Dear Friends of Richard:

I am humbled by the company in which I find myself in this tribute dossier, not to mention by its subject. But it offers the perfect context to convey the unique combination of the scholarly and the sociable that characterizes Richard Dyer’s contribution to the field. “Friends of Richard,” like “Friends of Dorothy,” is an imagined, ever-expanding community.

In Critical Visions, the film theory anthology I coedited with Timothy Corrigan and Meta Mazaj, Richard Dyer is the best-represented author, with three selections: from White, from Stars, and his 1976 classic, “Entertainment and Utopia”—much of which I know by heart: “To call attention to the gap between what is and what could be, is, ideologically speaking, playing with fire.”\(^1\) None of these was dispensable.

Indeed, many other papers, essays, and book excerpts by Dyer were candidates for inclusion in that anthology for their centrality to the field and their promise of relevance for future generations learning film “theory.” As important as their standing in intellectual history, however, is their affective power. I have very personal relationships with Dyer’s texts: with my Xerox of “Lana: Four Films of Lana Turner” from Movie, acquired long ago through interlibrary loan; with the stamp inside the front cover of Gays in Film from Cinemabilia, New York’s legendary, long-shuttered secondhand cinema bookstore; with the broken spine of Now You See It, after years of teaching from it; with prose that seems to express my secret self.\(^2\) And these cherished artifacts have pictures: I traced the image from the cover of Gays in Film to publicize a screening of Olivia (Jacqueline Audry, 1951) for the feminist film society I ran in college, and smiled that he’d chosen that image of Sal Mineo for the cover of The Matter of Images.\(^3\)

It was Dyer’s work that linked scholarship to affective life for me as a young queer feminist scholar; the privilege of his friendship keeps this alive for me today. My feminist film theory bona fides go back to

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undergraduate immersion in the pages of Camera Obscura—I loved the psychoanalytic discourse upon which Richard looked askance (imagine a gif of Richard Dyer looking askance here) as much as I loved his writing on Rita Hayworth’s charisma and Judy Garland’s voice. But it was easier to write like the cine-feminists than to emulate Dyer’s breathtaking precision with plain language. It is clear to me now that if he were writing and publishing at the same time and in the same place as the Screen- and mf-influenced feminists and they were not citing each other, it was because there was a theoretical, methodological, and ideological gulf between these schools of writing on gender and cinema. But I did not find it a contradiction at the time. Both were, and remain, vital.

I am not arraying Dyer and feminist film theory in opposition; often his warmth and admiration seemed more overtly feminist than dismissals of Mae West or Dietrich as phallic women. I think of the section on “independent women” from Stars that builds so fruitfully on Molly Haskell’s typology of female roles (while calling out her heterosexism); the chapter on lesbian feminist aesthetics in Now You See It; appreciations of Diana Ross and Julie Andrews; and the uncanny conjuring of Laura’s subjectivity in his monograph on Brief Encounter (David Lean, 1945).

Feminist theorists, eager to display the rigor of their work, lacked the easy intimacy with moving-image culture that Dyer showed with every spot-on descriptive phrase. Take, for example, his account of the stereotype of the predatory lesbian who operates “not by direct assault or honest seduction but by stealth.”

Finally, I met my role model when I invited him to speak at the New York Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in the early 1990s (I think he presented his work on the homo-erotics of Merchant Ivory–style “heritage” films about British landed gentry, followed up by a talk on porn star Ryan Idol). I learned that just as Dyer’s work showed a special regard for women and their feelings, so did his company. His genius for friendship was evident in the gracious way he spoke of close colleagues like Ginette Vincendeau and of more distant ones like my mentor Teresa de Lauretis. Every subsequent encounter with Richard situated intellectual exchange in a body- and soul-sustaining activity like visiting a tearoom, a bookshop (Dyer knows the catalog of London’s Persephone Books as thoroughly as the series’ editor), or a museum where each postcard beckoned to him with an addressee in mind.

In Glasgow for the Screen conference, I began to realize just how many women had such “privileged” relationships to Richard. We were everywhere—Lisa Henderson from the University of Massachusetts, Anu Koivunen and Tytti Soila from the University of Stockholm, Katie Grant at Sussex, Jules Pidduck at the University of Montreal, and Jackie Stacey at Manchester, among others. Walking home from dinner, I shared with the group that my family and I had watched Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger’s I Know Where I’m Going (1945) to prepare for the trip to Scotland. Suddenly, we were singing—Richard, Screen coeditor Sarah Street, and I—with Ruby Rich recording. Wendy Hiller’s travel tune, like Andrews’s “I Have Confidence” in The


Sound of Music (Robert Wise, 1965), is an anthem for smart girls and boys who both see through and find something compelling about plucky British femininity.

When I proposed elbowing my way into this Cinema Journal homage to Dyer despite having been unable to attend the tribute at SCMS Atlanta, I blurted out that I wanted to write about “Richard’s lesbian ducklings.” I didn’t know what I meant by this, except that through his gentle imprint I feel like I know where I’m going when I follow his lead.

Patricia

Dear Sir or Madman

by LOUIS BAYMAN

Dear Vice Chancellor, University of London:

I think now that the perpetrator has retired it is time for me to explain the curious fug that emanated for years from the basement of your university. That you were ignorant of the facts was proclaimed by none other than their executor, Professor Richard Dyer, surmising, to what can be described only as cackles by the assembled students, that the college management had “probably no idea” what he was teaching that autumn morning.

Being only an apprentice to the master of these arts, I did not consider it in my power as teaching assistant to obstruct them. For the deceptively titled “European Crime Film” did not broach our Anglo-Saxon legal statutes, or provide deductive skills to a vigilant citizenry, and still less an appreciation of crime as one of the few remaining gentlemanly pursuits. Dyer began an earlier treatise on Brief Encounter (David Lean, 1945) by remarking that there are good films and there are lovely films. But his intention was to emphasize the really, vilely, nasty realms of commoner tastes. I became aware in terror that this peak to his career dissecting popular culture would be devoted to serial killer cinema. Mr. Vice Chancellor! Have you ever wondered what sonic properties are obtained by the squelches during sex with a corpse? Would you care to know how filmmakers achieve realism on a low budget to show two weeks’ worth of bodily decomposition, or the material they study to verify the results? I didn’t think so. Nor, I suggest, did any of the young charges at your institution.

We were taught that if we wanted to know the films with the most deeply affective charge, those least interested in canons of respectability, those most directly visceral in their appeal, then it was to serial killer cinema that we must look. Delirium is not only the product of