



## Eyes Wide Shut: Tom, Nicole, Stardom and Visual Memory

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**Abstract:** The star phenomenon is highly visual; among the many texts that conglomerate into what is experienced as a "star", visual artefacts have a privileged position. Visual memory, then, is an important but little considered factor in the construction of the star persona. In order to investigate the role played by visual memory in star personae, Australian women's magazine coverage of the Nicole Kidman/Tom Cruise breakup is examined. This exploration shows how magazines create interpretive contexts for images-contexts that can change, exposing the instability of the meanings of the images. The media's use of star images is frequently influenced by powerful and highly paid publicists, whose job it is to attempt to control the possible interpretations of the images, and therefore to shape and reshape visual memory.

**Key terms:** visual memory, star, spectacle, narrative, women's magazines, Kidman/Cruise.

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### Introduction

"Celebrity is a never-ending series of images to be read", writes Joshua Gamson in his scholarly study *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*. He continues: "there is no endpoint, no final ground".<sup>1</sup> Visual memory holds all these images together in the agglomeration experienced as the "star persona", and is therefore a crucial but rarely considered element in the construction of the star.

This paper explores the phenomenon of visual memory, and its instability, by focusing on visual representations of Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman. The images under consideration are specifically those in Australian women's magazines in the six months after their February separation.

This examination of the visual aspects of the coverage confirms, first of all, the importance of the visuality of stardom itself. Spectacle is the framework which supports the narratives of stardom. But beyond this, the paper argues that the magazine coverage, in providing the interpretive context for the images, facilitates a process by which visual memories are unpicked and then knit together again into different formations.

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994, p158

Richard Dyer provides the theoretical understanding of stardom that underpins this paper, emphasising the manner in which a performer's star persona is made up of many different texts across many media. The visual texts—the performance itself; stills; portraits; personal appearances; advertisements; posters; images on packaging and merchandise—have a privileged position in the hierarchy.

Celebrity is supported by its own publicity industry, which vigorously exerts itself to shape and control what—and how—the star signifies. This is emphatically the case, even though writers from Stuart Hall and Roland Barthes on have insisted that there are no guarantees in the process of communication; those who “encode” meaning or “author” messages cannot guarantee that their meaning will be received exactly as intended.<sup>2</sup> Any star text, therefore, is a site of constant negotiation. The star's publicists attempt to narrow the range of possible interpretations available, by exerting control over the texts and contexts in which the star is represented—by trying, in fact, to shape visual memory. The Kidman-Cruise breakup is particularly interesting, because it has created a situation where publicists for the two stars are attempting to shape opposing versions of visual memories.

### **Magazines, stardom and visibility**

The separation of Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman after ten years of marriage was announced on February 7, 2001, by the publicist, Pat Kingsley, who at the time worked for both of them. Although the couple are total strangers to just about all of us, the separation had a huge emotional impact on many people. “Not since the death of Diana, the Princess of Wales has a story generated so much shock, speculation and sadness as the demise of Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise's marriage”, stated the *Australian Women's Weekly*.<sup>3</sup> *New Idea* reported that: “Fascination over the break-up reached fever pitch as more than 6,000 messages were posted on US-based America Online Internet service by people expressing their views less than 24 hours after the split”.<sup>4</sup>

The mass media's attention to the breakup is appropriate, since the mass media are a precondition of the establishment of stardom. Richard Dyer points to its crucial role. “The star phenomenon consists of everything that is publicly available about stars”, he writes:

A star's image is not just his or her films, but the promotion of those films and of the star through pin-ups, public appearances, studio hand-outs and so on, as well as interviews, biographies and coverage in the press of the star's doings and “private” life.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding”, extract printed in *Culture, Media, Language*, eds. Stuart Hall et al., Routledge/Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, London, 1980.

Also see Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, Fontana, London, 1997

<sup>3</sup> “What Next for Nicole?” *Australian Women's Weekly*, March 2001, p25

<sup>4</sup> Cathy Griffin, Peter Kent and Rachael Lloyd, “Nicole's Heartbreak”, *New Idea*, February 17 2001, p7

<sup>5</sup> Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, BFI/MacMillan, London, 1986, pp2-3

Dyer adds that the star image is therefore “always extensive, multimedia, intertextual”, and that within these complex constructions, “different elements predominate in different star images”.<sup>6</sup>

In particular, it is the visual aspects of mass media that allow stardom to thrive. To sustain such intense visibility, the star, therefore, must almost always be an individual of impressive appearance.

“Let’s face it”, says personal publicist Amanda Weber, “looks is a great commodity in this business, and it tends to carry over to publications and television and everything else. If you have a great-looking person you can almost sell them on their looks alone”.<sup>7</sup>

And when two good-looking performers are married to each other—as were Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman—the publicity potential is huge. Their couple-hood has been a particularly important element of their star images, with the attention to their relationship repeated in text and photographs, in the films they made together, in their personal appearances—in short, in “all that is publicly available” about them. As a result, the composite star image of each one has a large component of visual memories of the Tom-and-Nicole entity; it’s almost impossible to think of one without remembering the other.

So what happens when this predominant element of couple-hood is no longer appropriate, for example when the “golden couple” separates? What happens to the visual memories of the couple that are at the core of the collage of elements making up the star image?

It must be remembered that star images can accommodate change. Indeed, they feed on it, because their multimedia, intertextual nature is ever evolving:

The moving signifier of the celebrity is spawned by new configurations of information known about the celebrity’s professional life and personal life. New temporary gestalts are formed concerning the celebrity.<sup>8</sup>

Just as Kidman and Cruise’s relationship generated interest, their split whipped up a maelstrom of media attention. Newspapers, for example, reported it in hard news and features, and also published opinion pieces, cartoons and satires.<sup>9</sup> Women’s magazines had a field day, with the story still claiming covers as this is being written in July.

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<sup>6</sup> Dyer *Heavenly Bodies* p3

<sup>7</sup> Gamson p73

<sup>8</sup> P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997, p68

<sup>9</sup> **Hard news:** “Break-Up Shocks Kidman”, *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), February 12 2001, p12

**Features:** “The End of Tom and Nicole’s Days of Thunder”, *Australian*, February 7 2001, p6

**Opinion Piece:** Michelle Gunn, “Too Little Time for Love”, *Australian*, February 7 2001, p12

**Cartoons:** Neil, *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), February 11 2001: Cruise is shown saying, “Remember, Nicole, I get the lead role in our divorce or it’s off”.

**Satire:** Mike Colman, “Why Their Union *Really* Broke Up”, *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), February 11 2001, p135. This article puts the blame on the couple’s arguments about various issues in Australian football, “one of the biggest issues facing humanity over the past week”.

The magazines invariably accompanied the story with several pages of images of Tom and Nicole. The close interdependence of star spectacle and narrative is demonstrated by the way that spectacle is contextualised by narrative, and narrative is inflected by spectacle.

A typical example is the double page spread with the photos arranged in chronological order, constructed by *Woman's Day*.<sup>10</sup> The first photo is labelled 1990, and there is one subsequent image for each year to 2000. The spread is titled, "They *smooched* to the end: The golden couple's life was just one long cuddle, every kiss a photo op, but it was just marriage impossible 2".

It's clear that this layout is designed to be read as a story—the story of Tom and Nicole's relationship. But not just that. The media-generated memories of the couple are inextricably bound up with how they look; the story of the relationship is based on visual memories. The 1990 image, for example, is captioned "Fresh-faced and frizzy-haired, Nicole is every inch the Aussie tomboy who captured Tom's heart—at high speed—on *Days of Thunder*". The next image again makes a connection between the visual aspects of Kidman's appearance and the state of the couple's relationship: "Nicole's heels and hemline are rising with her status as the new Mrs Cruise".<sup>11</sup>

## The perfect couple

One particular photograph, published in *New Weekly* under a heading "Tom & Nicole: The Memories",<sup>12</sup> is the sort of image of Cruise and Kidman that cemented their position as "the film colony's first couple", living "a glittering, fairytale love story".<sup>13</sup>

In this shot, as in so many, the entity Tom-and-Nicole are in a classic mirroring position that is said to indicate togetherness. Their bodies are turned towards each other, and they are in such close physical proximity that they seem to be embracing. They even wear matching clothes, their black outfits visually melding them into one organism.

The visual memories of Tom-and-Nicole are based on a huge number of similar photographs, taken as the couple paused on red carpets, posed, and then went on into awards ceremonies or movie premieres.

These photos, although they appear casual—stars snapped while on their way into an event—are far from candid. The set-ups, writes Gamson:

are perhaps the clearest examples of the industrial nature of celebrity work. . . . For most participants, they are not events to be experienced but parts of their job. Staged and stagemanaged by entertainment organisations, they are routinely, habitually covered by news organisations. They are consciously and carefully organised to facilitate the capture and dissemination of standardised celebrity images in magazines and on television. These are true assembly lines, small parts in the more elaborate manufacture of fame: publicist brings

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<sup>10</sup> ""They *Smooched* to the End": The Golden Couple's Life Was Just One Long Cuddle, Every Kiss a Photo Op, but It Was Just Marriage Impossible 2, " *Woman's Day*, February 19 2001, pp10-11

<sup>11</sup> "They *smooched*", p10

<sup>12</sup> "Tom & Nicole: The Memories", *New Weekly*, February 19 2001, p17

<sup>13</sup> Lusetich, Robert, "Breaking Point", *Australian*, February 7 2001, p11

person to media, person pauses, photographer shoots, person becomes image, image is disseminated. Labor is divided. Media workers, eager for celebrity images for sales purposes, shoot the same standard-pose photos and ask simple questions that receive standardized answers. Entertainment-industry publicists and celebrities, eager for coverage for promotional purposes, provide easy but controlled access to celebrity images. The operation is mechanical, designed, routine.<sup>14</sup>

Kidman and Cruise have a strong chance of having their images circulated because they are both so photogenic. Kidman wears designer clothes well, a visual endorsement of consumer culture and extravagance. And although they are so equally visually appealing, together they are even better because they are so ideally contrasting. Her carefully coiffed, red curls contrasts with his dark, floppy, casual haircut. Her professionally applied, flawless makeup; his hint of five-o'clock bristles. Her shy, ladylike smile (no teeth showing); his broad, boyish grin (disclosing impressively perfect teeth). She gives off a calm, "female" aura; he sizzles with "male" energy.

Or course, she's a little taller than him—but doesn't that simply prove how confident he is of his masculinity?

Often these red-carpet photos show them "smooching", as the double-spread banner points out. These displays were often noted: another magazine runs a series of four images with the caption, "The power couple's appearance on Hollywood's red carpets was always characterised by open shows of affection".<sup>15</sup> They gaze into each other's eyes, their hands are entwined, Kidman ruffles Cruise's hair. Or Cruise nuzzles Kidman's neck or plants a kiss on her cheek, while she closes her eyes or gazes with apparent rapture. In terms of the industrial nature of star publicity that Gamson points out, these characteristic nuzzlings help differentiate the Tom-and-Nicole product from other celebrity couples.

There are other types of images of them too. There are, for example, stills from the movies they made together: *Days of Thunder*, *Far and Away*; *Eyes Wide Shut*. In each of these productions, they play a couple, and the stills capture poses that again indicate their close, intimate relationship. This is especially so for the *Eyes Wide Shut* images. One frequently used image is a mellow, peachy toned shot of an ecstatic-looking Kidman, dressed in a camisole, with Cruise nibbling her ear. It's no coincidence that this so neatly reiterates the smooches on the red carpet as the couple enter yet another premiere.

These type of images are planned and released by publicists—in the case of Cruise and Kidman, publicist is Pat Kingsley is renown for being particularly tough. One writer refers to her as one of "the real new powerbrokers" in Hollywood, saying that she is "all about maintaining the persona and controlling access and squelching anything which might possibly contradict the perceived image of their clients".<sup>16</sup> This approach in action is seen in the complaint, by an editor of *Rolling Stone*, "that more than twenty writers were approached for a cover story on Tom Cruise and were

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<sup>14</sup> Gamson p61

<sup>15</sup> "Up Close and Personal", *Who*, February 19 2001, pp30-1

<sup>16</sup> Freelance journalist Sharon Krum, quoted in Shane Danielsen, "Do Tell", *Weekend Australian, Review*, October 21-22 2000, p5

either vetoed by Cruise's publicist or opted out rather than work under the publicist's restrictions".<sup>17</sup>

It's difficult to know, however, exactly what involvement a publicist might have in the circulation of another type of Tom-and-Nicole image—the grainy paparazzi-type snaps of the couple with their children. The family values represented in the photos of Cruise picking up his son from school are emphasised in the caption: "He 'looked like an ordinary dad, definitely,' says a Sydney neighbour of Cruise's". On the same page: "Cruise entered the parents' race and helped clean up at Connor's sports day in Sydney last May".<sup>18</sup>

These images were valuable in the magazines' retrospective views of the couple's relationship, both because they provide an Australian link for the story, and because they supposedly demonstrate how ordinary these extraordinary people really are. Marshall notes the role played by this kind of knowledge about stars: "The ordinary elements of the film star are important as a marked entrance point for the audience to play with kinds of identity and identification".<sup>19</sup>

These shots, in fact, are just as important as the glamorous photos taken at premieres. They support the "perfect couple", "happy family" image that the smooching red-carpet shots establish. It is perfectly possible, therefore, that any of the "candid" shots has been in some way set up or aided by a publicist.

## The niggling questions

The coverage of the couple's separation became an opportunity for the magazines to recirculate various rumours. *New Idea*, for example, revisited whispers of earlier troubles in the marriage by publishing the transcript of a tape-recorded 1998 mobile phone argument between Kidman and Cruise, for which a US photographer was incarcerated in a halfway house for six months. In that call, Kidman warns her husband, "we're hanging on by a thread".<sup>20</sup>

*New Weekly's* roundup of the rumours ran under a banner that said, "Tom & Nicole: The Rumours". The article opens:

Since they tied the knot in a romantic, top-secret Christmas Eve ceremony at a Colorado resort just over a decade ago, the marriage of Hollywood's golden couple, Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, has been plagued by rumours.

So persistent has the gossip been—everything from the outrageous allegation that the union was a sham to the wildly inaccurate US newspaper report that they had to hire a sex therapist to teach them how to make love for the cameras in *Eyes Wide Shut*—the pair have been forced to fight back in the courts time and time again.<sup>21</sup>

The story then goes on to detail several of the juiciest rumours, and the couple's fervent denials. Also detailed are the many court cases they have fought, and won, in response to the allegations.

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<sup>17</sup> Gamson pp87-8

<sup>18</sup> "You Marry an Australian, You Basically Marry a Country," *Who*, February 19 2001, pp34-5

<sup>19</sup> Marshall p91

<sup>20</sup> "We're Hanging by a Thread, Tom," *New Idea*, pp4-7

<sup>21</sup> Jackie Brygel, "Marriage Impossible", *New Weekly*, February 19 2001, p12

The effect of these articles, included in coverage of the separation, is to suggest that the persistent rumours might have a grain of truth in them. Perhaps it is in the rumours, after all, that the explanation for their disaffection will be found.

*New Weekly's* rumour collection has another (probably unintentional) effect in the way that the condensation of ten years of denials and court cases in the article creates a sense of "protesting too much". Kidman, for example, sounds unconvincingly passionate when she says of the Tom-is-gay rumours, "I'll bet all my money I've ever made, plus his . . . that he doesn't have a gay lover, that he doesn't have a gay life . . . I did not marry for convenience. I would never, ever do that. You marry for love". And Cruise seems to be overreacting when he says, "Everything that is so sacred, that I feel so personally and deeply—basically, people are saying, 'That's a lie. It's a sham.' At a certain point I said, 'Fine, go ahead and prove it. Go ahead.'"<sup>22</sup>

One could almost think that the magazines were attacking Kidman and Cruise at their most vulnerable time by reprising all past public hurts. The justification is no doubt their journalistic obligation to provide the "full story", the "truth", "what really happened" for readers. *New Weekly* gestures at dismissing the stories as untrue and unfair. "There are ups and downs in any marriage. . . You just have to move forward", Kidman is quoted at the end of the article.

As if indignantly denying the rumours, the full-page photograph accompanying the article shows Kidman and Cruise at their smoochy happiest. Their arms are wrapped around each other in a close embrace, they wear matching grey outfits, and both smile broadly yet neither looks at the camera—apparently in their own intimate world of fun and pleasure.

## The split

Pat Kingsley's statement blamed work pressures for the couple's separation: "Citing the difficulties inherent in divergent careers, which constantly keep them apart, they concluded that an amicable separation seems best for both of them".<sup>23</sup>

But this "public" explanation did not satisfy the public, which—if media interest indicates—hungered to know "what really happened". Dyer's explorations of stardom argue that much of the drive behind the phenomenon relies on "a dynamic of secrecy and confession, concealment and revelation".<sup>24</sup> He writes that "[t]he whole media construction of stars encourages us to think in terms of 'really'—what is Crawford really like? which biography, which word-of-mouth story, which moment in which film discloses her as she really was?"<sup>25</sup> Stars, he says, "bespeak our society's investment in the private as the real".<sup>26</sup> Hence the cover of *New Idea* of February 17 promised: "Tom & Nicole—The Truth".

The authentic person can be found in the private, and that is often linked to "the sexual as the ultimate secret":

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<sup>22</sup> Brygel

<sup>23</sup> "The End of Tom and Nicole's Days of Thunder"

<sup>24</sup> Dyer *Heavenly Bodies* p143

<sup>25</sup> Dyer *Heavenly Bodies* p2

<sup>26</sup> Dyer *Heavenly Bodies* p13

The star system, and arguably twentieth-century culture in general, depends on an interpretive schema that equates identity with the private and furthermore accords the sexual the status of the most private, and thus the most truthful, locus of identity.<sup>27</sup>

We can see from this that the images of Tom-and-Nicole smooching and parenting were in fact, public enactments of their private—and therefore supposedly authentic—sexual world. Why should they care so much about proving their “authentic” identities? Dyer notes:

Outside of a camp appreciation, it is the star’s really seeming to be what s/he is supposed to be that secures his/her star status. . . . Authenticity is both a quality necessary to the star phenomenon to make it work and also the quality that guarantees the authenticity of the other particular values a star embodies.<sup>28</sup>

This point is borne out by the amount of damages—\$192 million—claimed by Cruise when male porn star “Kyle Bradford” alleged he had had a gay affair with Cruise. Cruise’s lawsuit stated: “Because Cruise is a motion picture actor, he is dependent upon worldwide public acceptance of his films. Losing the respect and enthusiasm of a substantial segment of the movie-going public would cost Cruise very substantial sums”.<sup>29</sup> In other words, the allegation that Cruise was gay was perceived to be damaging to the “authenticity” of the values embodied in Cruise’s star persona; Cruise’s “authentic” heterosexuality, enacted so many times in front of camera lenses, was valued at \$192 million.

But when the split was announced, “authenticity” had to be re-assessed. It had resided in those images of the happy couple, and the visual memories of them together made the news difficult to grasp. All the photos of Tom-and-Nicole smooching on the red carpets; all the film stills of them together; all the paparazzi shots of the happy family; together these formed a great weight of visual evidence that was difficult to immediately dismiss. The images of affectionate compatibility snarled the attempts to assimilate the new knowledge of their private incompatibility.

But almost immediately, a process of re-writing the visual memories began.

On February 7, the day the separation was announced in this country, the *Australian* ran an article titled “Breaking point”, that ran to almost a full page. It was illustrated by two photos superimposed on each other. The first was a red-carpet shot of Kidman and Cruise at the 2000 Academy awards. But the photograph has been roughly torn in two, the couple being violently visually separated by the ripped edges of the photo. (A similar image of a photograph seemingly torn in half was also used by the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* on the same day.<sup>30</sup> Beside it was a cartoon by Emmerson, using the same treatment and headed “Mission too impossible”.)

In the *Australian* image, no longer are the couple joined by entwined hands, which have disappeared into the torn area; indeed, they are looking in different directions

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<sup>27</sup> Dyer *Heavenly Bodies* p140

<sup>28</sup> Richard Dyer, “A Star is Born and the Construction of Authenticity”, in *Star Signs: Papers from a Weekend Workshop*, British Film Institute, London, p14

<sup>29</sup> Tiffany Dunk, “Setting the Story Straight”, *New Weekly*, May 14 2001, p12

<sup>30</sup> “Dream Pair Decides to Separate”, *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), February 7 2001, p2



and seem about to move off towards whatever they are looking at. The shot that once signified togetherness now indicates the opposite.

Below that *Australian* image is a snap of the two with their children, taken when they arrived at Sydney airport in 1996. A door frame in the background visually echoes the ripped gap in the image above. Again the photo has been overlaid with new meaning. Where once it had been a happy-family shot, it now emphasises the barrier between Kidman and Cruise.

Similarly, the happy, embracing image used by *New Weekly*, to “disavow” the collection of rumours it has published, instead absorbs the niggling questions, the persistent doubts. Photographs that obviously come from the same session were used on simultaneous covers of *New Idea* (“Nicole’s Heartbreak—‘Are You Having an Affair?’”<sup>31</sup>) and *Woman’s Day* (“Nicole and Tom: Why Did it Go *So Wrong?* The Inside Story”<sup>32</sup>). As they are retrospectively reinterpreted, those photos, and the others like them, are no longer as straightforwardly about smoochy happiness. Meaning is destabilised by the new context in which the photographs are published.

## Visual memories

Let’s look again at the original image of Tom-and-Nicole, the red-carpet shot that opened this paper. It was taken in Los Angeles in January this year, at the Golden Globe awards, not long before the announcement of the separation. Kidman and Cruise had arrived at the ceremony separately: “Expected to appear arm-in-arm, they stunned Hollywood’s glitterati by glaring daggers at each other and sitting at different tables”.<sup>33</sup>

There was just one photograph of them taken together—this one.

When the image is set in this context, it’s easy to see the disharmony between the two. Kidman seems to be pulling away, rearing back from Cruise. Her smile now appears particularly strained and artificial, her eyes hard. Cruise’s easy grin becomes, when the situation is explained, the expression of a consummate actor’s, able to effortlessly dissemble. She’s unhappy; he’s deceitful. And that’s just one possible interpretation among many.

Now when we look back over the couple’s visual narrative, as revealed in the red-carpet shots used by the magazines to tell the story of Tom-and-Nicole, it becomes noticeable that there are many images in which Kidman seems to be pulling away, or is passively enduring her husband’s affection, or has an awkward arm as a barrier between them. The two begin to seem as though they don’t even look good together. Cruise seems constantly badly dressed when compared to the immaculate Kidman—he is too scruffy, too casual.

Now, the magazines are beginning to publish and republish photos of Cruise and Penélope Cruz, his new love as it turns out. For example, there is the couple in a still from *Vanilla Sky*, the film they made together, on the cover of *Woman’s Day*, with a caption “Tom Taunts Distraught Nicole: I’m in Love Again”.<sup>34</sup> Cruz’s tousled thick

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<sup>31</sup> Cover, *New Idea*, February 17 2001

<sup>32</sup> Cover, *Woman’s Day*, February 19 2001

<sup>33</sup> Griffin, Kent and Lloyd p7

<sup>34</sup> Cover, *Woman’s Day*, July 30 2001

brown hair and somewhat pointed facial features make her closer in appearance to Cruise than Kidman was. Perhaps, in the end, the visual contrasts between Kidman and Cruise were indicators that they didn't belong together; could Cruise and Cruz be the new, improved Tom-and-Nicole?

## End

Joshua Gamson's remarks on celebrity being a "series of images to be read", which opened this paper, point to constant instability as a characteristic of star images. This, of course, is the point: audiences are engaged in an on-going, active process that demands constant re-interpretation, constant gathering of fresh information.

The struggle over the interpretive context in which the star's images are set is the fight over control of visual memories. Which narratives will be attached to the images? As Dyer points out, although stardom depends so heavily on appearances, the dynamic of public/private, performance/"authenticity" "leads us towards that which is *hidden behind or beyond the image*, hidden from sight".<sup>35</sup> Thus the process of reinterpretation involves a constant assessment of "authenticity". As Gamson says, authenticity is "always potentially in question, always in need of confirmation".<sup>36</sup> And there is always the danger that "yesterday's markers of sincerity and authenticity are today's signs of hype and artifice".<sup>37</sup> So is Cruise gay, or is he a proudly, publicly affectionate heterosexual? Is Kidman emotionally cold, or is she a passionate, vulnerable woman? Were all their red-carpet cuddles just a role they played for the cameras?

The struggle between Tom and Nicole is now about gaining control of publicity, and therefore of the context in which the all-important visual memories are re-made. At the time of writing, it seems that Kidman is easing ahead in the sympathy stakes, in her homeland Australia anyway. Evidence of this can be seen in one reader's letter to *Woman's Day*: "Australia will not forgive you for doing this to 'our Nic,' Tom!"<sup>38</sup>

Although the same kinds of process are undoubtedly at work in other media—as well as in the media of other countries—I hesitate to generalise that the contexts created in the Australian women's magazines are identical with those created elsewhere. While the images used around the world may be from the same circulating photo archive, the contexts in which they are set—and the ways in which they can be interpreted—are innumerable.

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<sup>35</sup> Dyer *Heavenly Bodies* p145 (my emphasis)

<sup>36</sup> Gamson p140

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