Julie Christie and Beatty in *Shampoo*. Stripped down for work, Beatty is a camera object but also a mirror for the woman he glorifies.
WARREN BEATTY AND THE ELUSIVE MALE BODY IN HOLLYWOOD CINEMA

In criticism on Hollywood film the male body has been treated mostly as an object hiding in plain sight. While theories of the female body on screen find it the exhibited object of a male gaze, treatments of masculinity until recently sounded like variations on 1960s elephant jokes: how do you hide a male body? The answers are numerous: the male physique is present but not displayed; visible but not to be looked at. It may be photogenic and muscular, but is always engaged in action or fixed upon some objective, never passive in repose. The man is shown doing, not merely being; looking at something (and through it) but not expecting to be gazed at.¹

The psychoanalysis-based feminist film theory introduced in the 1970s primarily by Laura Mulvey assumed an active male subjectivity. Mulvey’s male spectator, as positioned by the “classical” Hollywood movie, takes theorist Jean-Louis Baudry’s transcendental spectator whose eye sweeps over its field of vision like a searchlight and combines it with the spectator theorized by Christian Metz, who acts as both a projector of fantasy images and the screen onto which they are cast.² This male subject supposedly masters all he surveys. Male bodies are not among the objects of his gaze. To Mulvey woman signifies “to-be-looked-at-ness,” while man, fearing homoerotic feelings, “is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like.”

Like most dualisms, these have dissolved under close analysis. Critics have recently explored the tension between the unitary heterosexual identity constructed in the dominant culture and the multiple voices contained by it. However, attempts to fix upon the male body as a site of spectacle continue to be somewhat halting. On one hand is the undeniable fact that Hollywood has long displayed the bodies of male stars in films and in publicity and advertising. On the
other is a Hollywood cinema that to this day maintains the heterosexual white male as an ideal, with the subject position implied by such a notion.

The presentation of the male body—particularly of male stars and the protagonists they play—provides the putative male spectator with "ego ideals" who "act out a complex process of likeness and difference (the glamorous impersonates the ordinary)." Steve Neale, an early student of male spectacle in film, echoed Mulvey in asserting that "in a heterosexual and patriarchal society, the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed." Along the lines of the cultural axiom that men do while women simply are, male exhibitionism must be displaced onto action. It may be connected to a female gaze which very frequently is punished for its transgression. Discussing the visual treatment of Rock Hudson in Douglas Sirk's "women's pictures" of the 1950s, Neale found "moments . . . in which Hudson is presented quite explicitly as the object of an erotic look. The look is usually marked as female. But Hudson's body is feminized in those moments, an indication of the strength of those conventions which dictate that only women can function as the objects of an explicitly erotic gaze." Thus by applying the Freudian logic of the active male and the passive female, Neale concludes that the object of the look is so strongly a feminine position that for a man to occupy it is to suffer emasculation.

At the same time, images of the male are available for unauthorized use by a female or gay male spectator in ways which may perpetuate dominant gender roles but which may also undermine the powerful masculinity such images are supposed to reconstruct. Thus more recent critical work dwells in an ambivalent area between erotic exhibition of the male body and efforts to shield it from the gaze. Such work attempts to move beyond unsatisfactory, pat notions of "feminization" and the prohibitive heterosexual male gaze but finds them pervasive in visual culture. The title of a 1993 collection, Screening the Male, is glossed by its editors, Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, as "a multiple pun that captures the considerable force of the male in Hollywood cinema: the apparatus puts him on screen, it hides him behind a screen, it uses him for its ideological agenda, and it screens out socially unacceptable and heterogeneous cultural constructions of masculinity."
Beneath these issues remains the problem of a patriarchal filmmaking system which must keep within safe bounds the bisexuality that heterosexual gender dualisms repress. Much work has concerned 1980s action stars, Schwarzenegger and Stallone in particular, whose excessive physicality begs questions about how the male body is kept from sheer display and the anxiety caused when the body so clearly *is* being exhibited; how the obviousness of masculinity as a construction is kept from consciousness; and how the phallic values of the body balance and obscure the “femininity” associated with making oneself over, acting a role, putting oneself on display.

What then is signified when the male body must at the same time be vividly shown yet paradoxically kept from the range of a direct look? Men after all are both subject and object in a system that finds male objectification intolerable. The control and desire which propel the movement of a male protagonist through a film, moreover, are illusory, often balanced by discourses which make the male the object of female looks, curiosity, and scrutiny. This balance, and the repressed bisexuality at its center, belies the cultural assumption that Neale explained: “[W]omen are a problem, a source of anxiety, of obsessive inquiry; men are not. Where women are investigated, men are tested. Masculinity, as an ideal, at least, is implicitly known. Femininity is, by contrast, a mystery.”

Mystery is a word often attached to Warren Beatty, a star who may seem a curious subject for an inquiry into film masculinity, and for the very reasons which make him ideal. Beatty’s three-decade-long reign on magazine covers and in tabloids has been based on his glamorous enjoyment of the prerogatives of the successful man—women, money, travel, access to powerful people. A star must in some way be presented as “a real person” with whom the spectator can identify (“the glamorous impersonates the ordinary”). However, Beatty’s masculinity has been received as an embarrassment of riches devoid of the “regular guy” effacement of wealth and freedom affected by other male stars in press accounts. At least until his 1992 marriage to Annette Bening, writers about Beatty were hard-pressed to describe him as anything other than a jet-setting movie star/film producer/playboy with a fervid interest in liberal Democratic politics. In Beatty’s case, however, the characteristics that offset an aloof image of pure glamour are the same ones that contradict the masculinity of traditional male stars, especially in the stars’ appeal to male spectators. His screen roles highlight the complacent, vul-
nable underside of conventional masculinity, while his offscreen persona mingles unabashed glamour and leisure with unforthcoming privacy. The combination of these adds up to a star who exceeds the boundaries between subject and object, masculine and feminine qualities, identification figure and object of curiosity.

Beatty’s body image and Method performance style differ from conventional masculinity. A student of Stella Adler, who helped train Marlon Brando, Beatty reached stardom in the early 1960s on a wave of Method-trained (or at least influenced) “rebel male” stars (Brando, Dean, Clift, Newman). The Method actor’s emphasis on emotional and psychological realism and his/her bent toward solipsism and isolation serve perfectly Hollywood’s star system, as Virginia Wright Wexman has pointed out: “the closer the fit between the roles that actors could play and their ‘real’ personalities, the more promotable they were as stars.” The interiority from which the Method actor works clashes with the “implicitly known” outward strength of the male who dominates easily. A Beatty character’s struggle to make the interior exterior, to communicate, often puts his body into contortions and even into danger.

Beatty’s off-screen reputation as a womanizer and his resulting status as a sounding board for social attitudinizing (which finally ended with his marriage and the birth of a daughter) rest on cultural assumptions about the normality of monogamy and about women as the adjuncts of men in romantic relationships. However, Beatty’s persona, as filtered through his films, shows him often in the shadows of women, beginning with his sister Shirley MacLaine, who was famous while he was still a struggling young actor. Although the studio star Clark Gable considered the greatest threat to his image “any situation which subordinated him to a woman,” a constant in Beatty’s films is the female lead who is his equal, at least, in strength, competence, and imagination. He is probably the only male star of the past male-dominated quarter-century of Hollywood film about whom can be said. His films intertwine self-obsessed movers and shakers like McCabe (McCabe and Mrs. Miller, 1971, Robert Altman), Reed (Reds, 1981, Warren Beatty), and Siegel (Bugsy, 1991, Barry Levinson) with romantics like Joe Pendleton, the prematurely dead football player in the fantasy-comedy Heaven Can Wait (1978, Beatty and Buck Henry) who wills his spirit into another man’s body so that he can be with a woman, literally allowing desire to give him form.
It may be formlessness that ultimately defines Beatty’s persona. When he plays the most physical of his characters, a football player (which Beatty actually was, in high school in Virginia; he turned down a number of college athletic scholarships to pursue acting), the character also lacks a body, as if Warren Beatty is so insubstantial as a corporeal being that in order for him to be credible as an athlete, it must be as a quarterback in search of a physique. David Thomson writes of Beatty,

He has a way of catching sight of us looking at him and asking, “You want to be here? If I move over?” Who else has been so shyly conscientious about being the larger-than-life figure stardom requires, yet so irked by its excesses and so determined to withhold himself? These warring impulses make a perplexing result—Warren is simultaneously legendary, yet barely existing. Everyone “knows” him, but wonders what is there? His superiority is such as a ghost might command.⁹

This relative amorphousness might be said to come from his emergence from the Stanislavsky school in the transition period between the era of the powerful studios, which scholars agree largely came to an end by 1960, and a system whereby the old studios serve as distributors for independent productions and contracts that operate on a picture-to-picture basis. As Beatty explained, “The studio system was coming to a close when I showed up. And they didn’t quite know it. The studios less and less wanted to have the obligation of contracts to people. And we were moving into an era of free expression, or less inhibition.” This led in the late sixties to what many commentators would call “a new kind of star,” defined by Robert B. Ray as

essentially character actors whose self-reflexive, self-doubting personae contrasted sharply with the confident, natural imperturbability of Cooper, Grant, Gable, and Wayne. While the Classic stars had depended on the cumulative power of typecasting and genre conventions, these new performers specialized in playing against the expectations created either by a film’s nominal genre or their own previous roles. Their model for this iconoclasm was clearly Marlon Brando.¹⁰

Ray includes Woody Allen, Jack Nicholson, Robert DeNiro, Dustin Hoffman, and Al Pacino among the “new stars.”
The star most comparable to Beatty is Paul Newman, who was also Method-trained and in the mold of the “rebel males,” yet physically in the tradition of the romantic leading man. Beatty has made to date nineteen films in a thirty-two year career. Part of his media legend for perversity comes from his habit of turning down roles, usually choosing to develop his own projects, and often taking years to do so. As a star, Beatty is a hybrid—a man with the glamour and looks of a Studio Era romantic lead, the acting style of a Method-trained “rebel male,” and the business sense of producer-stars like Burt Lancaster and Charles Chaplin. Unlike his Method predecessors, he did not become an ill-used victim of the system and of his own excesses like Dean or Clift or languish in indifferent films like Brando and Newman. Nor did he show absolute fear for his image as did Robert Redford. However, unlike several of the stars who emerged at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s—Hoffman, DeNiro, Hackman, Pacino—Beatty did not dispense with image and was thought of more as a “personality” than most of them were, even if many of his film roles have been as resolutely unheroic as most of theirs.

Therefore, I approach Warren Beatty under the hypothesis that his incoherence as a star and as a man is caused by a lack—on screen—of the strong gaze of which he apparently is a master off-camera. As a romantic figure, which he primarily is, Beatty in his film roles is marked by a talent for giving in one way—Clyde making Bonnie feel like “the best damn girl in Texas”—while unable to give in another (Clyde is impotent), with a larger immortalizing event finally leading to sexual union (Bonnie’s poem celebrates the two of them for posterity in the newspapers; Reed and Louise Bryant become part of the Russian Revolution). Beatty is the object, not of a female gaze necessarily, but of a discourse of which women are mostly the subjects. He is adrift somewhere between the Mulveyan axiom about man’s avoidance of the exhibitionist gaze and later claims for male actors as erotic objects. The dialectic of his powerful though amorphous offscreen persona and his onscreen gallery of small-timers, losers, and deluded dreamers illustrates multiple and contradictory qualities of what we call masculinity; Beatty illustrates what may be present with all male stars: exhibitionism and its effacement at once, objectification so subtle it can be mistaken for its opposite.
Warren Won’t Tell but Joan Will: Beatty as a Figure of Female Discourse

The futility of casting Beatty as strictly an active male subject is demonstrated in Anthony Easthope’s book *What a Man’s Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture*. Easthope analyzes a 1985 article on Beatty in a London magazine, *TV Times*, reproducing the first two paragraphs. Entitled “Beatty Kisses But Won’t Tell,” the excerpted article reads:

Certainly, it’s hard to take your eyes off Warren Beatty when he arrives at a party, but it’s worth it, just to see everyone else’s reaction. Men watch him out of the corner of their eyes, subconsciously straightening their ties—or, if you’re in Hollywood, their gold chains—trying to fathom the appeal of this short-sighted, rumple-suited sex symbol as he squints his way around the room. Women tend to react in three predictable ways. There’s the “let’s pretend to ignore him” gambit, which is really an attempt to attract his interest; the casual move towards him so that he can’t turn round without bumping into a pliant elbow or hip; or the direct approach: “Warren, darling, it’s been ages, we *must* have lunch,” and a flurry of phone numbers—most of them, no doubt, already in his little black book.

Easthope analyzes the article’s presentation of Beatty “as a mastering subject,” who has found in art a means of gaining “power, wealth, and the love of women,” but who can present these goals as “mere adjuncts to his art,” since he “appears to be after something of human value, art.” To Easthope, however, the real attraction of the star is quite the reverse: Beatty’s films are mere pretexts for his power, money, and appeal to women. Beatty is rendered “a definite image for masculine fantasy”; a female reader is offered “a position of identification with the writer of the article,” and thus can become one of “Warren’s women.” “Meanwhile, the male reader is allowed to imagine himself as Warren Beatty.” This male reader is invited to identify with the prodigious sexual performance of the star, who “is said to be an ‘insatiable lover’ who made love ‘four or five times a day, even while he was on the phone.’” This characterization renders “Warren’s women” objects of exchange between the male reader and Beatty: “if Beatty makes love while on the telephone it is because he is telling a male friend about it,” Easthope concludes.
A press article such as this one capitalizes on what Richard deCordova terms the “secret” of a star’s persona, which he connects with Foucault’s concept of the configuration of sexuality in civilized culture as a secret. DeCordova extends to movie stardom Foucault’s concept of secular confession, in which the sexual is seen as the epitome of the “private life” and equated with the truth about personality.

The dynamic of secrecy and confession, concealment and revelation that supports discourse on sexuality supports discourse on stars as well. The star system continually sets us out on an investigation . . . that is, both in its methods (eliciting confessions and unveiling secrets) and in its promised result (revealing the sexual as the ultimate, ulterior truth of the player’s identity), closely tied to the constitution and deployment of sexuality in modern times.13

If we recall Neale’s assertion that women are objects of investigation and men are not, Beatty’s status as an agent for men’s fantasies begins to look very simplistic. Indeed it clashes with the way so much of the discourse on him treats him as an object of inquiry. Evidence abounds that Beatty realizes that sexual speculation about him is one source of his appeal. He once snapped dramatically to an interviewer, “What do I need with publicity? You want to see me driving up and down the Sunset Strip in my car picking up girls, right? Well, you don’t think I’d be stupid enough to let you see that side of me, do you?”14 It would be stupid indeed because the sight might result (in 1967 when he made the remark) in scandalous headlines and lurid photos, while the suggestion of such a sight keeps the curiosity and fantasies flowing. Beatty’s career—and film output—is marked by orchestrations of apparent revelation—a flashy outburst before a reporter, a provocative appearance at a party with a feature writer present—which reveal little but intensify the curiosity and perpetuate the secret, making both a bit more delicious: the male star as “tease.”

Similarly, his appearance in Truth or Dare, the 1991 documentary about Madonna, self-consciously injects a note of mature common sense into a film that is a kind of monument to self-styled exhibitionism. Sitting in a chair in a corner of a hotel room, wearing dark glasses, as if for protection from the documentary camera, Beatty comments on Madonna’s propensity to do everything on camera. He laughs, “She doesn’t want to live off-camera, much less talk.
There's nothing to say off-camera. Why would you say something off-camera? What point is there—existing?” Despite the film’s pretense to “direct cinema”-style discovery, Beatty performs the role of sensible elder statesman who has learned for sanity’s sake the difference between performance and everyday life (the scene begins with Beatty asking Madonna how her associates bear “this insane atmosphere”). By reminding the spectator that, unlike Madonna, he is an old-fashioned star who keeps his private life to himself, Beatty maintains an essential secret. He remains much more an object of inquiry than Madonna, who aggressively gives the appearance of revealing all, and conversely, of having fewer dimensions to reveal than Beatty does.

The problems with a strict Mulveyan/Freudian approach to Beatty become clear by looking again at the passage Easthope cites as evidence of his male = subject/female = object thesis. The first sentence presents Beatty as the object of a look: “It’s hard to take your eyes off Warren Beatty when he arrives at a party,” with the reader positioned, as it were, quite cinematically, as a spectator whose camera-eye can pull back to take in the whole scene: “it’s worth it just to see everyone else’s reaction.” Beatty then becomes recessed in that mise-en-scène, albeit the dominant figure.

For a master of the gaze Beatty is awfully myopic, needing to “squint his way around the room.” Contrary to the notion that the male is implicitly understood by other men, Beatty becomes an object of male apprehension (“mentally straightening their ties.”) and incomprehension (“... trying to fathom the appeal ...”); moreover, the men do not give him a direct gaze but look “out of the corner of their eyes.” Perhaps this male speculation about Beatty could be seen as a new way of posing female desire as a mystery, of asking Freud’s question, “What does woman want?” Even so, Beatty is aligned here with women, not men, making him not a man’s man, but a woman’s man. Beatty may be posed as a master of women, possessed of an all-knowing “little black book.” But he is also presented as an object of hopes and desires for the women in the article and of curiosity if not fantasy for its female readers.

This impression intensifies with a look at the rest of the TV Times article as Easthope describes it. The anecdote about Beatty’s brand of phone sex, which Easthope doesn’t document, comes from an account of the actor’s affair with Joan Collins, which took place in 1960. Its inclusion in a 1985 article perpetuates a macho sexual
myth, with a forty-eight-year-old magically retaining the sexual energy of a youth of twenty-three. More important, the quotation is from Collins's autobiography, making Beatty the object of a female conversation. The fact that the story comes from Joan Collins transforms Beatty from the subject of male sexual fantasy to an object of one woman's sexual experience, presented for the bawdy amusement of other women.

Easthope stretches the evidence in order to make Beatty an identification figure for men, sizing him up against the two main womanizing archetypes, the Casanova, "searching endlessly for the mother in one passionate affair after another" and the Don Juan, "who hates his lovers. To him they represent sexual difference, and so the threat of castration. And so they are to be destroyed." While male fantasies of the promiscuous man, such as the hard-boiled detective and James Bond-style spy, often are in the misogynist Don Juan mode, representations of Beatty's lovemaking usually adhere to the Casanova model, painting him as an immature Oedipal subject who cannot commit to one woman. This is especially true of films produced by Beatty, which provide more examples of the recipe for this star's career whereby one part revelation combines with two or three parts concealment.

In Shampoo (1975, Hal Ashby), produced and co-written by Beatty and the only film to capitalize on his amorous off-screen reputation, George Roundy (Beatty), a Beverly Hills hairdresser involved with numerous women at once, is portrayed as an irresponsible, flighty man who cannot commit to anyone or even to opening his own beauty shop, while approaching his work itself as a dedicated artist. A Method-style confessional scene before his girlfriend Jill (Goldie Hawn) shows Beatty/George forcing into words a self-realization of his sexual motives, that sex "makes me feel like I'm gonna live forever. . . . Maybe that means I don't love 'em. Maybe it means I don't love you. I don't know. Nobody's gonna tell me I don't like 'em very much." This speech indicates that women play the role of mothers. They continually give George new life and he burdens them with much of the responsibility for his actions.

The Don Juan and Casanova categories are mostly irrelevant to stories of the amorous Beatty, which generally are told from the points of view of women. MacLaine speculates that "he levels that wonderful you're-the-only-person-in-the-room expression on you and you fall in love with yourself. . . . It's not about him. It's what he
makes them feel about themselves.” This reinforces the impression from the TV Times piece that Beatty is primarily a cultural sign of female sexuality. Lee Grant, who appeared in Shampoo, said in 1978 that “the Peter Pan quality in Warren is very attractive to some. He teaches them to fly, and they have extraordinary experiences with him. Then they grow up and go on, and he keeps flying. Like Peter Pan, he always comes back to another little girl who’s ready to fly off with him to never-never land.”

Consider the patriarchal concept of man as the source of sexuality and woman as the site of sexuality to which man is drawn. In this scenario women are the mirrors in which men see themselves as sexual beings and are reassured of their powers. In stories of Beatty’s sexuality, the roles are revised. “[O]ne day Natalie Wood sees Leslie Caron at a party at the time of the Caron-Beatty affair. Isn’t Leslie looking unusually lovely? people say. Warren, Wood replies, as if Caron has made herself look better for him, or as if he has willed and summoned it, been the mirror in which she reappraises herself. And surely Natalie must have felt the same light lift her face, and seen her own radiance in the mirror.” The notion that, to paraphrase the cliché, in front of every successful man is a woman holding a mirror which reflects a man who can accomplish wonderful things, is altered here while the patriarchal notion that women look beautiful while men do things is still reinforced.

A scene in Shampoo, which could have been called Anatomy of a Seducer, makes the phenomenon of mirroring clearer. George tells Jackie (Julie Christie), the kept mistress of the wealthy businessman Lester (Jack Warden), that her long hair and bangs make her “look like a hooker.” It is after he transforms her—and she sees herself in the mirror—that she throws herself at him before she knows what she’s done. The film’s coup is making the Beatty stud a hairdresser, a heterosexist stereotype of homosexual men. In conflating male homosexuality with femininity, patriarchy subdues the threat to conventional masculinity of men who work closely with women. The hairdresser identifies with women as part of his job, doing their bidding and paying them an intimate, glorifying kind of attention. He identifies with women in other ways too. Confronted at the end of the film by the twice-cuckolded Lester, George assures him that the women’s dalliances had “nothing to do with you.” “Do you ever listen to women talk, man?” George asks. “Cause I do till it’s running out of my ears. I mean, I’m on my feet all day listening to
Beatty likes to play a man with a gun, with a difference. In *Bonnie and Clyde* (top), the phallic associations are mocked; in *Bugsy* (bottom), he's a psychopath who constructs a persona as carefully as a movie star.
women talk and they only talk about one thing, how some guy fucked them over. That’s all that’s on their minds. That’s all I ever hear about. Don’t you know that?"

*Shampoo*, like most of the Beatty-produced films and a few projects by others, such as *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, softens sexual difference by means of male protagonists who not only show a feminine side, but are close to women and must unconvincingly deny that closeness. In *Shampoo*, set in 1968, all of the men, dressed in soft colors and open shirts and sporting long, shaggy, blow-dried hair, appear "feminine," or at least androgynous, without suggesting a "feminization" which would impinge upon definitions of masculinity the film appears to find largely irrelevant.18

Finally, the mirror produces at least a partial female subjectivity, as seen best in *Bonnie and Clyde* by Clyde’s elevation of Bonnie. The glorification of Bonnie makes her not only an object of beauty but also a more confident, savvy robber of banks than her male companion. Moreover, Clyde, as played by Beatty, is of course “beautiful” as well. This leads Bonnie to complain when Clyde protests “I ain’t much of a lover boy,” in contradiction to what was known about Beatty even in 1967: “Your advertising’s just dandy. Folks’d never guess you ain’t got a thing to sell.” Clyde is posed as the source of sexuality, infusing Bonnie with attractiveness, making her see that she is meant to be “somethin’ better than a waitress.” However, the glorification of Bonnie is not connected to phallic values, since Clyde is impotent. Clyde’s inability to perform sexually actually relieves Bonnie of the paradigm whereby the woman on film becomes an object of the man’s desire only to be released from this aura after he has possessed her. Instead, Bonnie is allowed to be a full person; Clyde’s appreciation of her helps her develop resources of her own.

Therefore, *Bonnie and Clyde* is a revealing exception that proves the rule: Clyde’s sexual desire, which the film connects to sexual function, is absent until the end when Bonnie acts as his mirror by writing the poem for the newspapers. Thus the film has no choice but to make Bonnie interesting in ways other than those which make women objects of a male gaze. Moreover, in Beatty’s *oeuvre* as producer-director-writer-star *Bonnie and Clyde* is a transitional work. Later films such as *McCabe, Shampoo, Reds*, and even *Dick Tracy*, do not need to deprive a female character of sexuality in order to make her an interesting person, nor do they need to make
the male protagonist literally impotent in order to undermine his sense of masculinity.

**Beatty in Flight:**
**Active Success Story or Incoherent Woman’s Man?**

Warren Beatty, man on the go, is a figure who shows up in, or better, runs through, many of the articles on the star over the years. A 1968 *Life* feature centered on his “mobility.” “He is seldom here or there in a definite place, as most of us are—he is simply ‘somewhere.’ ” The writer noted that during the two weeks he covered the actor, Beatty jetted from Los Angeles to London to New York and back to London, while considering trips to Rome, Sydney, and Tokyo. A *Time* cover story ten years later found Beatty unchanged: “Having no strong family ties, he goes wherever he wants whenever he wants. Having no strong compulsion to work, he takes off months to hop around the world, read, dabble in politics and consort with beautiful and interesting women . . . He makes coast-to-coast plane reservations for six consecutive flights, then misses all of them.”

This freedom to move and to choose his activities would seem to mark him as an active male subject of fantasy. However, in such articles, usually by male writers, Beatty’s freedom meets with disapproval and envy. *Newsweek* in 1990 found that “Something about Beatty—his famous success with women, his politics, his previous refusal to cozy up to the press—brings out the beast in folks. Barely disguised personal attacks have already surfaced in some of the reviews of *Dick Tracy* (*People* magazine says he looks ‘jowly and wan’ when he looks leaner than he has in years).” Beatty exceeds the contract whereby the male star stays within the bounds of a “regular guy” a male spectator may want to know or be in life. Beatty’s various ways of “playing around” appear to force the spectator to “gaze at his exhibitionist like” and recognize that the star is not his likeness, but one superior in looks and different in demeanor.

The point of view that emerges when articles try to concentrate on all of Beatty’s facets is mystified resentment of a male star who would not at least try to conceal his wealth, excessive leisure and incoherent personality traits. Beatty comes across as a bewildering muddle which the writers prefer to read as unmasculine: too distant, too contradictory and incoherent, and perhaps friendly with all those women in ways that imply the inferiority of other men. The
paragraph in the *Life* piece that comments on Beatty’s “mobility” begins: “To try to understand Beatty even a little, which is something that he, women, psychiatrists, studio heads and his family have been trying to do for some time now, you might begin with his mobility.” The men’s magazine *Esquire* ran during the release of *Reds* in early 1982 a facetious page-and-a-half “dossier” called “Warren Beatty: Would you kick this life out of bed?” which made him sound capricious, contradictory, and incomprehensible.  

The image of Beatty, man on the run, becomes more complicated in his films as producer. George in *Shampoo* dashes from woman to woman (most of his sex acts end in *coitus interruptus*), his motorbike serving as an emblem of an almost hysterical mobility (versus Lester’s Rolls Royce, a symbol of hysterical stability). John Reed in *Reds* runs from one rally or Socialist party meeting to another. A recurring line from Louise Bryant (Diane Keaton) to Reed is “The taxi’s waiting, Jack.”

Even in *Dick Tracy* the stalwart detective’s crisp reply into his two-way wrist radio, “I’m on my way,” and his fleeting body—nearly diagonal across the frame during these “gotta go” moments—constantly interrupt his dates with Tess Trueheart (Glenn Headly). When the emotionally blocked Tracy’s clumsy effort to propose marriage to Tess is disrupted by an attempted mob rub-out, a tough Trueheart says, “When you play in the street, it’s part of the game, I know that. Just don’t ask me to like it,” as if previous versions of *Tracy* would even have bothered to ask the woman’s opinion of the boys’ “game.”

And this is exactly the point. Beatty’s films routinely pose the woman as the one grounded in reality, the one who slows down and asks questions. This may not seem so unconventional. In male action genres, notably the Western, the woman is there precisely to protest against violence and rash action, and to be dismissed, as the genre draws the line between masculine purpose and feminine hesitation. In the Beatty films, however, the woman questions the man’s competence. *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* poses the entrepreneur’s dreams against the prostitute’s hard business sense and lack of illusions about her own exploitation. McCabe may test his manhood by going to bed with Mrs. Miller, but the audience knows that the smile on her face comes from her own private pleasure by the opium pipe; he has not put it there. In *Shampoo* Jill implores George to stop running from himself and his adult responsibilities. In *Reds* Louise Bryant
continually asks if Reed knows where his frenetic political activism, which she more circumspectly shares, will lead.

However much a movie's formulaic plot may eventually fudge things, these films seem aware that mobility is a luxury mainly for white males. In these films women are in touch with how much they have to lose, whereas the men wrongly feel invincible. The female characters know that however strongly they may be drawn to the male lead, they cannot afford to give themselves over to him; he might not know where he would take them and often they do. The problem is not just the woman's individual identity, but often, as in McCabe and Mrs. Miller and Shampoo, the very survival of women forced to depend on men in a patriarchy. The male characters are not protectors, nor do they know themselves well enough for a woman to be sure they will know her needs.

Beauty and the Schmuck:
How Beatty Eludes Both Objectification and Subjectivity

Beatty's body image tends to be indefinite and amorphous. Thus the index for Thomson's book on Beatty lists seventeen entries under "Beatty, Warren: face" but lacks even a category for "body." His reputation for narcissism stems from an apparent preoccupation with the face. Paul Sorvino, who played in Dick Tracy, in which virtually every male actor except Beatty wore prosthetic makeup, joked that "This film is Warren's dream come true. Every other actor is ugly as sin and he looks just beautiful."22

Furthermore, Beatty performs within what James Naremore identifies as a tradition of American film acting in which character is concentrated in the face and upper body. Such performance "emphasizes flesh tones, expressions in the eyes, and the grain of a voice. It seems to rise out of the most intimate personal qualities of the actor."23 Method acting modifies this practice, relying on the face and voice as well as the body as vehicles of the inner self. Despite the status of the Method male stars of the 1950s and 1960s as physical icons, physical stance and presence became more organic and dependent upon the actor's emotion.

Beatty's body is displayed, of course, but avoids pure objectification. In early films such as The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone (1961) and All Fall Down (1962), Beatty's full body provokes the sort of female looks which under the Production Code had to be punished.
In *Bonnie and Clyde* he twists himself into bashful, James Dean-like contortions, as if embarrassed by the possibility that he might be looked at. The dandified McCabe, who wears black or is covered in fur, is instantly coarsened by Mrs. Miller’s line, “If you want to convince people that you’re such a fancy dude, stop wearing that cheap Jockey Club cologne.” One scene consists entirely of Beatty/McCabe, in full shot, sitting in the corner of a stockroom, belching. *Shampoo* adds a comic fillip to the idea of the exhibited male body displaced onto action, as George’s display of his upper body covered by just an athletic shirt is offset by the wielding of hair dryer and scissors.

Beatty’s body is most emphasized when the character is trying hardest to be “masculine,” when the film is showing a gap between image (“Your advertising’s just dandy.”) and man. This refers back to the kind of character Beatty is most often drawn to. “I like to play schmucks,” Beatty said in 1972, “cocky schmucks. Guys who think they know it all but don’t. It’s been the story of my life to think I knew what I was talking about and later find out that I didn’t.” In 1975 he said,

> It’s very hard for me to play a guy who is a Superman. It just embarrasses me. I think it’s funny. I guess I prefer to play men who are very stuffed-up, like a blowfish. I don’t do it consciously but, it’s funny, because, if I look back on things I’ve done, especially things I’ve written, they are similar people. The guy in *McCabe*, for example, was so full of b.s. and puffed-up that, when he gets into a situation where the heavy starts negotiating him down, he goes down, down, down. The guy is very timid. I mean, it would be very hard for me to play *High Noon*.24

Such an approach to male protagonists shows why Beatty’s film roles often appear as deliberate contradictions of his off-screen persona. For instance, the films that allude to Beatty’s amorous reputation do so while denying other things we know about him: George in *Shampoo* is politically ignorant and an inept businessman. Bugsy Siegel is a married hypocrite. Other portrayals more directly foreclose on his offscreen persona: Clyde’s impotence, McCabe’s delusions of independence, Pendleton’s innocence, Dick Tracy’s monogamy.

*Dick Tracy* is an example of what can happen when Beatty does play a Superman; he turns from a Method actor to a Brechtian
performer, showing the role rather than embodying it, the character's trademark yellow coat serving as a distancing device between himself and the character. Tracy may not be "stuffed-up," but Beatty's acting makes clear that the actor feels that he is. Beatty's performance in *Dick Tracy* was criticized, as Brechtian acting in Hollywood films generally is, for not achieving a synthesis between actor and role. "You're aware that he's not using all his acting talents," one reviewer wrote, "just as you're aware that *Dick Tracy* is a holiday from the complexities of movies like *Reds.*" But the performance was also taken as more proof of Beatty's narcissism and self-involvement, as the Sorvino quote shows.

By refusing to embody an action hero, posing him instead as a "quoted" hero, Beatty emphasizes the unreality of a world in which crime is easily solved, criminals are hideous and detectives are beautiful and "bad" women are strong while "good" women are weak and dependent. The hero who is an image rather than a subject is feminized; the Kid (Charlie Korsmo) complains to Tracy, "for a tough guy you do a lot of pansy things." A Tracy who appreciates flowers, picks out clothes, likes spending time with his girlfriend, and plays the role of mother to an orphan, may be said, in the mediaspeak of the day, to be "a man of the nineties." But this Tracy with a feminine side was read by many as an actor holding back. Beatty was criticized for displaying the role as an unlikely paragon of beauty and virtue. The film comically contradicts the monolithic archetypes while it performs them, producing confusion rather than a clear critique of the conventions.

As if in answer to Tracy's critics, in *Bugsy* (Barry Levinson, 1991), his most successful externalized performance, Beatty plays Ben "Bugsy" Siegel as a flamboyant psychopath who mistakes brute gangster power for Hollywood glamour and who stands, moves, and talks more like the popular notion of a movie star actor than Beatty himself ever has in films or in TV interviews. Beatty plays Siegel as a twisted travesty of the notion of celebrity, a character, like Tracy, with no apparent inner life for a Method actor to explore. Thus he acknowledges a link between the anxiety of looking and being looked at, between the actor's drive to show himself while becoming someone else, and psychosis, an acknowledgement of the madness of attempting to be private in public, of withholding one's body and soul while appearing to showcase them.

Certainly male stars had undercut a matinee-idol persona before,
especially in comedy. In an analysis of Cary Grant’s screwball comedies which goes hand-in-glove with Neale’s “feminization” thesis, Andrew Britton finds that the narrative objective of Bringing Up Baby and The Awful Truth is to strip the Grant character of his masculine dignity and the values associated with it (reason and logic, bourgeois marriage, capitalist success) in ways that are sometimes feminizing (the peak being the famous scene in Baby in which Grant ends up in a negligee). Britton’s point is that Grant’s screwball comedies pose the prospect of a positive bisexuality—something with which we are familiar in the personae of many of the great female stars, but which it is difficult to parallel amongst the men. [These] films are concerned with the elimination of the differential of social/sexual power within the heterosexual couple, and use Grant to formulate a type of masculinity which is valuable and attractive by virtue of the sharing of gender characteristics with women.\textsuperscript{36}

Beatty’s playing of “cocky schmucks” sometimes led in his films to what Britton calls in Grant’s movies a “‘comedy of male chastisement’ . . . in which he is subjected to the most extreme discomfiture, humiliation, and loss of face by women.” With that combination of romantic leading man (even when the figure is also a farceur, as Grant was) and “new star,” Beatty could project the jokes at the hero’s expense: “McCabe made me laugh all during the movie,” he said.\textsuperscript{37} Beatty, with “new star” independence and iconoclasm, lets the audience see a struggle toward “positive bisexuality,” most notably in Reds.

Reds is a rare American film that shows the struggle of an emancipated heterosexual couple to maintain the equality in their private relationship. A brief analysis of Reed/Beatty’s entrance in Reds shows how Beatty’s films balance conventional male subjectivity with an insistence on giving a woman equal weight. After the film establishes Louise Bryant/Diane Keaton as a determined journalist and photographer too emancipated for Portland, Oregon, and her dentist-husband, just after the outbreak of World War I, she is shown at a Liberal Club dinner when Jack Reed, who had covered the war, is being introduced. Reed/Beatty is first seen on the far right of a shot, seated at a table of tuxedoed, cigar-puffing dignitaries. When the master of ceremonies asks “What would you say this war is about,” Reed, from Bryant’s point of view, rises, puts his
hands in his pockets and fills his chest with air as if to inflate himself into a “puffed-up” orator. Jack says one word, “profits,” and sits down, having said all one can honestly say; a reaction shot shows Louise, intrigued.

In the next scene, when Louise approaches Jack, he darts into the frame. In a full shot of both of them, he looks at her as she talks, but although we have just seen him from her point of view, director Beatty does not cut to Jack’s point of view, which would be expected when a man meets a woman, but follows them with a backward tracking shot as they set up an interview. The interview, which takes all night, is presented in a montage as coffee cups are filled and drained and Reed talks about a range of issues from union organization to economic and sexual freedom for women. At the end of the montage, a full shot has the two sitting on a wicker sofa, as Louise asks Jack if he’d like to take the interview “a step further.” Reed, a liberated man, shyly pauses then answers “Yeah.” Louise then pushes a heavy bound manuscript on him, asking him to read her work, while hustling him toward the door.

In the next scene Jack is at a staid Portland dinner party given by his mother when Louise, introduced as “Mrs. Trillinger,” wife of a dentist, enters. As Louise’s “emancipated woman” persona seems to have been broken, the scene moves to a more conventional shot/reverse shot pattern that sets up a lovers’ bond, with the man coded as the desiring subject, his intent look at the woman securing her as the object of desire. The following scene, however, undoes this effect as the shot pattern returns to full shot of both of them as they leave the party, and as Jack is again caught off guard by Louise. Jack lightly rebukes what appears to him as hypocrisy, “I’d like to know what your idea of freedom is—having your own studio. . . .” Jack’s sentence is broken off with a cut to Louise who has stayed behind, crouched to the ground, and looks intently at him. “I’d like to see you with your pants off, Mr. Reed,” is her answer to his question about freedom. Jack, now the one whose unconventionality is put on trial, looks around and joins her on the ground and in the shot.

A cut to Bryant’s studio shows Bryant now the one rushing to get somewhere. Jack, shaving, calls to her on the stairs, and invites her to come to New York. In a shot/reverse shot, he is visually in a superior position above her, while Bryant is literally cornered below him on a staircase. Jack’s face is covered with soap and he waves a
shaving brush, making him somewhat ridiculous. "You want freedom," he says. "Come to where the freedom is." An angry Louise asks "What as? As your girlfriend? your mistress? your concubine?"
The scene broaches the issue of a woman who struggles to maintain her own identity and who knows that even though she’s leaving a conventional man for a non-conformist, the problems of perception will still persist. "It’s almost Thanksgiving. You could come as a turkey," Reed says, gesturing with his shaving brush, as the scene ends.

The back-and-forth manner of the scenes between Louise and Jack illustrates the balance between the "feminizing" traits of Beatty as a romantic object and "masculine" characteristics. Louise is attracted to Jack’s ideas, vision, and convictions. Jack is attracted to Louise’s aggressiveness, independence, and determination to break with convention and be her own person. The film, apparently both wittingly and not, shows that it’s far easier for a man to break with convention than for a woman. The white man in our culture is himself an accepted convention and when he turns in new directions he might be called a pathfinder. When a woman turns, she’s a troublemaker, or she’s flighty.

Beatty’s perceived flightiness in articles and in some films, however, illustrates the firm purpose that is expected to accompany a man’s change of course. Reed’s willingness to let Bryant lead part of the time shows a character and an actor unthreatened by a strong woman. However, where Reed in the film is unquestionably a strong journalist and speaker from the first time we see him, Bryant spends the film trying to establish herself. The trivializing put-down of Bryant that ends the sequence gives Reed the last word for the moment. Beatty is conscious of the demands of the Hollywood narrative movie, especially an expensive one that must attract a large audience. The results are embarrassing moments such as Reed’s gift of a puppy for Christmas, clichés such as a man’s bungled attempt to cook dinner, and Louise’s Dr. Zhivago-like trek across half of Russia to find Jack which takes up much of the film’s second half.

Thus the line about the turkey seems a crowd-pleaser, an easy laugh for an audience that might be getting bored with dialogue about labor strikes and opposition to World War I. But the put-down is a harbinger of the film’s final direction, in which Louise does at last become subordinate to Jack. The sequence, like the entire film, shows the difficulty of establishing a woman’s credibil-
ity and maintaining a heterosexual relationship of equals in a culture and among film conventions that militate for male subjectivity.

Nonetheless in the film and in its advertising (which he controlled), Beatty avoided celebrating Reed as a strong figure in the conventional biopic manner. The film wants to be about a smart, dynamic couple whose determination to push against the tide is itself determined and overtaken by events beyond their understanding. The advertising poster showed two people, dressed in peasant clothing, embracing. The two are Reed/Beatty and Bryant/Keaton, of course, although one must look hard to make out faces or even separate bodies. The image appears to announce an intimate epic, about an American couple who find themselves far from home and carry on a desperate love under great difficulty. But its ambiguity, evincing a reluctance to make any certain claims for the film, may be a perfect testament to Beatty’s ultimate privacy, his preference at least publicly to recede into an image rather than dominate it, while evading a clear statement of any kind.

In *Reds* Beatty and Diane Keaton are often surrounded by crowds of purposeful people, thus diminishing the narcissism of the star-vehicle and making the point that others are important too. Photo: Dan Weaks.
Conclusion: Warren Beatty Gives Good Phone.

Beatty declined to do publicity for *Reds*, a decision on which the film industry placed much of the blame for the 42-million-dollar movie’s disappointing box-office returns. In order to survive as a star into the 1990s, Beatty has had to offer himself as fodder for the “infotainment” industry. This has resulted not only in revealing information about the actor, filmmaker, and star but some bizarrely fascinating portraits of Beatty as multi-faceted pop icon. Two artifacts which appeared before and during the release of *Bugsy* in 1991 appeared to condense into images virtually all the elements of Beatty’s persona and of the culture’s presumed response to him.

In a study of the construction of masculinity in male pin-ups Richard Dyer found that while female pin-up figures cooperate with the looker, demurely looking down in shy response or looking at the spectator in a way that denotes pleasure in being an object, male figures generally look up or off, in contemplation of something lofty, invisible to the viewer. When a male figure does look at the spectator, he does so in a way usually described as “penetrating,” looking through the viewer as if to investigate. Most important, “images of men are often images of men doing something,” adhering to the notion that men are not passive objects to be looked at but subjects who endow an action with importance by performing it, and vice versa.28

On the *Entertainment Weekly* cover Beatty appears to parody the idea of “looking through,” cupping his hands around his eyes as if he is a director peering through a viewfinder or a public figure searching for a public. In this black-and-white photo (the only color on the page is the red “entertainment” lettering and a bright yellow strip proclaiming “Madonna and AIDS”) the contrast between the light on his hair, face, and hands and the black of the background could be said to promise a story that will throw light on the murkiness of Beatty’s persona. Once again, subject and object are in perfect balance.

The image, accompanied by the headline “Beatty, Baby & *Bugsy,*” suggests a paring away of Beatty’s storied womanizing and gallivanting and a return to basics with a new maturity accented by quite a few gray hairs (usually colored over in other photos of the time). This cover story seemingly has no truck with the accompanying item about Madonna, Beatty’s paramour of only a year before.
Beatty as cover boy. *On Entertainment Weekly...* and *Vanity Fair.*

The ideological message here is clear. Beatty settles down and is rewarded; he finds family, baby and a new movie. Madonna, on her own, is left to fend off rumors of AIDS. Thus the Reagan-Bush morality of the 1980s and early 1990s finally has its way with Beatty. The hand position in the photo could be read as a defensive acknowledgement of having been caged, pretending to exercise an active gaze while knowing that he is being scrutinized, closed in on.

The *Vanity Fair* photo goes straight to the signifiers of Beatty’s persona. A quintessential “movie star” portrait, it shows Beatty with dyed hair, teeth nearly as white as the phone he holds, photo-flash gleams in his eyes and discreetly airbrushed wrinkles. Several elements of the photo violate Dyer’s rule for male pin-ups. Not about to burst into action, Beatty is reclined in the shot. He looks at the spectator in a way that acknowledges the glance and does not deflect it by looking off or up or vanquishing it with a penetrating look. Beatty is offering himself to his beholder: “Hey, baby, I’m the telephone man.”

This, however, is superseded by the signifiers of the phone and the bathrobe. Beatty is adhering to Dyer’s rule about men engaged in action. He is doing something: talking on the phone. The phone
condenses all the aspects of his persona. On the phone, he could be lining up a film deal, arranging casting or locations, raising money for a candidate (stories about his efforts for McGovern invariably showed him on the phone), calling one of the women listed in his little black book, or even, according to the old Joan Collins story, having sex. Beatty's telephone connotes power, freedom, privilege, aggressiveness, those things about Beatty which might appear to make him a male fantasy figure but which, more evidently, make him threatening. Clad in a bathrobe, Beatty, reclining and available, doesn't look so secretive. He could be making a post-coital call; at any rate, we have him in private quarters. He appears to make his privacy public, yet in an image rich in connotation but devoid of information, revelatory of nothing. He is so self-consciously playing to the media image of "Warren Beatty" as to render it meaningless; in this nether-world of image making, to admit is to deny.

Furthermore, the caption in the lower right-hand corner may overshadow the entire, overdetermined image. The glowing playboy entrepreneur is quoted saying "I grew up thinking I would marry the first woman I had sex with." The Hollywood high-roller is thus thrown back to his beginnings in Arlington, Virginia, reassuringly middle-class and adherent to homespun values. The statement casts the photo into incoherence, leaving the reader to suspect once again that he/she doesn't know Warren Beatty.

Lest the mock-glamour of the photo and the contradiction of the quotation draw the usual amounts of male disdain and envy, there is yet a third enticement, the promise of a "one on one" with man's man author Norman Mailer. This suggests a showdown, the High Noon Beatty said he couldn't play. If Mailer could lay bare Gary Gilmore's secrets, what chance has Beatty of remaining enigmatic? With Mailer, the star trip boils down to two guys talking. If the photo collapses the star's persona into self-parody and if the caption sends Beatty once again into fascinating mystery or annoying incoherence, depending on the reader's point of view, the presence of Mailer promises answers and closure.

This promise is consistent with Bugsy, the film Beatty is promoting, which offers a new, emotive actor who holds nothing back. Its release, combined with the awaited baby and marriage, leaves Warren Beatty as enigmatic as ever. Now at least he is a mystery who appears to conform to a pro-family, safe-sex social agenda. He could yet age into a "beloved" personality like Katharine Hepburn, who in
her day struck many as an irritating nonconformist. His next announced film project, a remake of the Cary Grant-Deborah Kerr “woman’s picture,” *An Affair to Remember* (1957), co-starring his wife, Annette Bening, should continue the game of subject and object that Beatty plays before the public. He is willing to make himself an object, in a way that often seems to defy what is permissible for a male star. His subjectivity belongs to him, as do his male prerogatives, but in ways that are anything but reassuring to male spectators.

NOTES

1 Such notions were first put forward by Richard Dyer in a 1982 article, “Don’t Look Now: The Male Pin-up,” *The Sexual Subject: A “Screen” Reader in Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992). Dyer saw the prototypical female pin-up posing with downcast eyes, while the male “looks off or up.” “When the female pin-up returns the viewer’s gaze, it is usually some kind of smile, inviting. The male pin-up, even at his most benign, still stares at the viewer,” asserting the man’s “right to look.” However, Dyer points out that the male-active/female-passive order that these conventions observe does not hold true in reality. “Most of us probably experience looking and being looked at, in life as in art, somewhere among these shifting relations of activity and passivity. Yet it remains the case that images of men must disavow this element of passivity if they are to be kept in line with dominant ideas of masculinity-as-activity. For this reason images of men are often images of men doing something” (267–70).


4 Neale, 18. This assertion seems rigidly doctrinaire on its face; Paul Smith calls Neale’s claim “self-fulfilling, or at least circular. If it is first assumed that the apparatus is male, geared to a male heterosexual gaze, then any instance of objectification will have to involve the ‘feminisation’ of the object. However, instances of the erotic display of the male body are rife in contemporary film and media production, and can be shown to be geared to either male or female spectators (or both) in different contexts in ways that do not conform to the conventional treatment of the female body.” *Clint Eastwood: A Cultural Production* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 157–58. However, Smith demonstrates the problems with attempts to refute Neale; he doesn’t supply examples of that “display of the male body” that current media are supposed to be “rife” with, and he later tries to prove objectification in the 1970s films of Clint Eastwood, which constitute as extreme an example of male spectator positioning and effacement of the body as can be found.
Cohan and Hark, 8. Cohan’s work on the almost excessively displayed body of William Holden in *Picnic* (1955) and its advertising points out that when a man’s physique is exhibited for an explicitly female gaze an array of connotations equivocate what is undeniably a pleasure in looking, albeit an illicit one which the film must explain away. Cohan suggests that the carefully constructed studio and press publicity about Holden maintained an easy masculinity that could contain contradictions of it, such as the exhibitionist role in *Picnic*. “Masquerading as the American Male in the Fifties: *Picnic*, William Holden and the Spectacle of Masculinity in Hollywood Film,” *Camera Obscura* #25–26 (January/May 1991), 43–74.

For example, Cohan links “the sincerity of [William Holden’s] screen presence to his middle-class family life as a means of conforming his masculinity to a homogeneous national identity: that all-American boy next door, who grew up, went to war and came back to put on a grey flannel suit and live in the suburbs” (65). Cohan argues that Holden’s reassuringly “ordinary” persona gave him license to make films that showed a seamier side of life. Another example would be the sense of James Stewart as an all-American war hero and family man which allowed him to play psychotic figures for Alfred Hitchcock and Anthony Mann without harm to his image.


Among roles Beatty is reported to have turned down are *PT 109* (as Lt. John F. Kennedy; Beatty was the president’s personal choice to play him), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *The Way We Were*, *The Sting*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Godfather*.


Easthope, 154.


Thomson, 304.

Beatty placed *Shampoo* in the company of Jean Renoir’s *La Règle Du Jeu* (*Rules of the Game*, 1939), as a “movie about hypocritical sophisticated fools having a good time and being funny in the middle of a social catastrophe.” Peter Biskind, “Chronicle of a Life Untold,” *Premiere*, January 1992, 58. The film takes place on Election Day 1968 with a cast of self-obsessed people exemplified by Nixon, seen everywhere on posters and TV screens. Made soon after the end of the McGovern campaign, for which Beatty had taken off nearly a year and a half and raised over a million dollars, and released less than six months after Nixon resigned the presidency, *Shampoo* depicts narcissism, of which Beatty is often accused, as the real enemy of democracy.
Once again, Beatty complicates and distances himself from the popular perception of him, while appearing to acknowledge it in other ways.


25 Ansen, 48.

26 Andrew Britton, "Cary Grant: Comedy and Male Desire" (Newcastle upon Tyne: Tyneside Cinema, 1983), 10–11.

27 Thomson, 268.

28 Dyer, 270.