a similar spirit, in the spring of 1995, London's Institute of Contemporary Arts asked its members to name any one person they would like to hear lecture. Keanu topped the poll by a comfortable margin; the runner-up was Slavoj Zizek, a Lacanian philosopher and Intellectual arch-guru based in Ljubljana" (pp. 4-5)

21. See especially, the review of *Johnny Mnemonic* in note 9.

22. Reeves's entry reads as follows: "Title: Dude Awakening. Status Report: Carried kickass *Matrix*, his first studio movie in two years, to huge business. Fee will soar to \$12 million for next project, the football comedy *The Replacements*. Yes It's True: Gave up \$1 million of his *Devil's Advocate* salary to help pay for Al Pacino's" ("The Power List," p. 95).

23. The most famous and most prolific of these rumors concerned an alleged secret "gay marriage" between Keanu and producer David Geffen. Asked about the rumor, Geffen replied: "It's just an ugly, mean-spirited rumor meant to hurt him because he's a movie star" (quoted in Shnayerson, p. 112).

24. One need only look at some of the innumerable Keanu sites on the Web to note the range and responses to his stardom from adulation to total vitriol. Some of the sites post "hate" messages of such vehemence that they need to be seen to be believed. One such site is *The Keanu Report*, which argues that Keanu Reeves is the manifestation of evil on earth, the anti-Christ. See <http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/6608/keanu.html>

25. The precursor to many of the "star at home or on the town" genre of articles that we see today in magazines such as *Instyle* was the annual "Hollywood" issue of *Architectural Digest*

(the special issue continues to this day), which featured stars in their homes - where both star and home became synonymous fixtures of the Los Angeles/Hollywood landscape, in much the same way that stars are now associated with specific fashion designers, hairdressers, and makeup artists who are themselves celebrities, testifying to the longevity of the notion of Hollywood as premier site of stardom/celebrity.

26. Krutzen (1992) notes that this is exactly the case for Greta Garbo (p. iv).

27. Rick Nicita, head of Creative Artists Agency, is quoted in *The Stars* (television series).

28. It is real, in that the palace (place) exists: one can still visit it today. It is imaginary, in that it reveals "baroque" desire, the fantastic, the phantasmic desire to show (oneself) as absolute power. It is symbolic - since in some manner it is the sovereign norm, the "classic" law of universal subjection to signs, which constitute a transcendent cultural and political universe devoid of civil and natural exteriority.

29. A potent example of the "laws and powers of place" was the 1999 strike in Hollywood by technicians protesting the increasing move of film production away from Los Angeles to locations like Canada and Australia. The newsworthiness (both in Australia and in the United States) of this highly visible and emotionally charged protest is testament to the uneasiness that is seen to be brought about by the possible relocation of "Hollywood" to "other" places/spaces including what in some circles is being called "Aussiewood." The technicians' protest seemed to suggest that "Hollywood" cinema cannot be made anywhere else except the actual physical site that is Hollywood, that is, that the Hollywood film industry is seen (in Marin's terms) as a condition of place.

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