

heralded 'the Movies' Prodigal Son-of-a-Gun Returns' and 'All is Forgiven' (quoted in McGilligan 1975: 45). During his time at Warner Bros. during the 1930s, the casting of Cagney as the tough and fast-dealing street hoodlum seriously limited his image. At the same time, however, that image also appeared to represent the star's combative and uncompromising attitude towards the studio system.

Stars as Property

In the 1930s and 1940s, the five vertically integrated Hollywood studios dominated the domestic film industry through their control of exhibition in the United States. By their strategic ownership of theatres across the country, the majors were able to maximise their profits while blocking the entry of independent producers into the business. Stars played a vital role in the studios' control of the American film industry. Established stars offered a means for attempting to stabilise audience demand, while inside the studios, departments also fed the star system through the organised development of new star identities. A variety of methods were used to construct and promote the images of stars and the effects of star appeal were felt not only in the film business but also in other areas of the consumer economy.

While powerful figures in the economics of the studio system, the professional freedom of stars was contained by contractual conditions under which they were employed by the studios. The term contract defined the relationship between the star and the studio in ways that served the economic interests of the studios first and foremost. For the duration of the contract, producers and studio executives were able to manipulate the career of the star. In certain cases, stars disputed their contractual obligations and actively resisted the use of their labour by studio management. Such was the extent of the studios' control over the domestic film market in the United States, however, that there existed no space in which to operate that was totally free of studio influence. In the studio era, stars found that they became the virtual property of the studios.

4 RETHINKING THE SYSTEM

From the late 1940s, conditions inside the film industry – and American society in general – led to the breakdown of the vertically integrated studio system. While the studios had built their power through domination of film exhibition, from the 1950s the studios began to see their role principally as distributors. The medium of television presented new opportunities for diversification into small-screen entertainment. Further change in the structure of the film industry occurred as, from the late 1960s, all the major studios were gradually acquired by larger corporations. This trend located ownership of the film business in a broader conglomerate structure and, with many of the new owners of the studios holding interests in other media industries, the Hollywood film business became positioned in a diversified entertainment marketplace. This chapter looks at the shaping of the star system in these contexts, initially examining the significant changes made to the business of stardom following the breakdown of the vertically integrated industry, followed by a look at stars in the age of conglomeration.

Hollywood Reorganisation

Inside the vertically integrated system of the studio era, the oligopolistic control of the domestic film business had caused independent exhibitors and producers to demand an end to the non-competitive practices that maintained the power of the studios. Although the Justice Department began antitrust proceedings against the majors in 1938, it was not until

after the Second World War that these actions would impact on the industry. In December 1946, the decree was passed preventing studio distributors from continuing the practices of block-booking and clearances (see Conant 1981). Further change came in 1948, when the Supreme Court ruled that Paramount should divorce the company's theatre circuit from its production and distribution operations. The case affected the whole industry, with all the vertically integrated studios required to sign decrees consenting to divest their theatre holdings. Although all the studios eventually signed consent decrees, the industry did not change overnight, and Warner Bros., Twentieth Century Fox and MGM would not complete divestiture of their theatres until the 1950s.

At the same time as the studios were responding to the need for structural reform, the domestic audience for cinema in North America began to rapidly decline. Immediately after the Second World War, in 1946, the US box office achieved a historic high of 4,0673 million admissions, an average of 78.2 million admissions each week. This high was achieved in an era when movie-going was a regular weekly ritual for Americans. By 1950, however, admissions had fallen to 3,0175 million (58 million per week), and the figure continued to decline during the decade, with the 1959 box office recording 1,488.2 million (28.6 million weekly) admissions.

One important factor in the decline of the movie-going audience was the growth in popularity of television. In 1949, television ownership in American homes was estimated to stand at 940,000 sets. In 1950, four million sets were in use and by the end of the 1950s, 90 per cent of American homes were estimated to have television. However, television was not the only cause of the declining audience. As John Belton (1994) argues, during the 1950s the United States experienced other social changes that would have a significant impact on patterns of movie-going. A fall in the hours of the average working week, together with higher levels of disposable income, saw Americans preferring to spend their leisure time and money on participatory recreations such as gardening, golfing, hunting and fishing. Compared to cinema-going, television, with its in-home and constant on-demand entertainment, was more easily suited to fit these busy leisure lifestyles. A visit to the cinema therefore began to appear more of a special event than an established ritual. A further factor influencing patterns of cinema-going was the drive to suburbanisation. Post-war loans, cheap

mortgages and the prosperous economy of the 1950s extended home ownership, resulting in a boom of house building in new out-of-town developments. As the suburbs began to characterise the ideals of domestic living for the period, these new residential spaces took audiences away from the urban centres where the main first-run theatre houses were located. In the 1950s, therefore, the film industry in America was forced to adapt to new structural conditions, together with a fall in the movie-going audience effected by the challenge of television and changing social conditions.

While the breakdown of the vertically integrated oligopoly may suggest the market was suddenly open to greater competition, history saw the studios continue to maintain their power. As the main suppliers of films to independent exhibitors and the circuits they had previously owned, the Hollywood studios transformed the nature of their power by re-orientating their business away from the control of exhibition and towards the control of distribution. While still making some of their own in-house productions, the studios increasingly acted as distributors for projects created by independent producers. When seen in this context, 'independent production' is a potentially misleading expression, for the financing of independent projects was frequently secured prior to production through the agreement of distribution deals with the studios. In their role as production financiers, the studios could still control competition from independent production, without facing the costs and risk of investing in an extensive in-house production state.

With a declining audience, Hollywood cut back on the number of films produced each year. Previously, the films produced by the studios were guaranteed a market in the first-run houses and the studios had maintained factory-like production schedules to keep a constant flow of films into the theatres. This security was removed with the ending of block-booking and the divestiture of theatres, and the studios were now required to sell their films individually to theatres owned by separate corporations. This situation had a major effect on the organisation of production. To meet demand, production in the 1930s and 1940s was based on the central producer and producer-unit systems of production. As the demand for films decreased, Hollywood reorganised production around individual film projects. This change heralded the arrival of what Janet Staiger describes as the 'package-unit' system of production:

Rather than an individual company containing the source of the labour and materials, the entire industry became the pool for these. A producer organised a film project: he or she secured financing and combined the necessary labourers ... and the means of production (the narrative 'property', the equipment, and the physical sites of production). (1985c: 330)

Staiger suggests that the impact of this change saw the end of the self-contained studio and the movement in the industry towards organising production around the film and not the firm. Rather than owning the entire means of production, which would be used across many productions, the unit making a film would lease or purchase resources for that project alone. The change to the package-unit system would dramatically effect the employment and status of stars in the industry.

Reworking the System

Package-unit production had several significant effects on the star system. With a lower volume of production, the studios sold off or leased their physical assets, and cut back on overheads by releasing staff from contracts. Stars, the most costly category of labour, were previously employed on term contracts extending up to seven years. With the move to package-unit production, stars became freelance labour, hired for short periods on separate film projects. In the new system of production, the packaging of a project involved the bringing together of key personnel during development. As Richard Dyer MacCann explains, a package 'usually consisted of a writer and his script, one or two stars, and even a director' (1962: 55). The creation of a package in the new freelance labour market gave increased powers to talent agents in the industry. Representing the services of their independent clients, agents began to replace the studio executives in the planning of productions. With stars hired on a film-by-film basis, stars and their agents were able to negotiate fresh terms for each project the star signed to. A successful box office record could therefore enable star and agent to demand better terms with each new film project. For the most successful stars, it became possible to rapidly increase the fees for their services. Star wages therefore grew more rapidly than they had in the studio era, further extending the hierarchical division between stars and other film

performers, and making the employment of stars an even more expensive cost in the budgeting of productions.

Block-booking had allowed films to be sold in such a way that poor products could be carried by high-profile features, with the costs of distribution and marketing spread across a body of films. As this practice was outlawed, and as Hollywood adapted to the package-unit system, films were sold individually, requiring a separate marketing campaign for every production. Each film now had to fare in the market according to its own merit. To differentiate a film in the new market, producers turned towards raising the production values of a film. The presence of high-profile stars acted as a simple and direct sign of production quality. When selling films on an individual basis, distributors turned to making the image of the star into the image of the film.

Under the regime of the studio term contract, stars were prevented from forming their own independent production companies. As stars were gradually released from the restrictions of the contract system, they explored the creative and economic advantages of running an independent. When Burt Lancaster signed a new contract with producer Hal Wallis in 1947, it was agreed the star would be allowed to accept outside work (see Fishgall 1995). At this time, Lancaster had formed a partnership with producer Harold Hecht, and together they launched Hecht-Lancaster Productions, making independent features, including *Apache* (1954) and *The Kentuckian* (1955). Following the conclusion of his contract with Wallis, Lancaster went fully independent in late 1956, joining with Hecht and associate Jim Hill to form Hecht-Hill-Lancaster, producing *Trapeze* (1956) and *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957) among other titles.

Other star-based independents formed at this time were Kirk Douglas's Bryna Productions, Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh's Curtleigh Productions, Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin's York Productions, and Marlon Brando's Pennabaker Productions. Creatively, the star-based independent companies allowed performers to take a broader role in decision-making. Staiger (1985c) suggests that one of the effects of the package-unit system was that stars and other key talent such as directors became more involved in business dealings than matters of filmmaking. From an economic perspective, independent production also allowed high-earning stars to obtain tax advantages through listing income under capital gains rather than personal salaries (see MacCann 1962).

Initially seen as a threat to the film business, television was increasingly viewed as an area for growth by the studios. Looking for areas in which to diversify as the film market declined, the Hollywood studios became providers of programmes for television. After ABC launched Disney's weekly television show 'Disneyland' in 1954, other studios followed the drift towards programme production. In 1955, ABC ran 'Warner Bros. Presents' and 'MG M Parade', and 'The Twentieth Century Fox Hour' appeared on CBS (see Anderson 1994). Further ground for collaboration between the film business and television came from the sale of feature films to the networks. The small studios Monogram and Republic had quickly struck deals to sell their films to television, but the major studios at first refused. When RKO fell on hard times in the early 1950s, the former major was broken up and its assets were sold to the television industry. RKO's film library was sold in 1955 to a subsidiary of the General Tire and Rubber Company, General TeleRadio Inc., which purchased the library of features for presentation on the six television stations they owned in major US cities (see Jewell and Harbin 1982). As the other studios also sold their pre-1948 libraries to the broadcasters, television became an accepted secondary market for feature films, thus becoming a new 'window' by which the film star system addressed the American public.

However, the new market for films also raised a fresh set of concerns over the legal control of star images. Two notable early disputes over the re-use of film performances featured the singing cowboy stars Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. Both Autry and Rogers had started careers as singers before starring as themselves in B-features for Republic Pictures during the 1930s. Alongside screen acting, both stars ran their own companies. Unlike the stars of the major studios, Rogers was able to develop his own separate company while under contract at Republic. The studio held the rights to Rogers' film work but the star's company held the right to exploit his image and that of his horse, Trigger (see Gaines 1992). Autry moved into television in 1950, starting his own company, Flying A Productions, to produce several series, including 'The Gene Autry Show' (1950-56), 'Annie Oakley' (1954-56) and 'The Adventures of Champion' (1955-56).

In the early 1950s Rogers and Autry individually took Republic to court over the sale of their feature films for re-use in cut-down form as television series episodes. Rogers complained that while Republic had the right to sell his films, television was an advertising-sponsored medium that

located the use of his image in a context of commercial exploitation that his company had the right to control. Autry argued a different line, stating that cutting his films for television could detrimentally tamper with his image. In both cases, the courts ultimately ruled against the stars.

When RKO and the small studios had sold their films to the networks, they agreed residual payments would be made to actors for re-use of their performances. Other studios, however, refused such payments. For the Screen Actors Guild, the subject of residuals became a new area of concern in the television era. By 1960 the issue was not resolved and, in combination with demands over health, pension and welfare plans, in March of that year the Guild called a strike. The studios held performance rights on all pre-1948 films but SAG was demanding that members be compensated for films after that time. David Prindle notes anti-strike reporting of the time argued that actors wanted 'to be paid twice for doing one job', representing stars as the privileged elite of a 'country-club union' (1988: 85). Prindle also suggests that with many stars acting as independent producers, they experienced a conflict of interest during the strike. When support for the strike therefore inevitably wavered, SAG compromised, dropping demands for residuals on films between 1948-1960 when producers agreed to pay residuals beginning from 1960. Prindle suggests this outcome remains an embarrassing episode in the history of the Guild, evoking bitterness amongst stars who see their pre-1960 work re-screened on television without remuneration to the performer. As the SAG agreements and the cases of Rogers and Autry indicate, television became a new battleground over the ownership and control of star images.

Case Study: MCA – the 'Star-Spangled Octopus'

During the late 1940s and 1950s, as the studio system was gradually dismantled, the most powerful agency in Hollywood was Music Corporation of America (MCA). As the studios reorganised, MCA's star client list enabled the agency to act responsively to the changing shape of Hollywood and negotiate a powerful position in the industry. Founded in 1924 by Dr Jules Stein, MCA served as a booking agent for dance bands in the Chicago area. After moving MCA to Hollywood in 1936, Stein hired the young Lew Wasserman as an agent. Wasserman quickly established his skill in brokering powerful deals for MCA film and music clients. In 1946, Wasserman

became president of the Corporation, guiding MCA through the years of upheaval in Hollywood.

MCA's power was built on the impressive list of major stars it represented. In 1959 that list included the following: Carroll Baker, Leslie Caron, Charles Bickford, Ernest Borgnine, Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, Joan Collins, Joseph Cotton, Joan Crawford, Tony Curtis, Dorothy Dandridge, Joan Fontaine, Clark Gable, Van Heflin, Charlton Heston, William Holden, Howard Keel, Boris Karloff, Charles Laughton, Jack Lemmon, Dean Martin, Marilyn Monroe, Gregory Peck, Anthony Perkins, Jane Russell, Joanne Woodward and Jane Wyman (see Canby 1959). MCA packaged film projects that brought together the agency's talent. *The Young Lions* (1958) was developed as a project to bring together leading MCA clients, Brando, Clift and Martin. For *Some Like It Hot* (1959), MCA packaged the director Billy Wilder with the film's stars, Curtis, Lemmon and Monroe. Monroe's final film, *The Misfits* (1961), was another MCA package, casting her alongside fellow clients Clift and Gable.

Backed by the agency's entire star roster, MCA was able to aggressively pursue beneficial deals for individual clients. In 1950 Wassermann used the influence of MCA to broker a key deal between Universal and his client, James Stewart, for the star's work on *Winchester '73* (1950). The deal granted the star a participating share in profits from the film. Profit participation went back to the days when Mary Pickford had personally earned half the gross box office receipts from her films. Similar terms were agreed in the 1930s by Mae West and the Marx Brothers.

When Stewart signed to *Winchester '73*, his star appeal was low, yet Wassermann's skill in deal-making drove negotiations in the star's favour. Wassermann had Universal agree to sign Stewart on a deal that gave the studio rights to the Broadway stage success, *Harvey*, in which Stewart was appearing at the time, providing the studio agreed to the star also appearing in *Winchester '73*. For the film version of *Harvey*, Stewart would be paid \$200,000 plus a share of net profits (i.e. profits after studio deductions for production and distribution costs), while for the second film the star would waive his salary in return for a 50 per cent share of gross profits (i.e. box office earnings before deductions) (see MacDougal 1998). With the first film predicted to be a sure fire hit and the second seen as a standard genre picture, Universal's William Goetz accepted Wassermann's terms. Universal also agreed to Wassermann's demands that Stewart be given sole star bill-

ing, along with approval of director and co-stars. The deal had advantages for both star and studio. For the star, depending on the film's performance at the box office, the deal could potentially raise his cumulative earning power. For the studio, the deal allowed Universal to employ a major star without paying up-front – or at all if the film failed at the box office. When, contrary to predictions, the fortunes of the two films were reversed, Stewart made over \$600,000. Stewart's was not the first profit participation deal but it became, for the time, the most profitable one. The deal made the issue of participations and the rights of approval key areas of negotiation in the new market of star labour.

MCA had started in the music industry before moving into film, and the agency's talent list provided a base from which to further diversify into television. With television growing as a popular medium in the United States, in 1952 MCA set up various subsidiaries, producing original television drama through Revue Productions, packaging live television shows as Management Corporation of America, and operating a television distribution arm, MCA-TV (see Canby 1959). Fearing that agents would be given too much power if they acted as both talent representatives and producers, in 1939 the SAG had passed a regulation preventing agents from producing films. The reason for this fear was that if agents functioned as both the representative and management of labour, a conflict of interests would ensue between the producer's need to keep costs down and the requirement that an agency act in the most beneficial ways for clients. However, MCA's power was evident in July 1952, when SAG granted a blanket waiver allowing Revue to operate as a leading production outfit. Historians have questioned the role that Ronald Reagan, president of SAG and an MCA client, may have had in manipulating these negotiations (see Prindle 1988). What is certain, however, is that Reagan went on to work in Revue's 'GE Theater' anthology, starting on a salary of \$125,000 and staying with the series for nine years.

During the late 1950s, MCA extended its presence in the film and television industries. In 1958, MCA paid \$35 million for Paramount's library of pre-1948 films, and between 1959–62 MCA acquired Decca Records in a deal giving the agency control of Universal Pictures, previously acquired by Decca in 1952. As MCA extended its influence from leading star agency to multimedia conglomerate, the agency was nicknamed the 'star-spangled octopus'. This power had its limits, however, for the US Justice Department

ordered MCA to divest the agency operations from its production interests and, in 1962, MCA left the agency business.

Although MCA ceased to be an agency, it nevertheless took an active role in starting several of the trends that redefined the star system following the reorganisation of the studios. MCA had played the role of packager, using its impressive list of stars to develop productions. Deals like that struck for James Stewart had exploited new possibilities in the earning power of stars in the freelance labour market. It was MCA which also saw the potential that the new popularity of television offered as a window for star talent. MCA may have moved on from its role as talent representative when diversifying into television production, but it was the power of stars which had made the company. Through its background in the successful management of star talent, MCA was able to respond to the changing conditions of Hollywood and to come to sit alongside the leading studios as a major provider of film and television entertainment.

Conglomeration and Diversification in the Entertainment Business

Following structural reorganisation during the 1950s, in the late 1960s Hollywood would experience a further period of major transformation, as ownership of the industry's main production/distribution companies changed hands. With cinema audiences continuing to decline from the 1950s, the former vertically integrated studios found they were vulnerable to take-over. From the end of the 1960s, the American film industry experienced significant changes of ownership that saw Hollywood remake through the twin forces of conglomerations and diversification.

Conglomeration resulted from the acquisition of the former studios by other companies and corporate groups outside the film business. Paramount was acquired in 1966 by Charles Bluhdorn's Gulf and Western, a large conglomerate with interests in manufacturing, agricultural products and financial services. As Gulf and Western increasingly concentrated its business around entertainment and publishing, the company was renamed Paramount Communications, Inc. Subsequently, Paramount Communications was sold in 1994 for \$9.75 billion to Viacom, Inc. The initial sale of Paramount began an era in which the other major studios were bought up by larger conglomerates. Warner Bros. was sold in 1967 to the Canadian television distributor, Seven Arts, but it is indicative of the chang-

ing shape of Hollywood at this time that Warner Bros./Seven Arts was sold two years later to a company with no background in entertainment. Kinney National Services had grown out of a family business managing parking lots, car rental, contract cleaning and funeral homes. In a similar move to that of Gulf and Western, Kinney sold off its other businesses to concentrate on entertainment, renaming the company Warner Communications, Inc.

MCA Inc. was sold in 1990 for \$6.6 billion to the Japanese electronic manufacturer, Matsushita Electrical Industrial Company (and later in 1995 to the Canadian drinks company Seagram, renaming the organisation Universal Studios, Inc.). In 1982, Coca-Cola acquired Columbia for \$752 million, who in 1989 sold the studio to Matsushita's rival in the electronics market, the Sony Corporation. These changes of ownership saw the former studios transferred into the hands of richer conglomerates. MGM however, the richest of the majors in the studio era, fell on hard times. Despite merging with United Artists in 1981, MGM is now the least profitable of the former majors, its position weakened by not having the larger conglomerate backing that supports the other leading Hollywood companies.

With the wave of conglomerations came the trend towards diversification. The popular adoption of television during the 1950s had seen the Hollywood studios diversify into television production and distribution. Conglomeration combined the Hollywood studios with interests in other sectors of business, including the publishing, media and entertainment industries. When Twentieth Century Fox was sold in 1985, it became part of the publishing, and later television, empire of News Corporation. Sony had bought Columbia the year after purchasing CBS Records. In 1990, Warner Communications was sold to the powerful publisher Time Inc., forming the largest entertainment company in the world.

However, diversification was not only the product of acquisition and merger. Although originating as an important animation studio, the Walt Disney Company only grew to prominence in the entertainment marketplace in the 1950s, after starting its own theatrical distribution arm and diversifying into television production and theme parks. Disney grew not by conglomerations but almost entirely through the launch of its own diversified subsidiaries. A departure from this pattern was the purchase of the ABC Network in 1996 for \$19 billion, consolidating Disney's position as the world's second largest media and entertainment company. With interests

in broadcasting, film production and distribution, theme parks, tourism, merchandise, theatre stage productions, and Internet content and delivery, Disney is one of the clearest examples of how Hollywood has been changed by the trend towards diversification.

By the end of the 1990s it was increasingly difficult to view the American film industry as separable from a broader entertainment marketplace. Compared to the vertically integrated structure of Hollywood in the studio era of the 1930s and 1940s, the era of conglomeration and diversification is probably best understood by what Thomas Schatz describes as the trend towards 'horizontal integration' (1993: 35).

High Concept, the Event Movie and the Marketability of the Star

Despite changes in ownership, Hollywood continues to be based on the package-unit system of production. In the studio era, films could be sold in blocks, with marketing costs spread across several films. However, in the package-unit system, films are marketed individually, with P&A (prints and advertising) expenditure attached to the single film. Figures indicate the equal emphasis placed in contemporary Hollywood on the making and marketing of films. During the 1990s the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), the industry body representing the collective interests of the major producers and distributors in Hollywood, estimated that for the films made by its members, the average production or negative cost (i.e. the cost of producing a feature film's finished negative) grew from \$26.8 million in 1990 to \$51.5 million in 1999 (See MPAA 1999). Paralleling this rise in production expenditure, marketing or prints and advertising costs grew in proportion from \$12 million in 1990 to \$24.5 million in 1999. Compared to an average combined negative and P&A expenditure of \$38.8 million in 1990, the average cost of making and marketing features by members of the MPAA had nearly doubled by 1999, reaching \$76 million.

During the studio era, producers had looked towards novel ways by which movies could be tied in to the promotion of products in ancillary markets, and the contemporary industry has looked in similar ways to spread the marketability of film properties. In his study of Hollywood film in the 1980s and 1990s, Justin Wyatt (1994) argues that films have increasingly become the focus for various marketing opportunities. Market research is seen to inform not only the development of a successful film but also

to explore how the film may promote other merchandise, for example soundtracks, T-shirts and food stuffs. Central to recognising success in all these fields is the premise, the basic marketable idea that can be exploited in the sale of the film and all ancillary merchandise. To describe this close integration of cinema with marketability, Wyatt uses the term popularised by the industry in the 1980s – 'high concept' – which he describes as 'a form of narrative which is highly marketable' (1994: 12). Wyatt suggests that the idea of high concept entered industry thinking through projects based on a simple premise which could be marketed to maximum effect. *Batman* (1989), for example, represented the trend for high concept production in the 1980s.

In the era of high concept filmmaking, the premise would be something that could be represented in a straightforward and uncomplicated manner. Wyatt suggests that one solution to this requirement was to use the image of the star as a means of illustrating the premise. According to this view, the star became the premise, and the premise was the thing that made the film and other products marketable. So in *Top Gun* (1986), the premise of the film could be summarised as 'fighter pilot in love'. That idea was marketed through the boyish good looks of Tom Cruise, whose face appeared prominently on posters for the film and in the video for the song 'Take My Breath Away' by the group Berlin, a chart hit in North America and Europe. Not only did Cruise's image serve to sell the film but financing for the project also attracted money through product placements for the sunglasses manufacturer Rayban. Sales of leather jackets were also rumoured to have benefited from the film's release. Thus Cruise represented not only the film but also performed a role as fashion model.

Since the 1980s, the term high concept seems to have been replaced by the label 'event movie'. While still describing film as a marketing phenomenon, this latter expression usefully draws attention to the work of marketing in making a film more than simply a movie and more of a national and global happening. At the end of the 1990s, films like *Con Air* (1997), *Face/Off* (1997), *G. I. Jane* (1997), *Armageddon* (1998), *Dr Dolittle* (1998), *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (1999) and *The Matrix* (1999) all provided examples of projects where star image and premise appeared closely intertwined to create a marketing event. With *Titanic* (1997), the poster carrying the image of Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet in profile, divided by the prow of the great boat, neatly conveyed the film's premise

of young romantics, from different sides of the tracks, striving to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of their love.

In his discussion of the New Hollywood, Thomas Schatz (1993) argues that many of the most successful films in the contemporary market have been characterised by a hybrid mixing of generic conventions. Schatz suggests that where the classic Hollywood cinema of the studio era maintained clear generic differences, contemporary Hollywood cinema has produced films which freely combine aspects of several genres. For example, Schatz sees *Star Wars* (1977) as a meeting of science fiction, the western, the war film and the adventure movie. This breadth of generic references can be related to the marketability of high concept or the event movie. By offering a taste of many things, a single film can hope to maximise its audience by offering something for everybody. Compared to the stable, generically defined worlds of classic narrative cinema, Schatz suggests that some examples of contemporary cinema display what he calls 'purposeful incoherence', an intentional combination of pleasures 'which actually "opens" the film to different readings (and readers), allowing for multiple interpretative strategies and thus broadening the potential audience appeal' (1993: 23). Transformed by the effects of conglomeration and diversification, it can be argued that structural reorganisation has had a significant impact on the types of narrative created in popular Hollywood cinema. As Schatz notes:

The vertical integration of classical Hollywood, which ensured a closed industrial system and coherent narrative, has given way to the 'horizontal integration' of ... tightly diversified media conglomerates, which favours texts strategically 'open' to multiple readings and multimedia reiteration. (1993: 34)

In the entertainment business, horizontal integration has conjured up belief in the power of 'synergy'. A buzzword of modern marketing, synergy describes the opportunity to sell a single property or concept across several markets in ways that provide for the interaction and synchronisation of promotional energies. Mixing ownership of film rights with assets in television production and broadcasting, together with their own consumer product licensing divisions, the integrated media and entertainment conglomerates are ideally placed to see returns from numerous revenue streams relating

to a single property. In the entertainment business, the idea of synergy suggests that the promotion of a film may sell the soundtrack record, which will help sales of toys and other merchandising, and later a television spin-off possibly, all of which will enhance the making of a movie into an event.

In the workings of synergy, stars can be used to market a property across different media. Sony Pictures Entertainment (SPE) made effective use of Will Smith around the promotion of *Men in Black* (1997). As a hybrid mixture of comedy, action, science fiction and conspiracy theory narratives, the film entertained a broad spectrum of tastes across both child and adult audiences. Although the film co-starred Tommy Lee Jones, the identity of Smith was principally used to sell the *Men in Black* concept across various media. Originally a rap artist, appearing at the end of the 1980s as the 'Fresh Prince' with DJ Jazzy Jeff, Smith moved on to become a comic television actor with his lead in the series 'The Fresh Prince of Bel Air' (1990–96). After signing to Sony Music Entertainment (SME), he built a successful solo singing career with the albums 'Big Willie Style' (Sony Music, 1997) and 'Willennium' (Sony Music, 1999). Prior to SPE's opening of *Men in Black* in the United States during the summer season of 1997, SME released Smith's single of the same name. With a video featuring extracts from the movie, song and film served to mutually promote each other.

For *Men in Black* the image of the suited heroes, masked by sunglasses (a product placement openly referenced in advertisements by Rayban, the manufacturer), appeared across posters and other promotional materials to brand the film with a noirish but highly glossy style. Justin Wyatt (1994) sees the use of a uniform style as central to the marketability of the high concept property. When considering the use of style in the setting of the *Men in Black* concept, Smith's racial identity cannot be seen as an accidental factor, for it is possible to see Smith's colour, plus his background in rap, as making 'blackness' a factor in marketing the film as 'hip'. The look of the film was therefore intimately linked with its star.

Synergy may be a provocative idea but it is possible to over-estimate its actual effect and impact on contemporary Hollywood and the star system. Will Smith, a mixture of equally successful music star and film star, is uncharacteristic of modern stardom. If anything, the crossing over of music and film careers is more representative of a previous era of stars such as Bing Crosby, Doris Day, Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley. Smith's example also shows that synergy does not always work. After the success of *Men*

was frequently seen to shrug off danger with flippanant one-liners, the effect of which was to make him both the hardest of the 1980s action heroes and also a parody of the phenomenon he so effectively epitomised. A further change to the Schwarzenegger image came with *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). Although the film saw Schwarzenegger return to the role that had made him famous, the role was radically transformed. Whereas the first film had the Terminator sent back in time to kill the boy hero, John Connor, in the second film the Terminator returns to protect the child from the more advanced and aggressive cyborg, T1000. As Susan Jeffords (1993) observes, *Terminator 2* reconceptualised Schwarzenegger's role, portraying the Terminator as an all-caring, all-nurturing father, who effectively displaces the traditional role of the mother.

Schwarzenegger's previous film work had built an image combining the physical aggression of the muscular action hero with a strong sense of self-parody and clownish comedy. Whereas the heroic and comedic sides of Schwarzenegger's image had come through separate film performances, Columbia developed *The Last Action Hero* as a project attempting to straddle these potentially contradictory images in a single action comedy. Using a complex self-reflexive structure more commonly associated with European art-house cinema, the film openly explored the parodic component of the Schwarzenegger image. Schwarzenegger appeared as Jack Slater, a filmic action hero who magically comes out of the cinema screen to involve a young boy, Danny, in a series of adventures. Schwarzenegger was Slater and Slater was Schwarzenegger. The film involved several reflexive jokes on Schwarzenegger's image, with comparisons to Stallone, and walk-on parts for many other stars, including Sharon Stone, who had appeared opposite Schwarzenegger in *Total Recall*.

Nancy Griffin and Kim Masters describe the film as an attempt to construct a 'pan-demographic smash – a fantasy-action-adventure comedy' (1996: 363). They suggest the film represented a further stage in the softening of Schwarzenegger's image. The action hero films of the 1980s had become a cause for concern amongst public commentators worried about the possible effects of screen violence. An industry report published around the time *The Last Action Hero* was undergoing initial development, showed PG-rated films were more likely to reach \$100 million at the box office than films with an R rating. This market trend suggested a more family-friendly image was therefore necessary for both the film and the star.



Figure 4. Arnold Schwarzenegger

Since entering the film business, the power of synergy had eluded the various media interests of Sony. From a marketing point of view, the concept was simple and direct: *The Last Action Hero* was not simply a film featuring Schwarzenegger, it was a film about Schwarzenegger. Sony were set to exploit the Schwarzenegger concept across ancillary markets, holding 'synergy meetings' at which representatives of Columbia's advertising, business affairs, legal, production, marketing, publicity and merchandising departments met with executives from the company's games and music divisions.

With a production budget estimated to have reached \$87 million, and prints and advertising costs for the US release in the region of \$30 million, Sony had staked its reputation on the film. When the film opened in the US over the weekend of Friday 18 June to a box office of only \$15.3 million, the company faced a crisis. It is possible to speculate on several reasons why the film failed at the box office. Griffin and Masters regard the choice by Mark Canton, Columbia's Head of Production, to conduct research screenings while the film was only in the rough-cut stage, as a severe miscalculation that sank the film. Rumours rapidly spread across the press, presenting the film with insurmountably bad word of mouth in advance of its release.

A further problem facing the film on release was that seven days before, Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) had opened in the US to a record \$50 million weekend. *Jurassic Park* represented exactly the phenomenon that *The Last Action Hero* hoped for – a film that successfully sold action drama to family audiences. Ironically, *Jurassic Park* was distributed by Universal Pictures, a subsidiary of MCA which, at the time, was owned by Sony's great rival Matsushita. By the end of 1993, *Jurassic Park* topped the year's box office, grossing \$339,521,510 in North America, while *The Last Action Hero* limped home with \$50,016,394.

Reviewing the film, Vincent Canby remarked in *The New York Times* that the film 'tries to be too many things to too many different kinds of audiences, the result being that it will probably confuse and perhaps even alienate the hard-core action fans [while] more sophisticated audiences are likely to never see the film's occasionally funny gags at the expense of movies the action fans will never have heard of' (1993: 96). At the centre of the project's failure were the impossible demands made to stretch the appeal of the Schwarzenegger image. In attempting to entertain all audiences, the

film and its star arguably satisfied none. Schwarzenegger was paid \$15 million for his role, together with participation in earnings from distribution. The case of *The Last Action Hero* raised questions not only for Columbia but across the whole of Hollywood regarding the security and value of employing highly paid stars in event pictures. Rather than the valuable franchise Sony hoped would make the company a profitable front-runner in the film market, the Schwarzenegger image became an unmarketable concept that nearly drove Sony to make an early exit from the film business.

Star Vehicles and Genre

Event movies do not characterise the whole or even the majority of contemporary Hollywood production. High concept films may achieve a hybrid mixing of genres but in many cases films still appear to fall into singly identifiable generic types. If high concept involves the matching of star and premise, then this idea appears to have a long tradition in the development of particular films as promotional 'vehicles' for stars. The star vehicle combines two methods of product differentiation: the personal monopoly of a star's image, and the familiar conventions that establish generic expectations.

Through reference to stars of previous periods in Hollywood history, Richard Dyer defines the star vehicle in the following terms:

The vehicle might provide a character of the type associated with the star (e.g. Monroe's 'dumb blonde' roles, Garbo's melancholic romantic roles); a situation, setting or generic context associated with the star (e.g. Garbo in relationships with married men, Wayne in westerns); or opportunities for the star to do her/his thing (most obviously in the case of musical stars – e.g. a wistful solo number for Judy Garland, an extended ballet sequence for Gene Kelly – but also, for instance, opportunities to display Monroe's body and wiggle walk [and] scenes of action in Wayne's films). (1998: 62)

It is possible to see many contemporary examples of the star vehicle in operation. Meg Ryan frequently appears in roles as the ever-so-slightly dizzy romantic (for example *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), *French Kiss* (1995), and *You've Got Mail* (1998)). Michael Douglas's strong jaw has guided him

through several situations in which he has played the arrogant male lost in a world of psychological, and usually sexual, danger (for example *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Basic Instinct* (1992) and *The Game* (1997)). Jim Carrey and Robin Williams are both used in films which include specific moments in the narrative specifically designed to highlight the comic performativity of the stars (for example Carrey's roles in *The Mask* (1994), *Dumb and Dumber* (1994) and *Liar, Liar* (1997), or Williams' performances in *Mrs Doubtfire* (1993) or *The Birdcage* (1996)). *Striptease* (1996) was a film about Demi Moore's body, and *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), *Wolf* (1994) and *As Good As It Gets* (1997) seen organised almost entirely around Jack Nicholson's devilish grin.

Dyer sees the star vehicle as providing 'continuities of iconography (e.g. how they are dressed, made-up and coiffed, performance mannerisms, the settings with which they are associated and so on), visual style (e.g. how they are lit, photographed, placed within the frame) and structure (e.g. their role in the plot, their function in the film's symbolic pattern)' (1998: 62). It is the continuities of iconography, style and structure across the body of a star's films which leads him to liken star vehicles to genres. While the star vehicle does work to reproduce a set of conventions and so stimulate audience expectations in the same way as generic categories do, Andrew Britton (1984) points out that genre is a precondition of the star vehicle. Meg Ryan vehicles work within the general terms of the romantic comedy (see Evans 1998). The performativity of Carrey and Williams is foregrounded in the context of the character-based comedy. Generic conventions also limit the possible opportunities for a film to act as a successful vehicle for a star. Critical responses to Ryan's attempt to move outside romantic comedy with the war action drama *Courage Under Fire* (1996) focused on the incongruities of the star in the genre, revealing the difficulties facing a star escaping any genre they become most readily identified with. For her next movie, Ryan would return to more conventional ground, *Addicted to Love* (1997).

Britton suggests that it is a mistake to see genres as closed, discreet categories: genres can be seen to share similar themes and ideological contradictions. It is possible for films in several genres to serve as vehicles for a star, so that some stars can be seen to successfully cross genres. For example, in the Sergio Leone trilogy of westerns in the mid-1960s – *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1966) and *The Good,*

the Bad and the Ugly (1966) – as *The Man With No Name*, Clint Eastwood played an individual who, in a world that has lost clear moral co-ordinates, lives by no formal creed or law other than that of his own making. From the early 1970s, Eastwood's reworking of the western hero fitted with the moral ambivalence of the maverick police detective Harry Callahan character in the earliest films of the Dirty Harry series (*Dirty Harry* (1971), *Magnum Force* (1973), *The Enforcer* (1976) and *Sudden Impact* (1983)). Here Eastwood was seen to confront the same opposition between the individual and the official social order – the conflict of one man's law against *The Law* – motivating Callahan's fight to rid a corrupt world of crime by any means necessary.

Britton's arguments would suggest that genres have never been closed categories. However, it is possible to see examples of films in the last two decades which work by mixing influences from what may conventionally be thought of as separate genres. In these films, star identities appear to straddle potentially opposing generic impulses. Most noticeable in this context was the arrival of the comic action hero in the 1980s. Eddie Murphy, Bruce Willis and Mel Gibson combined action and comedy through their respective roles in the *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* series. While immersed in serious circumstances, in which a genuine sense of peril and suspense was created, the characters Alex Foley, John McClean and Martin Riggs each faced danger with a wisecrack. As the *Lethal Weapon* series progressed, the pairing of Gibson with Danny Glover became one of the most enduring comedy partnerships of contemporary cinema. Examples of this kind suggest that genres continue to play an important role in defining star identities, setting limits to the contexts in which a star is used. However, as the parameters of generic categories themselves are never firmly fixed, so the images of stars can be flexibly used to traverse genres and also to combine a mixture of generic influences.

Agencies and Deals

In the era of high concept or event cinema, the value of stars as capital has received new importance. As negative costs rise, stars become even more central to the packaging of a project and securing production financing. As discussed earlier, since the move to the package-unit system of production, the powers of agents to act as key mediators in the industry has

achieved new importance. The package-unit system saw the agent begin to work at putting together script properties with directing and performing talent, taking a vital role in the development of projects which was formerly the responsibility of studio heads of production. MCA may have left the agency business in the 1960s but it set an example for the leading agencies in contemporary Hollywood.

Since it was established at the end of the nineteenth century, The William Morris Agency (WMA) had remained the foremost agency in the American entertainment business. In Hollywood, WMA's position was severely challenged when, in 1975, five WMA agents (Martin Baum, Bill Haber, Ron Meyer, Michael Ovitz and Rowland Perkins) left to form the rival Creative Artists Agency (CAA). Where WMA had a bureaucratic, staid and gentlemanly reputation, CAA quickly achieved an image of aggressive competitiveness, ruthlessly cutting commission rates below the standard ten per cent to win deals and sign clients. Initially, CAA packaged television programmes, gradually moving on to developing feature film projects. Along with International Creative Management (ICM), WMA and CAA now make up the big three agencies in Hollywood today, representing the majority of stars in contemporary Hollywood. Although smaller than its immediate rivals, CAA currently maintains the most star studded list of clients (see Table 4.1).

During the 1980s, CAA packaged around 150 films. *A Chorus Line* (1985) brought producers Cy Feuer and Ernest H. Martin together with director Richard Attenborough and star Michael Douglas (see Stater 1997). Following a recommendation from producer Stanley Jaffe, in March 1981 Ovitz signed the then unknown Tom Cruise. Ovitz would take an instrumental role in making Cruise a star. *Rain Man* (1988) brought Cruise together with fellow CAA client, Dustin Hoffman, and director Barry Levinson. With its strong client list, CAA came to be seen as taking a virtually unshakable stand in negotiations. For *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), CAA packaged star Winona Ryder and director Francis Ford Coppola with a script by Jim Hart. Columbia Pictures was presented with the package as a non-negotiable entity. When CAA took on the packaging of the adaptation of Michael Crichton's best-selling novel *Jurassic Park*, the project floundered in development for an extended period of time while Ovitz pressured Steven Spielberg to join the agency's client list. The project went into production once Spielberg joined.

CAA's power in packaging projects faced criticisms that the practice unreasonably raised the price of talent. Ovitz has characteristically rejected such criticisms, reflecting that packaging 'is 100 per cent correct ... CAA set the pricing standard. That was our job ... we controlled the prices in the marketplace. My theory was, if you had all that talent under one roof, you could benefit from it' (quoted in Stater 1997: 108). While super agencies like CAA, WMA and ICM can wield power in negotiations through their size and importance, Mark Litwak (1986) suggests they can serve the interests of top stars at the expense of other clients. For this reason, Litwak sees some performers using personal managers in order to receive more individual attention.

Due to their central role in packaging projects, there is a tendency to assume that agencies have all the power in contemporary Hollywood. As Nicolas Kent (1991) points out, however, agencies, their clients and the studios remain in a situation of mutual dependency. Agencies may be the mediators between talent and the studios but that position requires balancing the interests of all parties. Stars need the agencies to get work but, at the same time, the agencies need to retain a high-profile client list to support their negotiating position in any individual deal. Kent argues that the power of the agencies in relation to stars is limited because, unlike the days when the term contract made stars the property of studios, stars are not bound by contract to agencies. While the role of the Hollywood studios

Creative Artists Agency	International Creative Management	William Morris Agency	Others
Pierce Brosnan	Jodie Foster	Clint Eastwood	Jim Carrey - United Talent Agency
Sandra Bullock	Tommy Lee Jones	Arnold Schwarzenegger	Cameron Diaz - Artists Management Group
Glen Close	Eddie Murphy	Bruce Willis	Leonardo DiCaprio - Artists Management Group
Sean Connery	Julia Roberts	Kate Winslet	Richard Gere - Andrea Jaffe Inc.
Tom Cruise			Mel Gibson - Icon Productions
Robert De Niro			Jack Nicholson - Bessler, Keller and Associates
Michael Douglas			Brad Pitt - Brillstein-Grey Entertainment
Ralph Fiennes			Winona Ryder - 3 Arts Entertainment Inc.
Tom Hanks			Alicia Silverstone - Premiere Artists Agency
Dustin Hoffman			Robin Williams - Artists Management Group
Demi Moore			
Al Pacino			
Gwyneth Paltrow			
Robert Redford			
Will Smith			
Sylvester Stallone			
Meryl Streep			

Table 4.1 Stars by Agency

Source: compiled from Screen International (1997 and 1998) and Internet Movie Database

may have become more concentrated on functioning as production financiers, it is the studios which hold the money, and agents are only rich and powerful to the extent that they can place clients in packages that receive that backing.

Agencies function to mediate between the studios, which supply the money, and the stars and other talent who supply their services. In this role, the most powerful agencies have achieved their status and reputation based on the art of making the deal. In the package-unit system, the earnings of stars are no longer constrained by the conditions of the studio term contract. While some stars still sign multi-picture deals with a studio, it is more usual for agencies to negotiate for the use of a star's services on a film-by-film basis. When MCA negotiated James Stewart's contract for *Winchester '73*, the deal made clear the advantages of profit participation. Since that time, the contracts of stars now regularly include 'back-end' deals. Instead of taking a flat fee when a film is made, contractual agreements may see a star choosing to be paid based on a film's performance. In the back-end deal, the star is not fully remunerated at the time of production but only when a film is distributed in all markets. This contingent payment is based on the star participating in a percentage share of profits. It is the industry vernacular to measure the percentage awarded to any individual participating in profits in terms of 'points' (see Cones 1992).

Profit participation deals will vary depending whether payments are made on the basis of gross receipts or net profits. Gross receipts are all monies received by the distributor from the sale of a film in any and all markets. It is common now for a feature film to be sold in many markets. After an initial release in theatres, a film will appear for video rental and retail before showing on television in pay-per-view (PPV), pay subscription and finally 'free' windows. Any film will therefore receive income from several revenue streams during its commercial life. Depending on the terms of a deal, a star may see earnings from multiple media outlets.

Net profit is what remains after gross receipts reach a level at which a film is judged to break even. However, accounting practices in Hollywood are notoriously flexible in how 'net' is defined, with producers and distributors claiming all kinds of expenses to make it appear that some films never turn a profit. Negative costs, distribution fees and expenses, interest charges, any gross participations, and studio overheads are all paid from gross before a film can be said to have any net profit. Compared to

net points, gross points are of greater value, and the agents of top stars negotiate for these.

Due to the artful accounting practices of the film industry, the value of net points has come to be discredited. When prize-winning humourist Art Buchwald took Paramount to court in 1990 over the issue of plagiarism regarding the story for the film *Coming to America* (1988), the issue of net points came to the fore. During the case, the film's star Eddie Murphy described net points as 'monkey points', because they were of such little value that only a monkey would accept them (see Daniels, Leedy and Sills 1998). While participation deals can see stars making terrific earnings from the distribution of the films they appear in, the contingencies of such arrangements mean that even if they negotiate for back-end points, many stars will still strike contracts that see they are paid some level of initial fee.

Stars and the Box Office

Since the earliest days of the system, the American film industry has used the names of stars with the intention of stabilising audience demand. Accordingly, stars have demanded high levels of earnings for their services. Speaking in Munich in February 2000, Viacom Chairman Sumner Redstone revealed that Tom Cruise had earned \$70 million through a back-end deal for *Mission: Impossible* (1996) (see Hansen 2000). Further details were not made available but it is likely that this level of earnings did not result entirely from Cruise's status as star actor, for he was also involved in the project as joint producer through his company, Cruise-Wagner Productions. With a budget estimated at \$75 million, the film took \$181 million at the North American box office during 1996 and \$271.6 million internationally. It can be presumed that Cruise's cut will have also included earnings from video and television windows. However, after the failure of *The Last Action Hero*, concerns have been expressed across Hollywood over the value of stars at the box office. With stars demanding big fees and participation in the gross, it is open to question just how valuable stars are for the industry.

After the failure during 1999 of star-driven films at the North American box office, including *Fight Club* (1999) featuring Brad Pitt, and *The Story of Us* (1999) with Michelle Pfeiffer and Bruce Willis, Peter Bart, the editor of

Variety, suggested that audience taste appeared ever more fickle in relation to stars: "The public seems bent on "discovering" new stars. A [Leonardo] DiCaprio will spring to instant stardom off *Titanic* or a Matt Damon off *Good Will Hunting*" (1999: 4). While Bart believes that stars remain essential to the success of major releases, his choice of DiCaprio actually reveals the instabilities of the star system. DiCaprio's star rating was boosted by *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), and *Titanic* catapulted him to the forefront of the star elite. Although *Titanic* became the most successful film ever at the North American and overseas box offices, the film's success begins to expose the inability of stars to guarantee box office success. Before *Titanic*, DiCaprio had made a string of low-profile films, including *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* (1993), *The Basketball Diaries* (1995) and *Marvin's Room* (1996). It is debatable, therefore, as to whether he brought a bankable star presence to *Titanic*. Hits on the scale of *Titanic* are extraordinary and it cannot be expected that a star's name alone can secure such an exceptional performance. DiCaprio's following starring roles in *The Man in the Iron Mask* (1998) and *The Beach* (2000) did only moderate business. The example of DiCaprio therefore highlights the incalculability of stars in the economics of the film industry. The effects of the package-unit production on the star system may be that there has been a shortening of the average life-span of star popularity. Instead of stabilising the market and guarding against risk, it could be that in contemporary Hollywood, stars have become an unstable element in the mode of production, inviting more risk rather than protecting against it.

A look at the top films at the North American box office during the 1990s indicates a mixture of titles fronted by star names, together with equally successful films without any star presence (see Table 4.2). Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997) featured well-known actors but arguably no stars. Disney's popular animated features *The Lion King* (1994), *Pocahontas* (1995) and the two *Toy Story* films (1995; 1999) may have used the voices of some stars, but it is questionable whether this involvement represented any actual appearance by a star, and certainly the names of stars were not used to sell these films. Other cases, for example *Wayne's World* (1992) and *Batman Forever* (1995), appear to be films which did not use existing stars but which, in retrospect, can be seen as significant career breaks, promoting certain actors to the A-list of star performers.

	US\$
1999	
Star Wars: The Phantom Menace	439,443,350
The Sixth Sense	276,386,495
Toy Story 2	208,851,257
Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me	205,444,716
The Matrix	171,479,930
1998	
Titanic	488,194,015
Armageddon	201,578,182
Saving Private Ryan	190,805,259
There's Something About Mary	174,422,745
The Waterboy	147,422,745
1997	
Men in Black	250,004,561
The Lost World: Jurassic Park	229,086,679
Liar, Liar	181,470,615
Air Force One	171,880,017
Star Wars (reissue)	138,257,865
1996	
Independence Day	306,167,040
Twister	241,708,928
Mission: Impossible	180,981,856
The Rock	134,069,511
Ransom	129,137,746
1995	
Batman Forever	184,031,112
Apollo 13	172,071,312
Toy Story	146,198,683
Pocahontas	141,523,195
Ace Ventura: Pet Detective	104,194,467
1994	
The Lion King	300,352,905
Forrest Gump	298,535,927
True Lies	146,273,950
The Santa Clause	137,826,098
The Flintstones	130,522,921
1993	
Jurassic Park	339,524,510
The Fugitive	179,315,784
The Firm	158,340,292
Sleepless in Seattle	126,551,583
Mrs Doubtfire	122,483,936
1992	
Batman Returns	162,831,698
Lethal Weapon 3	144,731,527
Sister Act	139,605,150
Home Alone 2: Lost in New York	145,769,282
Wayne's World	121,697,323
1991	
Terminator 2: Judgement Day	204,297,727
Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves	165,493,908
The Silence of the Lambs	130,726,716
Home Alone	129,461,346
Dances With Wolves	122,469,565
1992	
Ghost	197,954,919
Pretty Woman	178,406,268
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	135,265,915
The Hunt for Red October	120,709,868
Total Recall	118,572,502

Table 4.2 Top Five Films at the North American Box Office 1990–1999
 Figures represent gross box office ticket sales. "North America" combines the theatrical box office in the United States and Canada. Totals are based on sales in designated calendar year and do not include receipts from previous or following years. Source: compiled from *Variety*

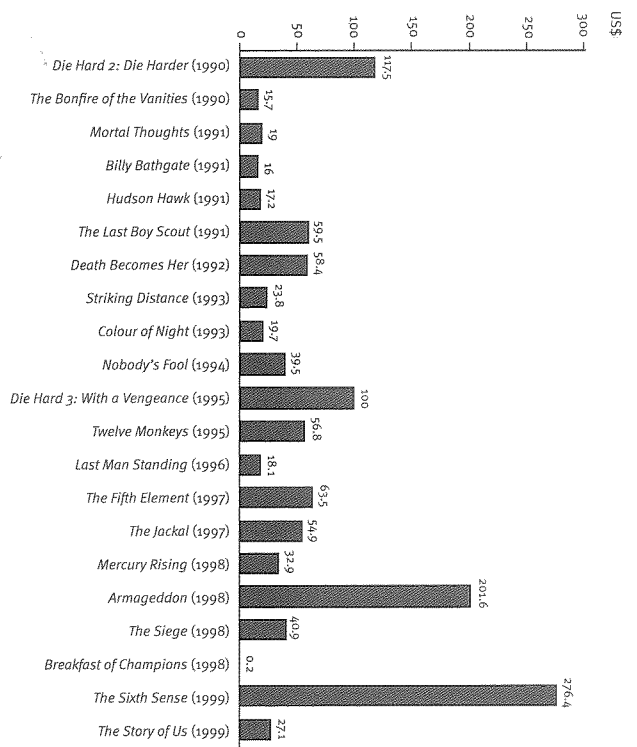


Chart 4.2 Bruce Willis at the North American Box Office 1990–1999

Source: Compiled from ShowBiz Data Inc. and Internet Movie Database figures (1999)

Note: Figures based on the combined gross of the United States and Canadian box office. Chart excludes films in which Willis provided voiceover work or narrated (i.e. *Look Who's Talking* (1990), *North* (1994) and *Beavis and Butt-Head Do America* (1996)), made a cameo appearance (i.e. *The Player* (1992)), had equal status with other actors as part of an ensemble (i.e. *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Four Rooms* (1995)), or was uncredited (i.e. *Loaded Weapon 1* (1993)).

Even when taking a broader sample of films, few women stars found continual success during the decade. Sandra Bullock, Jodie Foster and Demi Moore all had hits but Julia Roberts was the only female star to turn in a box office record to rival that of the A-list male stars (see Chart 4.3). In the 1990s, films starring Roberts made \$1,256.1 million, an average of \$83.74 million per film. After her breakthrough hit *Pretty Woman* (1990), Roberts had successes with *Sleeping with the Enemy* (1991) and *The Pelican Brief* (1993). However, with the box office failure of *Mary Reilly* (1996) and *Everyone Says I Love You* (1996), many commentators believed her career was over. *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997) marked a return to box office form and Roberts concluded the decade with the twin hits *Notting Hill* (1999) and *The Runaway Bride* (1999).

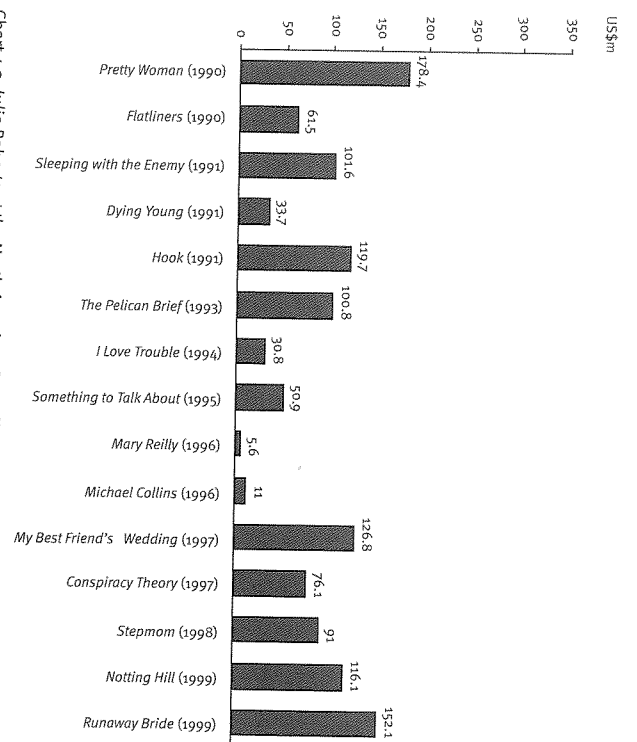


Chart 4.3 Julia Roberts at the North American Box Office 1990–1999

Source: compiled from ShowBiz Data Inc. and Internet Movie Database figures (1999)

Note: Figures based on the combined gross of the United States and Canadian box office. Chart excludes films in which Roberts had a supporting role or made a cameo appearance (i.e. *The Player* (1992), *Pret-a-Porter* (1994) and *Everyone Says I Love You* (1996)).

Box office performance has meant that many stars have secured great economic and symbolic power in the film industry. Yet even the most cursory of glances at contemporary popular cinema will reveal that Hollywood stardom remains a system organised by gendered and racial difference. Julia Roberts' performance at the box office stands out amongst rankings dominated by male stars. Will Smith's success in the 1990s was exceptional in a system defined by the overwhelming presence of white stars.

Tracking box office performance reveals the instabilities of stars as a sign of product differentiation. Looking at the examples of Willis and Roberts, it does not appear that even high-profile stars can stabilise demand in the manner suggested by Klaprat (1985). Box office performance offers one economic indicator of popularity but can be misleading: stars may choose to take leading or supporting roles in film projects not intended for popular audiences but which offer prestige and increased



FIGURE 5 *Julia Roberts*

artistic credibility. Also, box office gross does not show the net earnings of any film after production and other costs are deducted. If a star enjoys gross points, then the cost of that percentage participation will be one of the costs that will have to be deducted before a film can be judged to show any net profit. It is therefore likely that a high box office gross obscures how a star's prominence at the box office is bought at the price of high

production and marketing costs, together with the star's own participation in a film's earnings. Without access to confidential accounting data, any analysis of this kind is always limited and provisional. Nevertheless, to register a note of caution in the absence of the necessary data, a question remains over whether the Hollywood star system can ensure that popularity equals profitability.

Star Power

From the 1950s, stars were freed from the term contracts that had controlled the work and images in the vertically integrated studio system of the 1930s and 1940s. Power shifted from studio management to the star. Following the shift to the package-unit system of production, stars increased their earning power and became independent producers. Agents also extended their powers to take a more central role in the operations of the industry. In contemporary Hollywood, with great emphasis placed on the marketability of the high concept or event movie, the star provides a key sign in communicating the idea of a film in the public domain. However, the rising and falling fortunes of individual stars at the box office indicates the instabilities of the star system.

Barry King (1986) describes the broad change that occurred in the star system following the breakdown of the vertically integrated studios in terms of the Marxist distinction between real and formal subsumption. Real subsumption involves the direct intervention of capital in the labour process by controlling every detail of production. In the star system, this condition could be found in the studio era with the use of stars as property and the highly regulated use of a star's image. In conditions of formal subsumption, capital does not directly intervene in production but receives the final product of labour. Indications of a shift to this state in the star system would be the trend towards package-unit production, with stars drawn from a freelance labour market employed on single film deals.

While the breakdown of the studio system gave stars new liberties, it is also necessary to recognise that the vertically integrated system had protected stars in various ways. More films were made in the studio era and so there was a large demand for performer labour. As the volume of production declined from the 1950s, then so did the amount of work available for performers, including stars (see Kindem 1982). In these conditions, work-

ing freelance could only benefit the stars and only the most popular stars at that. In some cases, stars who did not appear at the top of the box office rankings – and feared the insecurities of the freelance market – sought to retain multiple-year or multiple-picture deals with the studios. Signed to a term contract, the star would make many films in a year. With stars making so many films, it was possible for a performer's career to survive a number of box office failures when supported by regular successes as well. This situation contrasts with the package-unit system in which a star's status is only as good as his or her last couple of movies. In such a system, it is possible to see examples of the rapid rise and fall of stars across only a few films. As the budgets for making and marketing films have risen, so stars have demanded higher salaries and a percentage participation in the gross. Stars are therefore potentially valuable for cultivating audience demand but they have also become more costly for producers and distributors.

CONCLUSION: STARS AND HOLLYWOOD HISTORY

Historically, the Hollywood star system emerged out of several developments. As the film business grew in the first decade of the twentieth century, industrial models of production were adopted to increase the supply of filmed product. With the industry becoming dominated by the production of fiction films, elaborations in narrative form revised the general performance space of film in ways that foregrounded the work of actors. Following the increase in the volume of narrative product, opportunities developed for actors to find full-time employment in the industry and film acting became an area of specialisation in the detailed division of labour. The industrialisation of film production therefore provided a general context in which film actors were recognised and valued as professional performers. From 1907, published commentary appeared discussing the work of film acting, and from 1909 the industry pursued the active distribution of various types of knowledge that named specific individual performers and constructed their on- and off-screen identities. From these developments the star system emerged as it became possible for audiences to both see and know the performers who appeared on film.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the major Hollywood studios operated as vertically integrated corporations, using their control of the domestic exhibition market to force anti-competitive trade practices. In an attempt to guard against risk, the studios used a stable of stars to market films and stabilise audience demand. Talent development departments cultivated the supply of new stars and the images of stars were circulated through campaigns orchestrated by publicity departments. To control their stars,