



The Star as Icon: Celebrity in the Age of Mass Consumption

Daniel Herwitz

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Princess Diana, Jackie O, Grace Kelly?the star icon is the most talked about yet least understood persona. The object of adoration, fantasy, and cult obsession, the star icon is a celebrity, yet she is also something more: a dazzling figure at the center of a media pantomime that is at once voyeuristic and zealously guarded. With skill and humor, Daniel Herwitz pokes at the gears of the celebrity-making machine, recruiting a philosopher's interest in the media, an eye for society, and a love of popular culture to divine our yearning for these iconic figures and the role they play in our lives.

Herwitz portrays the star icon as caught between transcendence and trauma. An effervescent being living on a distant, exalted planet, the star icon is also a melodramatic heroine desperate to escape her life and the ever-watchful eye of the media. The public buoys her up and then eagerly watches her fall, her collapse providing a satisfying conclusion to a story sensationally told?while leaving the public yearning for a rebirth.

Herwitz locates this double life in the opposing tensions of film, television, religion, and consumer culture, offering fresh perspectives on these subjects while ingeniously mapping society's creation (and destruction) of these special aesthetic stars. Herwitz has a soft spot for popular culture yet remains deeply skeptical of public illusion. He worries that the media distances us from even minimal insight into those who are transfigured into star icons. It also blinds us to the shaping of our political present.

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