

1 STARDOM AS A SYSTEM

The place of stars in Hollywood cinema can be understood from a number of directions. Stars appear in films and other forms of media texts that cumulatively form the images of stars. At one level, these texts form the general image of Hollywood stardom, the image of stars as wealthy, glamorous and beautiful human beings. At another level, texts are linked by their reference to a single person. Linking texts in this way, the image constructs the star as a particular identity. Stars are not just images. Stars are people who work in the film industry and as such they form a part of the labour force of film production. The role of the star in the industry is not, however, only confined to their function in the process of filmmaking. In a commercial cinema such as Hollywood, stars are important to the processes of production (making films) but also distribution (selling and marketing films) and exhibition (showing films to paying audiences). Filmmaking is a high-cost and high-risk enterprise. Stars are used by the film industry as a means to try and manage audience demand for films. Distributors use the presence of stars to sell films to exhibitors in domestic and overseas markets. Exhibitors, who own and run the theatres showing films, are attracted to films with stars because it is believed the presence of stars help to draw audiences to films. In this circuit of commercial exchange, the star therefore becomes a form of capital, that is to say a form of asset deployed with the intention of gaining advantage in the entertainment market and making profits. This chapter further explores the role of stars as images, labour and capital. In other words, the chapter considers stars as a source of meaning, work and money.

Stars as Images

From the earliest years of the system, the identities of film stars were constructed for commercial purposes across many different sources. It is this construction of identity that Richard Dyer defines as a star's image:

By image ... I do not understand an exclusively visual sign, but rather a complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs. This configuration may constitute the general image of stardom or of a particular star. It is manifest not only in films but in all kinds of media text. (1998: 34)

Dyer sees the images of stars constructed across various categories of texts, including not only a star's film appearances, but also forms of publicity and promotion. Additionally, stars are the objects of critical reviewing and other forms of commentary, for example published star profiles, biographies and interviews. Other factors contributing to the images of stars are the characters they play and the style of performance they use to portray that role. It is also necessary to consider the types of film or genres a star appears in. Stars are also categorised by social variables of age, gender, race and nationality. In semiotic terms, the images of stars are therefore the product of signification. Stars are mediated identities, textual constructions, for audiences do not get the real person but rather a collection of images, words and sounds which are taken to stand for the person. From their familiarity with a range of star texts, moviegoers form impressions of that person so that the star becomes a collection of meanings.

It would be worth adding to Dyer's notion of star image the relevance of gossip, for informal talk about well-known performers is one of the clearest examples of how stars enter into popular culture and everyday life. Frequently a source of unfounded rumour, gossip may depart from the actual truth of stars' lives. Rumour cannot be simply dismissed as falsity however, for if the same untruth is repeated regularly and becomes known by enough people, then rumours can come to define something of the truth of a star's image. Even when it is acknowledged that a particular story about a star is untrue, rumours can still have a residual effect, a legacy, which contributes to the enduring image of that star.

While the identities of stars are highly individuated, Dyer points out that a star is never wholly unique. The images of stars appear both ordinary and extraordinary. Through their images, stars appear ordinary and like other people in society. In this sense stars are not unique because they are typical. Stars are, however, also shown to be exceptional and somehow apart from society. The wealth and looks of stars set them apart from everyday people. It is never possible for any individual member of the audience to comprehensively know all the textual sources through which a star's identity is represented. Knowledge of stars is therefore differently dispersed across society. Moviegoers also bring many different social and cultural competencies to their understanding of a star's identity, so that the image will be interpreted in many different ways. The meaning of a star's image is therefore not contained in the sources that represent the star but is produced in the moment of interaction between moviegoers and star texts.

For this reason, the images of stars are open to a range of differentiated readings. However, this is not to suggest that the meanings of stars is entirely open to individual or subjective interpretation. The images of stars are open to a range of meanings and readings but that range is inevitably limited. At one level, the meaning of star image is constrained by the content of star texts. Jack Nicholson smiles in a particular way. He speaks with a certain rhythm. Opinions may differ over whether Jack Nicholson is charming or vulgar, menacing or sexy, but it seems unlikely that his image will be read as conveying innocence and moral purity.

Equally important is to see star texts in context, to recognise that readings take place in particular cultural and historical circumstances. One of the most obvious indicators of the historical determination of a star's popularity is the fact that stars seem to be objects of fashion and changing audience tastes. A star who at one time entertained enormous popularity because he or she was seen to be 'of the moment' may very quickly become stale in the public imagination. This cannot be seen as a matter of mere caprice on the part of the audience however, for the fashionability of stars raises questions about what makes a star popular at one time and not another. In certain cases, stars seem to transcend historical fashions, enjoying continued popularity over different periods of time. In such cases, however, the image of a star is nevertheless still historically transformed. The Marilyn Monroe of the 1950s, for example, is not the same as the Monroe of the early twenty-first century.

Stars as Labour

Various developments in Europe and the United States during the nineteenth century led to the invention of moving image technology. Although this prototype film technology was available before this time, the first uses of film as an entertainment medium occurred in the 1890s. In this period, film went from being a technology to a business. The moving image moved from being an object of scientific curiosity to becoming a commodity, a thing that could be sold. It is in this early commercialisation that the moving image can be said to have moved from the status of film, i.e. a strip of photographs, to cinema, i.e. the industry for exploiting the economic value of the image.

Emerging at the end of the nineteenth century, cinema became a product of the changes experienced in various European nations and the United States that had seen those countries become industrial capitalist economies. Cinema itself became a capitalist enterprise. Initially, the cinema industry made money by protecting the patents to camera and projector technology. It would take several years for producers to start regarding the content of films as the main source of revenue for the industry.

In her work on the Hollywood film industry, Janet Staiger (1985b) borrows the Marxist concept of the 'mode of production' to explain the work of film production as a capitalist enterprise. Although Staiger sees the history of the American film industry as the growth of an overarching capitalist mode of production, she identifies different systems of production. A system of production is effectively a sub-system of the capitalist mode of production, marked by patterns in the arrangement of labour, technology and capital. During the history of Hollywood, the organisation of the star system has changed as the structure of the film industry as a whole has changed. The changes Staiger describes are discussed in more detail in the following chapters, for they are important in identifying the emergence and subsequent transformation of the star system.

Staiger sees patterns in the organisation of labour as central to identifying transition in systems of production. She regards the labour force in Hollywood as broken down into different categories of workers, for example cameramen and women, scriptwriters, prop-makers, and so on. All these roles represent a particular task in the overall process of making a film. Staiger describes this system as a 'detailed division of labour'

(1985b: 91); unlike a social division of labour, in which one worker will be involved in all stages of producing something from first devising to the finished product, a detailed division of labour splits production into a series of separate functions. For Staiger, the arrival of a detailed division of labour in Hollywood was the result of the American film industry increasing the volume of films made, requiring studios to imitate factory-like modes of mass production. Under a detailed division of labour, particular functions become an area of specialisation. Workers perform some tasks and not others. Staiger also points out that the organisation of labour in Hollywood established a hierarchical system, between management and talent or the crafts, and then between the different levels of responsibility and decision-making in those areas. As a capitalist industry, Hollywood has therefore organised labour on the structural principles of specialisation and hierarchical power.

Stars fit into this structure. In the division of labour, stars are categorised as performance specialists: stars are required to execute certain tasks. During pre-production, star work involves reading scripts sent to them and the learning of lines. When a film is in production and undertaking principal photography, the star's work requires some limited rehearsal time, the shooting of scenes on location or in the studio, and repeated takes. In postproduction, stars will do some dubbing or post-synchronisation of the voice during sound re-recording. For many performers, this will be the end of their work on a film but as stars have an important role to play in the distribution of films, star labour also involves participating in the various promotional tasks of giving press interviews, appearing at gala premieres and appearing on television chat shows.

These are the specialist responsibility of the star in the division of labour. Stars may be categorised as performance specialists but their position in the industry is also marked by their hierarchical status. Not all film actors are stars. In the labour pool of actors, stars are the elite. There is a lot of overlap in the working responsibilities of stars and ordinary performers (learning lines, dubbing, and so on) but also differences. Ordinary performers will not have to complete the promotional commitments that a star will, however a star will not have to undergo the humiliation and disappointment of the auditioning process.

Danae Clark (1995) describes the distinction between stars and ordinary performers in terms of 'labour power differences'. For Clark, any

understanding of the star system cannot concentrate exclusively on those performers with star status but must see the star as a relative position in conditions of labour power: 'Though the term "star system" refers to the institutional hierarchy established to regulate and control the employment and use of *all* actors, stars have become a privileged class within the division of actors' labour' (1995: 5; emphasis in original). Seeing the star system in this way demands consideration of the power that attaches to stardom in the film industry.

Stars as Capital

To understand why stars have more power in the film industry than other ordinary performers, it is necessary to see that stars are not just a source of labour but also a form of capital. Stars are valuable to the industry in ways that extend beyond simply how they play a character. After the labour force, Staiger sees the other aspects of the capitalist mode of production as the means of production and the mechanisms for financing production. The means of production defines not only the physical resources of buildings, materials and technologies required to make films, but also the skills, knowledge and techniques employed in the use of those resources. Financing in a capitalist mode of production requires the supply of money or capital for the purchase of physical resources and labour. Capitalist industry works as a system by combining labour, technology and capital in ways intended to produce and maximise profits. The products of labour become commodities sold in the market and it has been a classic concern of the critics of capitalism that commodity production separates the product from its creator, with the effect that the labour force is alienated by the organisation of production.

Stars have a place in the film industry both as a category of labour and a form of capital: a star becomes a form of capital because in the commercial film industry, he or she is a valuable asset for a production company. Stars are a form of investment, employed in film productions as a probable guard against loss. The wages of stars account for a major portion of any film's budget and stars are also a marketing tool, whose images are promoted with the intention of trying to effect the entertainment market. Barry King (1987) also points out that stars act as capital because in the contemporary film industry, they have increasingly established their own

companies so as to profit from the sale of their images. Early cinema used brand names to differentiate the products of film production companies. After the arrival of the star system, however, films were increasingly marketed through star differentiation. Cathy Klaprat (1985) sees the value of stars through the economic principles of product differentiation and demand inelasticity. In economics, when demand for any product can be seen to decrease if the price is raised, or to increase if the price is lowered, then the market for a product is said to be elastic. However, where changes in price do not effect demand, the market is inelastic. Klaprat argues that with the most popular performers of the studio era in Hollywood, star differentiation could theoretically stabilise demand, creating a consistent box office performance for a star's films and so allowing distributors to raise the price of their product in dealing with exhibitors. Star differentiation therefore became a valuable strategy in Hollywood, offering a means for not only stabilising the price of films but also the raising of prices for certain products.

While differentiation is crucial to the economic value of stars, rarely have stars ever maintained a consistent record at the box office. Rather than fully accepting Klaprat's view of stars as a mechanism for manipulating the market for films, we can more cautiously suggest that stars act as a means of product differentiation which can only potentially stabilise the market.

Stars do appear to offer an unrivalled opportunity for product differentiation. At one level, various individual stars appear to share common characteristics, and the system of stardom differentiates performers according to type. For example, the 'young male rebel' type is a category which would include stars of the 1950s, like Marlon Brando or James Dean, but also stars of later decades, such as Sean Penn or Christian Slater. At a further level however, the star system seems to resist the classification of stars as types. The identities or images of stars are of value to the film industry for they appear as individuals. Staiger suggests that from an economic point of view, 'stars may be thought of as a monopoly on a personality' (1985b: 101). Monopolies emerge when there is only one supplier to a market. Star monopolies are based on a belief in unique individuality: 'there is only one Jim Carrey'.

The monopoly status of stars is not only of value to producers and distributors. As Leo Rosten observed, star labour has a uniqueness which

'places that personality in an almost unchallengeable bargaining position' (1941: 329). Historical examples have shown that both producers and stars are aware of the value of personal monopoly represented through a star's image. How that monopoly is defined and used is therefore potentially an area for struggle. Star contracts must deal with stars as both labour and capital, defining relationships over not only the star as a particular category of worker but also the star as a property and a product that can be exploited for commercial purposes in image markets.

Star work has a different status in the labour market than other types of work. In manufacturing, for example, labour is hired to produce something separate from the person. The sale of that product as a commodity in the market has been the basis for Marxist arguments that labour is alienated in capitalist economies. At first glance, this condition would not appear to apply to stars, for here the person and the thing produced are one. However, there are potential grounds for division between the star as working person and the star as image, a division between the star as labour and the star as capital. The image may be taken to represent the person but it is also separable from the person. Star images are circulated in various forms of text and in many different contexts. Star contracts must therefore define not only the conditions of an actor's labour but also the rights to use the star's image. As Jane Gaines (1992) observes, the contracts of stars are intended to cover two legal entities: the private person of the performer and the star image.

Gaines points out that star contracts are based on conditions of exclusivity. Unlike other categories of labour, involving the sale of knowledge or skill, the work of stars is based on the selling of a distinctive identity. To sue for breach of contract, the employer must be able to show that a star's services are extraordinary and unique, and that without the services of that particular star, the employer would be damaged in ways that could not be compensated. Equally, the contracts of stars must determine the rights to the exploitation of a star's image. Studying particular examples of star contracts, Gaines sees conditions laid out to determine the right to use a star's 'acts, poses, plays and appearances', and then the 'name, voice and likeness' of the star (1992: 157). The former appear as part of a feature film and as such are the property of the film's copyright holder. The second, however, can be used to carry the star's image into other media, designed for commercial and promotional use.

Gaines comments that 'there is more at stake in the enforcement of a personal services contract in the entertainment industry than in other fields of employment because the entertainer *is* the product' (1992: 153; emphasis in original). The relationship of person to image is the ground for potential legal conflict for the star system. While the star has some control over how he or she appears on-screen, depending on the agreed terms, contracts can grant the right to use a star's name, voice or likeness in ways which may not be seen to be desirable to the star as a person. The image is therefore always liable to escape the individual control of the star.

The Production of Popular Identities

There are several connections to be made between seeing the star as image, labour and capital. Star images are collections of meanings read from various star texts. Star work involves the labour of contributing to the creation of some of those texts. In the Hollywood industry, stars are placed in the structure of specialised and hierarchically organised relationships with other categories of labour. Unlike other performers, stars have greater power in the industry because of their dual capacity as labour and capital. The star becomes a form of capital inasmuch as his or her image can be used to create advantage in the market for films and secure profits. Because the image is not the person but rather a set of texts and meanings that signify the person, then the image is something separable from the star. Star contracts cover both the labour of the star but also the product of that labour, the image. Contracts set out the ownership and control of the image, defining who has the right to use the image, or parts of the image, and in what contexts. The images of stars are therefore legal entities.

What follows is an attempt to explore these connections between stars as image, labour and capital during different phases of Hollywood history. We will look at the place of the star system in the changing conditions of the industry as a whole but also how examples of particular cases, be they stars or organisations, represent certain trends in the system at that time.

2 MAKING THE SYSTEM

When tracing the foundations of the film star system, some histories of the cinema have frequently repeated a now familiar anecdote as the catalytic moment for the creation of the system (see, for example, Cook 1996: 40; Jacobs 1968: 86–7). The story goes something like this. In the first decade of the twentieth century, American film production companies withheld the names of film performers, despite requests from audiences, fearing that public recognition would drive performers to demand higher salaries. This policy was followed by the powerful companies of the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC) (i.e. Biograph, Edison, Essanay, Kalem, Kleine Optical, Lubin, Pathé Frères, Selig Polyscope, Star Film and Vitagraph) and independent producers and distributors. In 1910, however, the independent producer Carl Laemmle directly confronted the power of the MPPC when he lured the leading Biograph actor Florence Lawrence to his company, the Independent Motion Picture (IMP) Corporation (later the Universal studio). Laemmle promoted Lawrence's arrival at IMP by naming her in an elaborate piece of newspaper publicity. On 12 March, Laemmle bought space in the trade paper *Moving Picture World* to denounce a previous story supposedly run by a St Louis newspaper which had allegedly reported that Lawrence, previously known only as 'The Biograph Girl', was killed in a car accident. Proclaiming 'We nail a lie', the IMP announcement named Lawrence as the new 'IMP girl' and reassured readers of the actor's continued good health and her forthcoming appearance in *The Broken Oath*, to be released on 14 March.

While the anecdote is appealing for its portrayal of Laemmle's entrepreneurial cheek and the courageous struggle it conjures up of a nascent independent fighting the mighty MPPC, it does not satisfactorily account for how the star system emerged in American cinema. Recent accounts of the film star system have seen cause to revise this conventional history. While film actors were not named in early cinema, there is evidence to show that producers were advertising the names of leading performers prior to the Lawrence incident. A further difficulty with the story is that it tends to imply that the star system was the invention of the early film industry. American theatre, however, had already formed its own star system during the nineteenth century, providing an example to the film industry of the value in promoting individual fame for the entertainment business.

To examine these foundations further, this chapter looks at the impact of the star system on nineteenth-century American theatre before tracing the earliest actions by the film industry to name and promote its leading actors.

American Theatre and the Coming of the Star System

Before the War of American Independence (1775–81), companies of British actors toured the colonies of the 'New World'. Professional theatre began in America during 1752 when the London manager William Hallam organised a group of ten actors led by his brother Lewis. The Hallam company took up residence in Williamsburg, Virginia, performing a repertory of plays by established English dramatists, including Shakespeare and Farquhar (see Harris 1994).

Lacking the prestige of the legitimate English theatre, the colonial companies were unable to attract the best acting talent and certainly not the stars of the London stage (see Mordden 1981). Instead, Hallam employed his wife and other members of his family, and the company came to represent the stock system that continued to dominate American theatre until the late nineteenth century. Based on the recollections of family member Lewis Hallam Jr, the theatre historian William Dunlap described the Hallam company as 'a well organised republic, every member of which had his part assigned to him, both private and public, behind and before the curtain' (1832: 509). In the stock company, a group of actors would be employed for a season to specialise in playing characters cast by familiar 'lines of busi-

ness' or types of role, for example 'leading man/lady', 'heavy', 'soubrette' or 'old woman' (McArthur 1984: 5–7). Salaries would be scaled according to these lines of business. Built on the principle of ensemble playing, the stock company system did not privilege the appearance of individual star performers.

While indigenous companies were in existence at the end of the eighteenth century, even after independence the English stage continued to dominate the theatre in North America. During the early nineteenth century, centres of theatre culture were established along the eastern seaboard. Following an increase of population and wealth in urban centres, major theatre houses were established in Philadelphia, New York and Charleston, and tours of America began to appear more attractive to leading actors from London. In 1810, the English tragedian George Frederick Cooke became the first star of the London stage to tour America. Cooke's visit started a trend which saw English stars touring theatres to appear for a few performances in leading roles supported by resident stock company actors (see Wilson 1966).

Amongst the English stars to follow Cooke's example was the famous Shakespearean actor, Edmund Kean. After an unremarkable and often difficult career as a strolling player, Kean came to star prominence in London when in 1814 he took the role of Shylock in 'The Merchant of Venice' at Drury Lane. Kean's status was largely due to his style of acting, which became well known for its dynamic energy and violent emotionality. As the English critic William Hazlitt observed, 'Kean is all effort, all violence, all extreme passion; he is possessed with a fury, a demon that leaves him no repose, no time for thought or room for imagination', and Samuel Coleridge famously remarked, 'to see Kean was to read Shakespeare by flashes of lightning' (both quoted in Cole and Chinoy 1970: 327). Motivated by financial difficulties he was having in Britain at the time, Kean first visited America in 1820, appearing in New York, Philadelphia and Boston to perform a repertory of Shakespearean roles, including Hamlet, Othello and Richard III. For his appearances, Kean was paid £50 for each performance, plus a share of box office profits (see Taubman 1967). Kean later returned in 1825 for a second tour.

Cooke and Kean represented the influence of the English star system on the American theatre. For certain commentators, the dominance of the American theatre scene by the London stage was a cause for nationalistic

outrage. For example, the American poet Walt Whitman declared that 'English managers, English actors, and English plays ... must be allowed to die away among us, as usurpers of our stage' (quoted in Taubman 1967: 83). American theatre began to find its first crop of indigenous theatre stars from the 1820s through to the 1850s. Notable names of the period were Edwin Forrest, Mary Ann Duff, Charlotte Cushman and Edwin Booth, among others.

With the appearance of these early indigenous stars, some commentators were critical of what they saw as the influence of popular performers on American theatre. Writing in his autobiography, the theatre manager William B. Wood saw the advent of stars as a consequence of broader social changes, a symptom of nineteenth-century modernity brought about by 'a spirit of change – of exhilaration – of excitement ... an end of an old order of things, and the advent of some new and undefined ones' (Wood 1855: 544). Wood lamented the effect of stars on the American stage, believing 'regular actors no longer form ... a stock company, but [are] reduced to the condition of mere ministers or servants upon some principal performer, whose attractions it was now their sole and chief duty to increase, illustrate, or set off'. Wood's observations were prophetic, forecasting the trend that would bring sweeping changes to the American theatre in the second half of the nineteenth century.

While the American theatre saw its own native stars emerge during the nineteenth century, for most of the century the theatre remained dominated by the stock company system. During the 1870s however, the stock system began to decline. As a result of railroad building during the civil war, large-scale theatrical tours became easier and affordable (Harris 1994: 7). Combination companies, as they were known, were brought together for a single play instead of a season of plays. Where the stock actor was hired to perform a special line of business across a series of plays, actors in the combination system were employed to perform a specific role in a single play. To support the economics of the combination system, managers and booking agents assumed a new importance in the planning of major tours, and star names were marketed to sell tours around the national circuit.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the decline in the stock company system and domination of the combination company was central to fully instituting a star system in American theatre. By the time of the arrival of cinema in the mid-1890s therefore, American theatre already

offered a representative model of the economic and symbolic importance of stars in popular entertainment.

Case Study: Edwin Forrest, the Bowery B'hoys and the Declaration of American Stardom

Edwin Forrest made his professional debut in 1820 at the age of fourteen, and developed a career based on his passionate portrayal of great tragic roles. Forrest enjoyed mass appeal with his native audience and has come to occupy a place in theatre history as the first home-grown American star. With his agile physique and sonorous voice, Forrest was well known for his energetic performance style. Like Kean, to whom Forrest played a supporting role during the English star's 1825 tour, Forrest's stardom depended on the dynamic and aggressive spectacle of his acting. Early in his career, Forrest became associated with the Bowery Theatre (opened in 1826), situated in one of the tougher areas of New York, where his vibrant acting style won him a loyal audience amongst the local 'Bowery B'hoys'.

Although frequently likened to Kean, Forrest's acting assumed nationalistic significance as the mark of an American style and tradition. For Watt Whitman, reviewing Forrest's performance as 'The Gladiator' for an 1846 edition of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, the star displayed a distinctive American style. While Whitman praised Forrest's performances, he saw the star's style eagerly imitated but rarely equalled by the many other actors of the day who chose to adopt a 'loud-mouthed ranting style' (Whitman 1846: 546). Forrest's national significance was most pronounced during the 1849 tour by the English star, William Charles Macready. In contrast to the passion of Forrest, Macready worked with a far more restrained acting style.

When Forrest performed in London during 1845, he received a hostile reception from British audiences, a response which the American star believed was maliciously cultivated by Macready. Disputes between Forrest and Macready escalated during the English actor's 1849 tour of America, culminating in scenes of public disorder. When Macready appeared as Macbeth at the Astor Place Theatre on 8 May, the Bowery B'hoys disrupted the performance with shouting, heckling and the throwing of chairs onto the stage. Returning to the Astor two days later, Macready was once again subjected to a hostile reception. As the house became more rowdy, the night turned into a full-scale riot, ending when an infantry unit fired into the

crowd, killing twenty-two people and injuring many others (Taubman 1967: 89–92). In retrospect, the Astor Place Riot appears as more than simply a conflict between two actors. Forrest was not just a star but an American star. Forrest's stardom represented not only the popular appeal of a single performer but also a wider sense of American theatre struggling to break from a colonial past and produce its own cultural identity.

Early Film – Cinema Without Stars

While the star system was firmly established in the American theatre by the end of the nineteenth century, early cinema did not immediately emulate the theatre business. Film technology was developed in various contexts at the end of the century. In the United States, Thomas Edison and William Kennedy Laurie Dickson developed the Kinetoscope camera, which Edison patented in 1891, followed by the Kinetograph viewing machine. The Kinetograph allowed one person at a time to watch short films or Kinetophones. In Europe, machines were developed for the projection of large images to a public audience. In 1895, the French brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière patented their Cinématographe, a combined camera, printer and projector. That same year the German brothers Max and Emile Skladanowsky patented the Bioskop projector, and in Britain, Robert W. Paul and partner Birt Acres built their own camera, which Paul accompanied with a commercial patent in 1896 for his projector, the Theatrograph.

In this immediate phase of early cinema, business was driven by the economics of film hardware. The first film companies were the patent holders and manufacturers of camera and projection equipment. These manufacturers regarded the technological display of moving images in itself to be the prime appeal for audiences. The films themselves were of secondary concern and early cinema was marketed to audiences through the exciting possibilities of film technology. This trend marked a departure from the theatre, which was dominated by the production of narrative dramas. Tom Gunning (1986) regards early filmmakers of the period 1895–1906 as developing what he calls a 'cinema of attractions'. Excited by the technological possibilities of projecting moving pictures, filmmakers created a cinema of attractions which explored the wide range of uses for film to record and show something. Early films frequently worked to document a real-life moment and, in some cases, filmmakers would manipulate the technology

so as to transform reality. For example, the Lumières' *Démolition d'un Mur* (*Falling Wall*, 1895) documented the knocking down of a wall into a pile of rubble followed by the use of reverse printing to create the magical illusion of the wall returning to its former upright and intact state. This preoccupation was different to that of narrative cinema, in which film was explored as a medium specifically to represent a fictional world. Early cinema was not without narrative fictions and the Lumières would also make the two-actor comedy short *L'Arroseur Arrosé* (*The Gardener and the Bad Boy*, 1895).

Early filmmakers were therefore not concerned exclusively with making non-narrative films but the entertainment appeal of dramas or story films did not lead the business thinking of the industry at this time. By perceiving the value of the medium to be in the attraction of film technology, the early cinema business did not immediately look towards copying the practices of the theatre, including the star system. Reflecting on early film history, it could be argued that the first stars of cinema were the camera and the projector; however this would be erroneous, for it would be to miss the point that the early film business in the United States and Europe developed as a cinema without a need for stars.

While acknowledging that cinema emerged as a medium of show rather than a medium of drama, it is important, however, not to lose sight of what was shown in early films. Although technology was the draw for audiences of the period, early films also immediately reveal the preoccupation amongst filmmakers with recording the activities of human subjects. Working in Edison's studio, known as the 'Black Maria', Dickson created numerous shorts, including films with descriptive titles such as *Blacksmith Scene* (1893), *Record of a Sneeze* (1894), *Amateur Gymnast* (1894) and *The Barbershop* (1894) (see Musser 1994). In the Lumière brothers' famous *La Sortie des Ouvriers de L'usine Lumière* (*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, 1895), the static camera captures people in an everyday ritual. The attraction of early cinema therefore combined a fascination with the spectacle of technology and the spectacle of human action. It is this showing of people on screen which has made cinema from its earliest moment a performance medium if not exclusively a dramatic medium.

The type of performance created by early cinema was not orientated towards the construction of star identities. Where filmmakers did produce short narratives, the presentation of human subjects excluded elements essential to screen stardom. It was the convention of early narrative film-

making to anchor the camera in a fixed position that set the action in a long shot at a distance from where it was difficult to recognise or individuate the actors. Without credits to identify the names of the actors or the characters they played, the performers of early narrative cinema were undistinguished and unknown.

In some cases, short films were made of performers who already enjoyed a reputation in other fields of entertainment. Between 1896–1906, early cinema was organised around a period of itinerant exhibition, as projectionists travelled with their equipment and films to show as inserts in vaudeville programmes (Alien 1980). The interaction of cinema and vaudeville extended to the cast of performers who appeared in early films. In March 1894, Dickson filmed the Austrian strongman, Eugene Sandow. Other names from the vaudeville stage featured in Kinetograph shorts, including the Spanish dancer Carmencita, contortionist Madame Edna Bertoldi, facial contortionist George Layman, and boxing duo the Glenroy Brothers (Musser 1994). Running for less than a minute, these shorts showed extracts from longer stage acts. One Kinetograph subject, the vaudeville dancer Annabelle Moore, caused a scandal when she was rumoured to have danced naked at a New York stag party given by the showman P. T. Barnum. Although the incident was denied, copies of her film *Annabelle Dancing* increased in price from \$10 to \$40 (see Christie 1994).

With dancers and contortionists as its subject matter, the look of early cinema was drawn to the attraction of seeing the movement and manipulation of the human body. For Gunning, the cinema of attractions was an exhibitionist cinema, creating a spectacle that self-consciously acknowledged the presence of the audience, against the voyeuristic cinema of narrative film in which the audience spy on a framed world that does not appear aware of the spectator. Dickson's films of vaudeville performers were representative of this exhibitionist tendency. Subjects were filmed in such a way that they performed direct to camera, reproducing the presentational address of the popular stage. With Sandow, the camera captured the strongman in medium long shot as he flexed and displayed his musculature to the camera. In early cinema, therefore, the performers who appeared on screen were professionals from outside the cinema, and the look of the camera demonstrated a greater preoccupation with the show of bodies over the representation of dramatic characters.

The Emergence of the Film Actor

While early film brought performers such as Sandow and Carmencita to the attention of film audiences, in the first years of the twentieth century the American cinema did not have a star system. For vaudeville performers, any degree of public recognition they enjoyed was for the work they did outside the cinema. Vaudeville acts did not perform regularly enough in film to construct any substantial cinematic fame. Also early producers or exhibitors did not seek to market films through the names of performers. Films were shot in such ways that actors could not be clearly identified and audiences had no means of knowing the individuals who appeared on screen. It was the predominant mode of early cinema, therefore, to present anonymous bodies on screen.

Three factors appear central to the development of the star system in the American cinema. First, the industrial organisation of filmmaking based on systems of mass production in the United States and the move towards a specialised or detailed division of labour involved in this process. Secondly, growth in the production of narrative film and the formal changes in the organisation of on-screen space that resulted from this change. Finally, the beginnings of an active circulation of information about the identities of performers in films.

In early cinema, small film companies comprised a handful of individuals creating product for the projection technicians who ran itinerant exhibition. As changes in the organisation of film distribution, exhibition and production saw the scale of business grow, then cinema became a fully fledged industry (see Balio 1985a). From 1903, film exchanges opened enabling cost effective distribution and a regular supply of new releases to exhibitors. Increased audience demand led to the boom from 1904–5 in the building of small nickelodeon storefront theatres. As thousands of small storefront theatres opened between 1907–9, the American film business stepped up filmmaking activity, gradually moving towards an industrial model of mass production. The period 1907–13 saw a shift in the geography of film production as companies moved towards the west coast of the United States to take advantage of the warmer climate and brighter shooting conditions. The concentration of production facilities in and around a single Los Angeles suburb has meant that since this time the American film industry is frequently referred to simply as Hollywood. It was in the context

of this industrialisation of the American film business that the star system would eventually emerge.

With an increase in the volume of film production, the American industry saw the transition from what Janet Staiger (1985b) sees as the organisation of production centred on the cameraman to a director-led system of production. At Edison, Dickson was representative of the cameraman system, taking overall responsibility not only to photograph a scene, but also to choose the subject matter, stage the performers, and then develop and edit the material. As early as 1904, companies began using directors to manage production and for Staiger the director system was prevalent by 1907. Several directors came to film after experience in the theatre, including D. W. Griffith who joined Biograph in 1907 as a film actor and story writer before becoming a director. With the director system, filmmaking began to move away from the social division of labour that the cameraman system was based on and towards a detailed division of labour, separating the conception and execution of production with the director managing a crew who individually took responsibility for separate crafts in filmmaking.

This transition to a detailed division of labour in film production changed the status of the film actor. Before 1907, the performers in early film narratives were either non-professionals or actors who worked in the theatre but took occasional employment in the films (see Musser 1986). Production schedules were irregular and, with films hiring actors for single days, very few performers found regular employment in films. Eileen Bowser (1990) suggests that at this time film was seen to attract those actors from the lower ranks of the profession who were looking for work between engagements. Theatre continued to provide the main source of employment for actors, defining the legitimate working context of the performing professional. While producers feared that naming could give performers wider public recognition, leading to greater power in the negotiation of their contracts, the anonymity of film acting also served the interests of actors who did not want their name associated with the less prestigious work of appearing in films.

From 1907, however, an increase in narrative production provided opportunities for actors to find regular work in films. Producers formed their own equivalent of the stock company system of nineteenth-century theatre, with Vitagraph and other companies hiring a pool of actors who were

employed in various roles across a series of films. Paid by the day, leading actors received \$10, rank and file players \$5, and extras between \$2 to \$3 (see Balio 1985a). Benjamin McArthur (1984) suggests actors were drawn to working in films, attracted by the money, the widespread exposure and the permanence of their performance recorded on film. Furthermore, Bowser (1990) argues that the regular employment of the screen cowboy Gilbert M. 'Broncho Billy' Anderson and comedian Ben Turpin made these actors the first movie stars. Although actors of the legitimate theatre were hired to appear in films, in many cases the transition from stage to screen proved to be unsuccessful. Stage stars such as the musical-comedy performer Blanche Ring and comedian Eddie Foy Jr. found their work did not translate from live stage to silent screen (see McArthur 1984). The Triangle Studio closed as a result of hiring major stage names on high salaries for films which failed at the box office. Although film struggled against theatrical tradition for recognition of professional legitimacy, the growing film market provided a context in which actors could reasonably expect to work regularly and for comparatively good rates of pay. With industrialisation and the organisation of production through a detailed division of roles, the film actor emerged as a separate category of labour.

It was not only the increased volume of film production that gave actors greater opportunities for work in film at this time but also the growing dominance of narrative production over other types of film and this increase in narrative film production is a second significant factor in the making of the star system in American cinema. Early cinema had taken the novelty of film technology as the basis for its business; however, the attractions of that technology were limited. To maintain demand, the film business saw a shift from prioritising the economics of film hardware towards the concern with driving the market through producing new and attractive films. Before 1903, various types of film appeared in vaudeville programmes. Audiences were offered a wide variety of films, including not only the recordings of vaudeville acts discussed earlier, but also trick films (exploiting the manipulative effects of camera technology), various forms of documentary, comedies and short dramas.

Of the films made in 1904, Robert Allen (1980) sees films with documentary subject matter accounting for 42 per cent of the total films produced. Comedies comprised 45 per cent of films, with dramatic narratives accounting for eight per cent and trick films five per cent. Between

1907–8, a significant change occurred as production of narrative forms in the shape of comedies and dramas swiftly overwhelmed documentary forms. In 1907, production was divided between 67 per cent comedies and dramas, against 33 per cent documentaries. By 1908, the imbalance in output had increased to 96 per cent narrative forms and only four per cent documentary forms.

There is no clear evidence to suggest why this change should have happened. Allen suggests that the growth in nickelodeon building created an increased demand for new films that required producers to rethink their production practices. Documentary forms required shooting on location, which was not only costly but also placed crews in environments where happenings did not occur under the total control of the crew and so could not be planned or predicted. Narrative production, either in the form of comedies or dramas, could be planned, contained and organised in the controlled environment of the studio, with material generated specifically for that purpose. Allen therefore speculates that the increased volume of narrative filmmaking came from the need to regularise production in order to supply exhibitors: narrative allowed filmmakers and distributors to efficiently control supply to meet demand. While this argument may be a point for further research in film history, it is the effect and not the cause which is important for the star system. Relying on the skilled performer, the increased output of comedies and dramas expanded the labour market for professional actors to work regularly in film.

As film in the United States moved from a cinema of attractions to a narrative cinema, filmmakers explored the possibilities of film form in telling stories. Early narrative filmmaking tended to photograph an entire scene in a single shot, with the camera set at sufficient distance from the action so as to capture the whole body of a performer in long shot. This manner of filming made the frame equivalent to the proscenium arch in the theatre. Like stage actors, a film actor had to be conscious of how he or she placed the body in performance. Film performers were required to keep their bodies at angles that were constantly open to the look of the imaginary audience represented by the fixed camera. Early narrative film therefore displayed a frontal style of performance, limiting the performance possibilities of actors. Filming actors in long shot, these tableaux scenes not only demanded a highly gestural and demonstrative style of acting but also set members of the audience at a distance that prevented the intimate

identification necessary for stars to become a recognisable feature of film narrative.

Janet Staiger (1985a) sees the American film industry undergoing a number of changes in the development in narrative film production between 1908–12. During this period the industry moved more towards character-centred narratives with dialogue intertitles. In a change to film style, the camera was moved closer to the action, cutting actors off at the knees and, on occasions, framing the actor from head to waist in medium shot. As the conventions of continuity editing were elaborated, so an increased use of close-ups, patterns of shot/reverse-shot cutting, and eye-line matching, were all used to bring further emphasis to the actor's face as a source of meaning. Changes in staging methods therefore established a complex performance space on screen in which the camera shifted its relationship to the bodies of performers.

With this new performance space came a more physically reserved style of acting. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, American theatre had already seen many actors moving away from the declamatory style of acting associated with melodrama, preferring a more restrained style of playing which was seen to introduce a new standard of realism in acting. Roberta Pearson (1992) identifies a similar shift occurring in American film in the period after narrative film forms began to dominate production. The effects of this transition became most evident in the years 1910–11. As the use of camera more closely explored the details of the actor's performance, so actors drew on small gestures and facial expressions. This combination of film form and performance style constructed a greater sense of interiority in performance. In the trade papers of the period, commentators viewed this change as bringing psychological complexity to film acting.

Pearson argues this transition played an important part in raising the cultural status of cinema in America. The new acting style was not simply a product of the change in film form but an imitation of the stylistic practices found in the legitimate theatre, signifying a sense of 'quality'. Performance style therefore played a role in distinguishing narrative film from the cinema's roots in vaudeville exhibition. As Pearson comments, 'the shift in performance style can ... be seen as part of cinema's transition from the cheap amusement of the "lower orders" to mainstream medium appealing to patrons of all classes' (1992: 139).

The Discourses of Stardom

While the industrialisation of film production created a detailed division of labour, providing regular employment for actors, and the dominance of narrative production elaborated methods of staging that provided audiences with a more intimate image of performers, these were only necessary but not sufficient conditions for the production of star identities. Audiences could see performers but they had no means of knowing who they watched. A final factor in the making of the film star system therefore came with the circulation of information that identified and promoted the images of individual performers. For Richard de Cordova (1990), the emergence of the star system in American cinema came after 1907 with the distribution of certain types of knowledge or 'discourse' about film performers. As film acting became a stable profession, during 1907 the trade press began to publish articles examining the work of the film actor. De Cordova sees the appearance of such articles as marking an important early stage in the emergence of the star system. By making known the work of film acting, these early articles raised public awareness of the human labour involved in the production of on-screen performances, resulting in what he has referred to as the 'discourse on acting'. In line with the transition to a detailed division of labour, in which actors became a specialised category of worker, the discursive construction of the 'film actor' as a category of artistic professional was introduced to the moviegoing public. The effect of this discourse was that while individual actors remained unknown, something of the work of acting was revealed.

As cinema matured as an entertainment business in America, members of the MPPC and independent producers marketed their films through brand names. For example, films were sold as Biographs or Vitagraphs. Brand names worked by selling a film through its sameness to other films, offering audiences a reassuring indicator of quality which, as Bowser argues, guaranteed 'uniformity of the product manufactured' (1990: 103). Branding identified one body of films as the work of a particular studio while also differentiating those films from the products of other studios. A brand name was therefore a sign of similarity and difference.

Although branding as a marketing strategy directed the consuming interests of audiences towards the production company and not the performers, when the companies did begin to publish the names of their

players, those names functioned in the same way to signify similarity and difference. Early cases of naming occurred before the infamous Laemmle/Lawrence incident. When Vitagraph, a member of the MPPC, released its production of *Oliver Twist* in May 1909, the film carried an on-screen credit announcing 'Miss Etita Proctor Otis as "Nancy Sykes"' at the point where the actor first appeared in the film. At the same time, the *New York Dramatic Mirror* named Otis and promoted her appearance as Nancy Sykes. Naming personalities worked in conjunction with the new performance space of narrative film to individuate performers. Audiences could begin not only to recognise performers but also had a name to put to the face. As that face and name appeared across films, so an on-screen identity was pieced together.

Further instances of naming soon followed. Edison ran articles on performers in the company's own *Kinetogram* periodical. In particular, the French pantomime artist Pilar-Morin was promoted across a number of films, with the effect that her name became the means for the identification of a specific on-screen identity. It is this use of the name to construct knowledge of performers across a series of film appearances that de Cordova sees as central to advancing the promotion of the 'picture personality'. Where the discourse on acting constructed a supra-individual knowledge of film performance as a craft practised by many, the picture personality introduced a specifically individual knowledge of the single performer.

Naming sectioned-off certain performers as worthy of special attention and American cinema began to systematically promote individual actors as a means of marketing films. In particular, Kalem, Edison and the French company Pathé, all actively announced the names of actors in their films. To promote personalities, production companies introduced new methods for raising awareness of leading names. Alongside newspaper articles and advertisements, the names of actors appeared on lobby cards made by producers for exhibitors to display in theatres, together with slides of favourite actors to be shown between films (see Staiger 1983). Performers made personal appearances and fan magazines were published. By May 1911, the Edison company had started to provide on-screen credits for its actors. Within two years after the first naming of film actors, cinema had discovered many of the basic promotional tools still used to sell stars today.

For de Cordova, the name of the performer was central to the inter-textuality of the picture personality's image. At one level, the name functioned to construct the picture personality as an on-screen identity, linking performances in separate films: 'Personality existed as an effect of ... the representation of character across a number of films' (1990: 86). The effect of the name extended beyond the screen; however, into stories carried by the press and fan magazines, yet de Cordova sees this extra-filmic discourse limited to discussion of the on-screen work and roles of personalities. For this reason, knowledge of personalities remained anchored in the performer's on-screen life, with the identities of personalities defined in terms of 'a professional existence – a history of appearances in films and plays and a personality gleaned from those appearances' (1990: 92).

While the personality discourse was an important stage in the emergence of the star system, for de Cordova the system itself was only fully realised after 1913 when stories circulated in the press about the off-screen lives of popular film performers. This new realm of knowledge introduced readers to life behind the screen, so that the star was known not only through his or her roles but also as 'a character in a narrative quite separable from his or her work in any film' (1990: 99). By combining knowledge of on-screen and off-screen lives, star discourse constructed both a professional and private existence for performers. In the star discourse, de Cordova identifies a central concern with distinguishing the moral healthiness of work in cinema against life in theatre. Compared to the nighttime work, travelling and general insecurities of the theatre, working in films was represented as offering regular daytime conditions conducive to maintaining stable domestic and familial lives.

Another set of concerns with the private existence of film performers came through reporting the wealthy lifestyles enjoyed by stars. With big homes and expensive cars, the lifestyle of stars exemplified the values of the consumer economy. Stardom and consumerism both share an element of fantasy and desire. Consumerism is escapist, promoting the fantasy of living beyond basic necessities. The market suggests consumers are free to choose what they want rather than what they need. Through the exercise of choice, consumption takes on the appearance of an act of individual self-expression. Advertising becomes a vital component of the consumer economy, using the image of things to stimulate desire. Images of wealth, freedom and individualism are therefore fundamental to consumerism and

since the start of the star system, popular film performers have played a significant role in promoting those values.

With many stars known to have come from humble backgrounds, the glorification of consumption in the coverage of star lifestyles presented the trappings of stardom as material pleasures which could be legitimately aspired to and possibly achieved by one and all. As Lary May observes in his discussion of press reporting on the lifestyles of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, 'they demonstrated how modern consumption allowed one to emulate the styles of the high and mighty' (1980: 145–6).

By representing the moral rectitude of performers' lives, star discourse promoted the image of the whole cinema business. Through controlling what became known about a star's private existence, production companies could actively manage the image of the industry, protecting it against those critics who were eager to dismiss cinema as morally degraded and in need of censorial intervention. With many early stars playing on-screen roles as virtuous heroes and heroines whose moral course withstood whatever challenges were put in its way, the representation of a wholesome off-screen existence achieved moral closure between the star's on-screen and off-screen images. During the early 1920s however, newspaper stories began to appear which disrupted that closure. Between 1920–21, several stories broke about the divorces of stars such as Conway Tearle, Clara Kimbell Young, Francis X. Bushman and Douglas Fairbanks (see de Cordova 1990). Initially, these stories received little attention by the press. From late 1921, however, a series of high-profile scandals made headlines and had a profound effect on star discourse. Most notable was the case of popular comedian Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle, who was accused but later acquitted of murdering the film actor Virginia Rappe in his hotel room. For de Cordova, the star scandal added a further level of knowledge to star discourse: 'Exposés on the real lives of the stars would no longer be limited to stories of success, security, and marital bliss; transgression, betrayal, restlessness, and loss entered into the dramatic formula' (1990: 121).

For the early star system, the effect of reporting scandal therefore drew attention to the contradictions that could exist in the images and lives of stars. Through the circulation of the discourses of stardom, audiences came to know who they watched on screen. With the construction of the picture personality, the performer became a vital means of branding and differentiating the film product. Covering the lifestyles of performers, star

discourse picked out certain film actors as worthy of identification and desire. In contradiction to what appeared in films and sanctioned accounts of the star's lifestyle, star scandal made known what appeared to be the most intimate truths of a star's identity. Whether true or not, scandal stories were nevertheless important to an audience's understanding of the star as not only an object of desire but also a desiring subject.

Case Study: Mary Pickford – From 'the Girl with the Curls' to United Artists

Mary Pickford holds a significant place in the early history of film stardom. Not only was she one of the most popular stars of the silent era but through her own actions, she effectively exploited her image and in so doing revealed the early value placed by the American film industry on the star as capital. Born in Toronto, real name Gladys Mary Smith, Pickford was still a child when she entered the theatre by joining a local stock company. Her theatrical career continued into her early teens, touring and working for David Belasco in New York, until in 1909 she left the theatre to become a film actor at Biograph under the direction of D. W. Griffith.

It was during her years at Biograph that Pickford achieved her star status. Like all actors of the time, Pickford's appearances for Biograph were uncredited. Pickford can, however, be seen as one of the first players to be lifted out of anonymity by the discourse of the picture personality. In her first big hit for Biograph, Griffith's *The Little Teacher* (1909), intertitles identified Pickford as 'Little Mary', a label that would stick for much of her early film career. Other sources referred to her as 'Goldilocks', 'The Girl with the Curls' and, after Florence Lawrence left for IMP, 'The Biograph Girl'. As Molly Haskell suggests, Pickford's image was similar to that of Griffith's other major female star of the period, Lillian Gish, a type who represented 'the diminutive child-woman' (1987: 58). Pickford's image contrasted sharply with that of other female contemporaries, such as the vampish Theda Bara and the sophisticated Louise Brooks.

Although Pickford's image signified fragility and innocence, the star showed herself to be a shrewd businesswoman, and she was quick to take control of her career. Naming made Pickford into a marketable personality and the value of the star's image was not only recognised and exploited by the studios but also by the star herself. Leaving Biograph to join IMP in December 1910, Pickford successfully negotiated a salary rise to \$175

a week. There followed a series of rapid career moves, with a four-picture contract the following year at Majestic for \$275 a week, and in 1912 a lucrative new contract with Biograph (see Balio 1976).

During a brief return to the Broadway stage in 1913, Pickford was spotted by Adolph Zukor who asked her to join his Famous Players Company. While working for Zukor, Pickford's salary would rise dramatically. Initially signing for \$500 a week, Pickford used her name to negotiate ever higher salaries, rising quickly to \$1,000 and then \$2,000 a week. When the American Film Company offered Pickford \$4,000 a week for the serial *The Diamond in the Sky*, Zukor was forced to meet the price to hold on to the star. Such was the value of the Pickford name that Mary's sister Lotte was employed for the series instead. To keep Pickford, Zukor agreed in 1916 to the formation of the star's own production company, The Mary Pickford Corporation, with Pickford owning a 50 per cent interest, taking half the profits of all films and earning \$10,000 a week, a guaranteed salary of at least \$1 million over two years.

Pickford was able to exercise leverage in salary negotiations for it was known that Paramount, the distributor of films from Famous Players, used the Pickford name to sell packages of films to exhibitors through the practice of block booking (that is, organising sales of fixed packages of film titles that mixed average or poor product with star titles). As Zukor raised Pickford's salary, he passed the cost on to the exhibitor, increasing the guarantee fee from \$35,000 to \$65,000 and then \$120,000. When Pickford's salary went up to \$10,000 a week, the guarantee fee reached \$165,000 (Pickford 1956). After her contract expired in 1918, First National poached Pickford with an offer of \$675,000 for three films, with 50 per cent of profits along with authority to select scripts and the right to have a say in the final cut of her films (Balio 1976).

If Pickford's business acumen contrasted with the image of 'Little Mary', then so did her private life. Initially married to Owen Moore when both were acting at Biograph, the marriage collapsed amidst Moore's drunkenness and Pickford's affair with fellow screen idol, Douglas Fairbanks. In the press, an image of marital bliss was conveyed, working to achieve moral closure between the on-screen and off-screen lives of Pickford. Divorce from Moore in 1920 and Pickford's subsequent marriage to Fairbanks could have fractured that closure. De Cordova observes, however, that Pickford's life neatly avoided becoming an early source of the scandal discourse.

FIGURE 1 *Mary Pickford*

Instead of scandal, 'the Pickford-Fairbanks affair was recuperated in a family discourse', with the two stars 'touted as the country's ideal couple' (1990: 123).

Pickford fought to achieve independence in her dealings with the studios, making her most direct gesture in 1919 when, following rumours the studios were intending to cap star salaries, she and Fairbanks joined with Griffith and Charlie Chaplin (the most highly-priced male star of the period) to form United Artists (UA). UA functioned as a distribution company for the films produced by the star names, placing the owners in a position where they could extend their economic power by negotiating more broadly across the film industry. Tino Balio explains:

As heads of their own production companies, [the stars] controlled all artistic aspects of their work – from the creation of the scenario, to the selection of the director, to the final cut. By organising a distribution company, they could oversee, in addition, the crucial function of sales, advertising, and publicity. (1987: 10)

This power was evident with Pickford's first UA release, Paul Powell's *Pollyanna* (1919) in which she reprised her little girl image in the title role. *Pollyanna* was produced through Pickford's own company and distributed by UA. Whereas the established business practice in the exhibition sector was to lease prints from distributors for a fixed fee, *Pollyanna* was made available only on the basis of both a guaranteed base rental fee together with a percentage split of box office income. Despite complaints, exhibitors agreed to UA's terms, transforming the business model for dealings between distributors and exhibitors.

During the 1920s, Pickford's career would experience rises and falls in the star's critical and financial status. Despite taking more adult roles, the moviegoing public were reluctant to let Pickford shed her child-woman image. From its inception, UA experienced decades of financial crises, the cause of which has been partly attributed to the company's star management. When Pickford eventually sold her UA stock in 1951 to Arthur B. Krim and Robert S. Benjamin, partners in the law firm Phillips, Nizer, Benjamin and Krim, she described UA as 'sick unto death' (quoted in Balio 1976: 9). At the height of her appeal however, Pickford had clearly demonstrated the wide-ranging power that the star could wield across all sectors of the film

industry. Pickford's significance is not limited to the silent era. She exemplified many of the trends that would develop the Hollywood star system in future decades. In particular, Pickford showed how the star could have the ability to use his or her popular status as leverage to demand from producers rapid rises in salary payments. Her career also paved the way for stars to participate in box office earnings from the films they appeared in and represented the benefits to be had from stars choosing to form their own independent production companies. These trends would all become key characteristics of the star system following the decline of the vertically integrated studio system that dominated Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s (see the following chapter). Pickford was therefore not only a product of the star system in the cinema; she showed how it was possible for stars to find ways to work that system for their own gain.

The Foundations of Hollywood Stardom

The star system in American cinema developed through the detailed division of labour, the redefinition of performance space in narrative film, and the widespread distribution of knowledge about individual film performers. Tracing the emergence between 1907–22 of different types of discourse about film performers, Richard de Cordova not only provides an early history of the star system in American cinema but also identifies levels of knowledge relevant to reading and understanding star images at all stages of cinema history. While the discourse on acting reveals the general labour of film performance, the naming of picture personalities makes known individual performers through their on-screen professional existence. Naming enables the construction of the personality's image and identity across films, but also in other media such as newspapers and magazines.

De Cordova reserves star discourse to describe the extension of knowledge about film performers beyond on-screen appearances and into the off-screen lives of performers. With the star scandal, a star's private life becomes further divided between a publicly controlled private-image and a hidden secret private-image. From de Cordova's study, a general definition emerges of the star 'as actor (professional manipulator of signs), as picture personality (as a personality extrapolated from films), and as a star (as someone with a private life distinct from screen image)' (1990: 146–7). Although the discourses of actor, personality and star become levels of

knowledge, with each seeming to add a further degree of depth to a star's image, these levels do not operate separately but work together as what de Cordova calls 'collapsing levels of identity' (1990: 111).

As the example of Pickford shows, the Hollywood industry and the stars themselves were quick to exploit the value of star identity as a personal monopoly. Naming is essential to making that identity into a commercial and legal entity and the star system would develop through the use of such mechanisms to construct star identities and to use those identities as a means of promotion in the public domain. Subsequent phases in the development of the system would therefore be marked by transitions in the film industry as a whole which influenced this control and use of star identities.

3 CONTROLLING THE SYSTEM

With the star system in place, Hollywood worked hard to find effective means to exploit the identities of popular performers. By the end of the 1920s, economic control of the American film industry was concentrated in the hands of five leading companies: Paramount, Warner Bros., the Fox Film Corporation (Twentieth Century Fox after 1935), Radio Keith-Orpheum (RKO) and MGM, the film production studio of the exhibition conglomerate Loew's Inc. In this period, the star system operated under the general direction of these studios. The studio era of the 1930s and 1940s was a period in which Hollywood worked actively to make and market its stars. Stars became a vital asset in maintaining the hegemony of the major studios over the whole domestic film industry, with the effect that control of the film market required the strong control of its stars. This chapter will look at the structural conditions that enabled the Hollywood studios to dominate the film market in the United States and the ways in which those studios created, sold and controlled their stars.

American Cinema in the 1930s and 1940s

The power of the 'Big Five' studios, as they became known, was based on maintaining subsidiaries that engaged in the production, distribution and exhibition of films. With interests in all sectors of the film business, the major studios formed vertically integrated corporations, capable of generating profits from all stages of the value chain by owning the means to make, sell and show films. Three other studios held a significant pres-

ence in the industry: Universal and Columbia functioned as producers and distributors, and United Artists distributed the films of major independent producers. Without their own exhibition outlets, the 'Little Three' released their films through the theatre chains run by the majors.

Although the studios have historically remained famous for the films they made, it was the control of exhibition rather than production that accounted for the power of the studios. The major studios controlled the domestic film market in the United States through their ownership of first-run theatre houses. For example, Paramount evolved from the theatre business started by Adolph Zukor, and became the largest of the vertically integrated companies after merger with the theatre operator Publix in 1925. Of the assets owned by the majors, investment was divided approximately into five per cent production and one per cent distribution, with exhibition accounting for the remaining 94 per cent. As Douglas Gomery argues, to gain 'a clear picture of the studio era one has to characterise the Big Five as diversified theatre chains, producing features, shorts, cartoons, and newsreels to fill their houses' (1986: 8).

While the power of the majors lay in their control of exhibition, in the domestic market the majority of theatres were owned by large or small independent exhibitors. The collective theatre holdings of the Big Five accounted for only 25 per cent of the total theatres in the United States. Ownership of theatres by the majors was, however, strategically planned to maximise earnings from admissions. The situation varied between different areas and locations. In some locations, the majors dominated the local market by acquiring or building the main first-run houses. Elsewhere, particularly in the largest cities of the United States, neighbourhood or subsequent-run theatres were more important. Theatre building and buying therefore followed local patterns of movie-going (see Huetting 1944).

Although the majors were in principle competitors, they nevertheless colluded in mutually beneficial ways. To meet the demand for new product in their own theatres, the majors would book films from other members of the Big Five and the Little Three. Also, the geographical siting of theatres in the domestic market was divided up so as to prevent the major exhibitors encroaching on territory controlled by other vertically integrated studios. Paramount dominated the South, New England and the upper Midwest, with Fox taking the Far West, Warner Bros. controlling the mid-Atlantic states, and Loew's and RKO dividing New York, New

Jersey and Ohio between them (see Gomery 1986). The first-run theatres of the majors therefore represented only a fraction of the total theatres in the country, however ownership was strategically organised to control the entire domestic market.

Alongside the theatres they directly owned, the majors also organised deals with independent theatres. Outside of the films produced by majors, it would be impossible for independent exhibitors to find any suppliers with a sufficient volume of films to fill their screens all year round. Although small independent producers did exist, independent exhibitors were reliant on the majors for supplying the bulk of the films shown. This situation placed the majors in a position to force non-competitive trading practices in their dealings with independent exhibitors. Block-booking involved distributors selling films as a package rather than individually and any block of films would combine major quality releases with more average and poor product. A price was set for the whole package, offering top titles at a lower price than they could be bought individually, while effectively raising the price of poor films. For the major distributors, block-booking had the advantages of guaranteeing sales of films in volume and spreading marketing costs across a whole group of films rather than individual titles. Blind-selling was a related practice, through which films were sold to exhibitors with maybe only a catalogue description or number as a reference. The status and profitability of the first-run theatres owned by the majors was protected by the further trade practices of clearance (determining the number of days to pass between runs in theatres) and zoning (setting regional areas in which clearance conditions applied). Large independent chains were able to use their size to negotiate the terms set by the majors but smaller independent exhibitors were compelled to accept such terms.

The most important effect of block-booking was the closing of the market to independent producers. For any exhibitor, the amount of playing time available in any week or year was limited. The first-run market, in which the highest revenues could be earned, was dominated by the chains owned by the majors. Through block-booking, independent exhibitors were compelled to buy films in such volume that their screens would be filled all year round with the supply of films from the majors. As the small independent exhibitors were dependent on continuing their relations with the majors for supplying both the quality and quantity of titles needed to

fill theatres, there was little or no space in the market for independent producers. Control of exhibition therefore enabled the majors to collude to the mutual benefit of each other, while also preventing the growth of competition. By concentrating control of the market in the hands of so few companies, the studio system of the 1930s and 1940s formed a powerful oligopoly (see Balio 1985b).

Stars and Studios

Domination of the domestic film market by the major studios determined the conditions under which all categories of film performers could work in Hollywood during the 1930s and 1940s. The majors instituted mechanisms designed to produce and reproduce the star phenomenon by actively working to manufacture and take legal control of star identities. To retain control of their talent, the studios employed stars on contracts which could run for a maximum of seven years, and which were frequently written in terms that allowed the studios to manage and effectively exploit the images of stars. With the studios controlling exhibition, even star performers would find that it was virtually impossible to work outside the studio system. However, while the stars needed the studios, the studios also needed the stars. The power of star image was recognised not only by the studios but also by the stars themselves, and the period experienced significant instances of struggles between stars and the studios.

At the height of their power, the studios would keep many stars under contract, providing a 'stable' of performers from which to draw when making casting decisions across the studio's output. In order to achieve variety and feed the uncertainties of changing audience tastes, all the major studios established their own departments for discovering and developing new talent. Through his interviews with former studio employees, Ronald Davis (1993) uncovers the common processes that hopeful performers would have to pass through before they would be signed by a studio. Each studio employed their own talent scouts, for example Solly Baiano at Warner Bros., Lucille Ryman and Al Trescony at MGM, Milton Lewis at Paramount, and Ivan Kahn at Twentieth Century Fox. Scouts attended the theatres and night-clubs of New York and Los Angeles in the search for potential new stars. Other talent would come from vaudeville, burlesque and radio.

Scouts filed reports on interesting performers, which were circulated to studio executives, producers and directors. Those performers who caught the eye would be asked to read a scene for the scout who may then recommend that the performer attend the studio for tests. In tests, the try-out performers would prepare a suitable scene selected by the studio's drama coach. Usually hopefuls would have a silent test, shot in black and white in a studio, followed by a sound test. Based on these tests, the casting director would decide who would receive a contract, with the final approval resting with the studio head. Contracts offered starting salaries of between \$75 and \$250 a week, with a six-month option that allowed the studio to drop a performer after that period or raise his or her salary. Once signed to the studio, new talent would undergo an apprenticeship, during which time the studio would begin to mould the images of contract players. Apprentices would receive tuition from the studio's own speech and diction coaches, together with acting classes with the drama coach and, in some cases, singing and dancing lessons. Other optional lessons were offered in etiquette, movement, fencing, horseback riding, swimming, boxing and languages. Advice on fashion, make-up, and skin care were also available.

The earliest years of the film star system had put a high premium on the circulation and signification of a performer's name. Where an apprentice performer's actual name was regarded as inappropriate for his or her image, the studios made changes. Through make-up and hairstyling, alterations were also made to physical appearances. When their preparation was complete, newcomers would serve an apprenticeship by taking supporting roles chosen by the casting director. It would be usual to first try new talent in B-pictures. Frequently the placing of a new contract player would alternate a starring role in a B-feature, with a role opposite an established star in a major feature. Young performers of similar status might be paired in productions designed to test the partnership.

While stars could be profitable for the studios, they were also costly. From the earliest years of the star system, producers expressed concern that popular box office performance would lead to the escalation of performer earnings. Stars of the silent era, like Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin, had set the trend for stars to demand dramatic rises in their earnings. In the studio system, stars received salaries at levels that confirmed the biggest names as Hollywood's aristocracy. In research for his study of

the 'movie colony', Leo Rosten (1941) found that in 1939, of respondents who had obtained some form of work acting in the movies, nearly 80 per cent earned under \$1,000 a week, with six per cent receiving over \$2,000 a week. In the same year, figures showed around 69 per cent of actors earning less than \$10,000 for the year, with four per cent enjoying salaries in excess of \$100,000 a year. For many leading stars, income levels easily topped those of the highest-paid studio executives.

During the early 1930s, the studios witnessed a wave of unionisation by labour groups organising to achieve representation and recognition for collective bargaining over pay and conditions. Compared to the skilled crafts, creative talent organised relatively late. Actors Equity was established in 1913 as the representative of stage actors. After winning recognition from Broadway producers in 1919, for several years Equity tried unsuccessfully to unionise film performers. In 1927, the formation of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was created as a professional body to represent five categories of creative labour: producers, directors, writers, technicians and actors. Membership of the Academy was not open but restricted by invitation to those figures, including stars, believed to have made a significant contribution to the industry. Several functions were performed by the Academy, including its role as a collective negotiating agency in the conciliation and arbitration of labour disputes (see Clark 1995). As a producer-backed and controlled body, however, the Academy operated as a company union, proving to be ineffectual when representing the interests of its members in disputes with the studios.

The representation of screen actors by the Academy was tested twice during 1933. First, using the crisis conditions of the Depression as a convenient excuse for salary cuts, the studios introduced an eight-week salary waiver for employees. While raising objections to an all-out withdrawal of salaries, the Academy provided the studios with an income-linked formula for proportionally cutting salaries. Employees on the lowest rates of pay lost nothing, but others forfeited anything from 25 per cent of salary, while the highest paid, including stars, lost half their income (see Ross 1941). Secondly, when President Roosevelt passed the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) in June, requesting all industries to draw up codes for stabilising the economy, studio executives and producers took the opportunity to draft articles intended to increase their control over stars. Articles were presented which intended to contain the salary demands of stars by

prohibiting star-raiding between studios and preventing competitive bidding for stars. The code also sought to bring agents under the control of studio management, directly threatening the status of agents as independent mediators between talent and studio management. In response, the Academy adopted a moderate position by only asking for modifications to the articles rather than their wholesale rejection.

While these articles were later withdrawn, the disputes that ensued around the studio code exposed the Academy as a producer-controlled company union, unable to fight for the interests of screen actors. Consequently, in June 1933, performers independently organised by forming the Screen Actors Guild (SAG). While SAG became an agency of organised labour, David Prindle (1988) notes that choosing the identity of a guild, rather than a union, placed SAG in a non-militant relationship with studio management. Prindle argues that the social and political conservatism of many SAG members immediately avoided the militancy of organised labour, with the title 'Guild' suggesting instead a 'medieval association of artisans' (1988: 22). Another distinctive feature of SAG was that the body was established as a corporation. Prindle regards this as a move designed to attract stars to the organisation by insulating members from the financial responsibility they would otherwise incur for collective action.

In the years after its formation, SAG would engage in disputes with studio management, frequently uniting in support of other labour groups. However, the political credentials of SAG were clear, for these disagreements were usually settled at the expense of those other labour organisations. For example, in April 1937, SAG offered its support to the more leftist Federation of Motion Picture Crafts (FMPC), who were striking over the issue of recognition. When SAG leaked rumours of supporting strike action, senior figures in the guild met privately with Louis B. Mayer of MGM to demand studio recognition of SAG as the official bargaining agency for screen actors. After Mayer agreed on behalf of the studios to the Guild's demands, SAG immediately withdrew support for the strike, a betrayal that eventually saw the collapse of the FMPC.

It is debatable to what extent stars can play an active role in organised labour. While stars could raise the profile of SAG both inside and outside the industry, they were also the quintessential embodiment of sheer individualism and therefore appeared to occupy a difficult posi-

tion in relation to collective action. SAG represented all screen actors and included star names amongst its members. Eddie Cantor, the popular radio and film comedian, became the second president of SAG in 1933, and Fredric March, Adolphe Menjou and Robert Montgomery were elected vice-presidents. Star power could be effective. For example, Cantor used his personal friendship with President Roosevelt to have removed those clauses in the draft NIRA code that were of concern to the Guild.

Stars were, however, also the elite of the performer labour pool, and as such enjoyed privileges that were not granted to other actors. The membership of SAG straddled the broad range of labour power differences amongst the community of film actors. Stars would have a stake in the collective agreements reached between SAG and studio management, however it was the case that stars had most to gain from individually negotiating over the uses of their labour and images. Like all agencies of organised labour, SAG was formed to negotiate the terms of collective bargaining. With stars, negotiations were not based on the collective terms and conditions but the particular uses of the star's personal monopoly. Frequently, the highly restrictive terms offered by the studios in the contracts of stars became a matter of heated dispute, and several stars would engage in personal battles with the studios. These individual instances of opposition are returned to later in this chapter.

Case Study: MGM – 'more stars than there are in heaven'

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) remained at the forefront of the studio system throughout the 1930s and into the early 1940s. During the 1930s, MGM's profits consistently exceeded those of any other studio, and only dropped behind Paramount and Twentieth Century Fox during the Second World War. MGM stood for Hollywood glamour in the studio era, boasting the claim that the studio employed under contract 'more stars than there are in heaven'.

Although identified as a studio in its own right, MGM was actually the film production and distribution company of a larger entertainment conglomerate, Loew's Inc. Marcus Loew founded his People's Vaudeville Company in 1904, running cheap 'nickel vaudeville' with shows combining live variety entertainment and film shows (see Gomery 1986). Building a lucrative chain of theatres, Loew aimed to feed his screens with in-house

productions, buying the film production and distribution company Metro Pictures in 1920, followed in 1924 by acquisition of the struggling Goldwyn Pictures. Ex-Metro executive Louis B. Mayer was appointed to oversee production and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was formed. A key figure at MGM was the young producer Irving Thalberg. Before illness in 1932, Thalberg oversaw all productions at MGM, and his role exemplified what Janet Staiger (1985b) calls the central producer system of production. When Mayer downgraded Thalberg's responsibilities by reorganising the studio around the producer-unit system of production, the producer still packaged some of the most star-studded projects produced by MGM before his death in 1936.

Although Loew's business was founded on ownership of theatres, the number of cinema houses owned by the company was substantially lower than the other major studios. For this reason, MGM's success was always highly dependent on sales of its releases to the theatres of the other studios and independents. Douglas Gomery (1986) views this condition as requiring MGM to consistently produce high-profile popular releases. This imperative resulted in films with spectacular, glossy production values but also, Gomery argues, the largest stable of glamorous stars contracted to any studio.

MGM's glamour was well represented by Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, Norma Shearer and Clark Gable. Mayer signed Garbo when she left Sweden and made her Hollywood debut in *The Torrent* (1926) before reaching prominence opposite John Gilbert in *Flesh and the Devil* (1926). Garbo's image was founded on romantic mystique, a quality which, in the context of Hollywood, was bound up with her sense of European otherness. MGM exploited that mystique to good effect. Moving into the sound era, MGM created an event around the marketing of *Anna Christie* (1930) with the advertising line 'Garbo Talks!' offering the teasing prospect of hearing the Scandinavian star speak. As her box office power began to wane in the late 1930s, MGM broke the icy cool image by casting Garbo in the extremely successful comedy *Ninotchka* (1939), acknowledging the casting against type by advertising 'Garbo Laughs!'.

Although stars like Garbo and Gable brought charm and sex appeal to the studio, MGM's star stable was not all glamour. During the early 1930s, the studio's most popular star was Marie Dressler, who was already 58 at the time she first worked for MGM in 1927. Working in the historical con-

text of the Depression years, Dressler's popularity may be explained by the type of hard-working and resilient characters she portrayed. If Garbo and Gable represented the glamorous star, Dressler could be described as a 'down-to-earth star' (Balio 1995: 146), a category which saw her well-matched with the equally down-to-earth Wallace Beery. Dressler and Beery were cast opposite each other in *Min and Bill* (1930) and *Tugboat Annie* (1933). Beery had a varied background in entertainment, working in circus, variety and Broadway theatre before entering films. After moving from Paramount to join MGM, Beery appeared to critical acclaim in *The Big House* (1930) and *The Champ* (1931), and gave a memorable performance as Long John Silver in *Treasure Island* (1934).

The MGM stable also nurtured a number of child and teenage stars, including Freddie Bartholomew, Jackie Cooper, Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland. Mickey Rooney was not only the most popular of this collection of young actors, but during the 1930s he also occupied the top slot in the star rankings three years in a row. After appearing as the character Mickey McGuire in a series of silent comedies between 1927 and 1933, Rooney signed to MGM in 1934. He played the central character in the Andy Hardy series of fifteen features, including *A Family Affair* (1937). In the late 1930s, Rooney began his partnership with Garland, MGM's other leading young performer, and the two were teamed across several movies, including *Thoroughbreds Don't Cry* (1937), *Love Finds Andy Hardy* (1938), *Babes in Arms* (1939), *Strike Up the Band* (1940), *Babes on Broadway* (1941) and *Girl Crazy* (1943).

Thalberg frequently brought together MGM's star stable in showcase productions. Based on Vicki Baum's best-selling novel 'Menschen im Hotel', *Grand Hotel* (1932) offered the paradoxical construction of a star-driven ensemble, with a cast that featured Garbo, Crawford, Beery and brothers John and Lionel Barrymore. Thalberg united the Barrymore brothers in *Arsène Lupin* (1932) and *Dinner at Eight* (1933) and created a showcase of Barrymore siblings when the brothers were cast opposite their sister Ethel in *Rasputin and the Empress* (1932). The star ensemble was most directly foregrounded in the short *Jackie Cooper's Christmas Party* (1932), in which young Jackie Cooper decides to throw a party and is helped out by his other friends at MGM – including Beery, Gable, Dressler, Shearer and Lionel Barrymore, amongst others – who all appeared as themselves.



FIGURE 2 Judy Garland

MGM's stable of stars carried the studio through the 1930s. While other studios faced severe financial problems in the Depression years, MGM remained profitable. In the economic conditions of the 1930s, Loew's comparatively small chain of theatres was an advantage, demanding less investment and expenditure on general running costs than the larger chains. During the war and the immediate post-war years of the 1940s,

however, the domestic film market enjoyed a boom period, and the size of Loew's chain prevented the company from adequately capitalising on this growth (see Gomery 1986). Consequently, MGM dropped behind the other majors, precipitating a downward spiral in fortunes which even the studio's star power could not reverse.

Selling Stars

Stars are crucial to the distribution of films. Distribution combines the functions of selling movies to exhibitors and marketing films to the general public. Starting with the circulation of the discourses of stardom before 1920, star identities not only became known but also marketable. During the 1930s and 1940s, the studios all maintained publicity departments with responsibility for constructing and disseminating a star's image across the media of posters, photographs, newspapers, magazines and radio. Publicity circulated a star's image both among fellow members of the industry and the general public.

At each studio, there would be a head or director of publicity responsible for managing the organisation of marketing campaigns. For example, MGM had Howard Strickling, while the same role was occupied by Harry Brand at Twentieth Century Fox, and Bob Taplinger at Warner Bros. At MGM the publicity department employed a large staff of approximately 60 people, who individually took responsibility for three or four stars and the liaison with a handful of national press correspondents (see Davis 1993). During the making of a film, the studio would assign a unit publicist to create and manage the publicity surrounding an individual production. Leading up to the release of a film, publicity departments would prepare stories from the set about the production and its stars, which were then positioned by 'planters' in trade and news media in ways intended to maximise exposure – publicity was not an afterthought in the production process. As one former publicist commented, 'publicity began when Warner Bros. bought a story; it never stopped until the picture was released' (quoted in Davis 1993: 142).

Aside from the in-house studio publicists, relatively unknown performers would hire an external publicity agent in the hope that such services may help the performer achieve star status (see Powdermaker 1951). Established names would also use publicity agents, either to cultivate

competitive interest for the star's services inside the industry, or else to find ways beyond the studio publicity machine by which to manage the ways in which his or her image was directed at the public. In the latter case, however, hiring a publicity agent represented a bid by the star to exercise some degree of independent control over his or her image. Publicity agents were therefore not welcomed by the studios and stars were actively discouraged from hiring such mediators (see Gaines 1992).

To measure the value of stars, research companies were hired to conduct studies to assess the popularity of performers. Various methods of assessment were used to quantify popularity, including measuring the volume of fan mail received by a star, or analysing box office statistics to assess a star's economic value. However, use of star ratings was seen to be a more scientific test of popularity. Ratings studies would look at the appeal of either a group of stars or conduct in-depth studies into an individual star's popularity. Star ratings were based on interviews with movie-goers, who were invited to indicate their response to the names of well-known performers (see Handel 1950). Ratings assessed a performer's popularity over a period of time and relative to that of other performers. Analysis would also be conducted into the effect of different types of films on a star's popularity, together with studies measuring popularity against audience demographic and social variables of sex, age, income and geography. Other studies would assess the 'want-to-see' factor, speculating on the popularity of a star's appearance in a forthcoming film.

In her study of Bette Davis's early career at Warner Bros., Cathy Klaprat examines how the star's image was reworked across publicity media and her narrative roles. Davis came to public prominence with her performance as Madge in *Cabin in the Cotton* (1932), a role Klaprat describes as a 'rich spoiled flirt' (1985: 356). Advertising for the film constructed the image of Davis as a blonde sex bomb. The poster portrayed Davis and male star Richard Barthelmess in a kiss, eliciting audiences with the call: 'Meet a new kind of temptress! Flaming as southern suns, bewitching as plantation moons, she'll teach you a new kind of love.' Klaprat suggests publicity worked on this occasion to depict Davis as a 'love expert' (1985: 366). After her appearance in *Cabin in the Cotton*, the trade paper *Variety* ranked Davis as the top box office attraction for 1932.

Building on her success, the following year Warner Bros. cast Davis again in the role of the sexy blonde. Publicity for *Ex-Lady* (1933) sold the

new film through making direct reference to Davis's role in *Cabin in the Cotton* but when the film failed at the box office, Davis's name was not amongst the 1933 list of box office leaders. Davis was loaned out to RKO for *Of Human Bondage* (1934), the film which Klaprat sees as redefining Davis's image around the role of the vamp. Davis's character, Mildred Rogers, destroys the gentle Philip Carey, played by Leslie Howard. Initially, publicity downplayed Davis's presence in the film, with her name in small print below that of Howard. When the film performed well at the box office, Davis's name increased in size.

After her stint at RKO, Davis returned to Warner Bros. and the studio did not revert to the image of Davis as sexy flirt but instead capitalised on the image of the man-eating vamp she had so evocatively created while on loan. *Bordertown* (1935), starring Paul Muni, was included on the Warner Bros. production schedule in June 1934, but Davis was only cast as Marie Roark after *Of Human Bondage* proved successful. Publicity now linked Davis to her previous appearance as the vamp, and this image was replayed in her next role, appearing opposite Franchot Tone as Joyce Heath in *Dangerous* (1935). As Klaprat observes, the advertising for *Dangerous* foregrounded the vamp image, explicitly naming Davis in ways that linked her narrative role to the star's own identity. For example, posters announced 'Bette Davis smacks 'em where it hurts', 'Manwrecking Bette is on the manhunt again', and 'One look into Bette Davis' eyes and Tone joins Howard and Muni in succumbing to her fatal attraction' (Klaprat 1985: 368). Publicity therefore worked at constructing the vamp as a definition of Davis's fictional and real-life identities.

To avoid the dangers of exhausting Davis's star value, Warner Bros. experimented with the mechanism of off-casting – giving the star roles that contradicted her vamp image. Klaprat sees Davis cast in a series of roles as 'the good woman', a type in which she appears as the saviour rather than destroyer of men. This new image first appeared with *That Certain Woman* (1937), after which Klaprat observes a pattern emerging as Davis's roles alternate between the good woman and the vamp. In *The Letter* (1940), Davis returned to the vamp, followed by the good woman in *All This and Heaven Too* (1940). This pattern continued with her vampish roles in *The Little Foxes* (1941) and *In This Our Life* (1942), and compassionate roles in *The Great Lie* (1941) and *Now, Voyager* (1942). As Klaprat suggests, 'offcasting not only provided the variation to sustain audience interest, but

also served to enhance the image of the star as a great performer' (1985: 375). This diversity of roles itself became an image that could be publicised, with advertisements for *The Corn is Green* (1945) claiming 'There are as many Bette Davises as there are Bette Davis-starring pictures! That's part of Miss Davis's greatness: the ability to make each character she plays stand by itself, a distinct and memorable triumph of screen acting' (quoted in Klaprat 1985: 375).

Publicists would plant stories about stars in the trade and popular press but the primary publicity tool was the press book. Publicity departments would prepare a separate press book for each film released. Press books were mailed to exhibitors with the intention of offering theatres useful information and advice for publicising films. It was standard for the press book to include a cast list and synopsis of the film. The book would provide a display of advertisements and posters available to exhibitors for display in windows, theatre lobbies or the local press (see Sennett 1999). The publicity department would also send press books to newspapers, including prepared reviews for those local papers and radio stations that did not hire their own film critics. These various materials all found a point of focus and coherence in the images of stars. Press books included short biographies of the leading players in the films, accompanied by photographic portraits of stars. The graphic style of posters and advertisements would also foreground the role of stars. For *Dark Victory* (1939), the Warner Bros. publicity department prepared reviews focusing on the performance of Bette Davis, along with printed quotes from the star and her character, and a range of posters portraying Davis. The images of stars were therefore central to publicity campaigns, and in the assortment of materials included in the press book, exhibitors were offered a pre-packaged version of a star's image available for local marketing drives.

Stars were also used in other methods of promotion, including personal appearances and road shows. Personal appearances would see stars turning up for glittery premieres in main cities. For the premiere of *Gone With the Wind* (1939), MGM not only transported the entire cast to Atlanta but also other stars contracted to the studio, including Claudette Colbert and Carole Lombard (see Sennett 1999). Personal appearances by musical stars were particularly effective, for a star could display his or her talents in song-and-dance numbers performed for the assembled public. For dramatic performers, the studio may have writers draft a special short

scene for live performance, in which stars would play the roles in which they appeared in the film. Road shows required stars to make a succession of appearances on a tour of the cities and towns where a new release was opening. Bette Davis added to her reputation as a rebellious star when she flatly refused to participate in the ordeal and indignity of these tours (see Sennett 1999).

The marketing appeal of stars was not employed purely for the promotion of movies. Stars were also used to promote the sale of other products in secondary or ancillary markets. Charles Eckert (1978) sees the growth of a consumer economy in the United States during the 1920s as a period in which the film industry intensified efforts to link up with the high street in using star images to market household and fashion products. As suggested in the previous chapter, stars represent the ideological values of wealth, freedom and individualism on which a consumer economy is built. During the 1930s, stars were central to the development of Hollywood as a showcase for fashions, furnishings, accessories, cosmetics and other items available on the high street. An important development in the relationship between Hollywood and the high street came in 1930 when Bernard Waldman established the Modern Merchandising Bureau. Waldman produced fashion lines based on clothing worn by female stars in films. All the studios (except Warner Bros., which launched its own Studio Styles in a similar capacity) provided Waldman with sketches or photographs of styles prior to the release of a film, and manufacturers would then produce styles based on these designs. The Bureau would send the completed garments to retailers, accompanied by publicity materials on the stars and the films. Initially, the studios offered styles for no charge, believing in the value of free advertising. Waldman opened his chain of Cinema Fashions shops and by 1937, the company owned 400 shops while also providing star-endorsed styles to nearly 1,400 other outlets.

With star-related promotions for cosmetics and toiletries, the Hollywood showcase addressed the market in ways that perceived women to be the primary category of consumer. Recognising the value of ancillary markets for the promotion of female stars, Hollywood cultivated the style of leading female stars such as Joan Crawford and Norma Shearer. It is important to also note the significance of this star glamour on the high street during the Depression years of the 1930s. Ready-to-wear lines offered the image of film star glamour but at relatively affordable prices.

Star styles could thus promise some escape from real-world conditions. Outside the United States, British women have recalled the enjoyment of sewing their own home-made copies of the styles worn by Hollywood's female stars during the Second World War, off-setting the hardship of war-time life (see Stacey 1994). Such actions are significant, for they indicate the pleasure of star identification, expressed in tangible forms produced outside of the consumer economy.

Case Study: Shirley Temple and the Business of Childhood

For four years between 1935 and 1938, Shirley Temple headed the list of top box office stars in Hollywood. After successful starring roles in seven features during 1934, a special Academy Award was bestowed on Temple – a miniature Oscar given in recognition of the child phenomenon. Temple's success came from how she represented a concept of childhood that could appeal not only to children but adults as well. As Charles Eckert (1974) suggests, Temple's popularity was made through her appeal to universals: her cuteness, precocious talents and invocation of parental love. That vision of childhood was marketed not only through the star's films but also a huge merchandising industry that grew up around selling the Temple concept to Americans.

Temple's screen career started at Educational Films, a production company specialising in comedy shorts. In the early 1930s, Educational began production of the *Baby Burlesks*, a series of comedy shorts featuring child performers in satires of box office hits from the time. Temple debuted for Educational in the unreleased *The Runt Page* (1932), a satire of *The Front Page* (1931), before appearing in *War Babies* (1932), a comedy take on *What Price Glory?* (1926). At the same time as working for Educational, Temple was loaned out to other studios, including supporting roles on *Red-Haired Alibi* (1932) for Tower Productions, *Out All Night* (1933) for Universal, *To the Last Man* (1933) at Paramount, and *As the Earth Turns* (1933) for Warner Bros.

Temple's work on features provided a stepping-stone into the studio system. After an unaccredited appearance in *Carolina* (1934) for Fox Film, the studio conducted a number of 'try outs' to test her singing and dancing skills. Temple abilities were showcased in the revue film *Stand up and Cheer* (1934) after which, on 9 February 1934, she signed a seven-year

contract with Fox. The following year, Fox merged with Twentieth Century Pictures, and Temple stayed with the studio until 1940. It was during her years at Fox that Temple would be transformed into a child star, yet it was on loan to Paramount when she received her first significant popular and critical acclaim with a role in *Little Miss Marker* (1934). When Paramount offered to buy out Temple's contract, offering her \$1,000 a week against the \$150 she was earning, Fox saw off the move to raid the studio's new talent. A revised contract was issued for \$1,200 a week, rising by increments of \$1,000 a week annually for seven years. The contract also included the conditions that Temple make only three films per year and her mother, Gertrude, be paid \$150 a week to act as the child's coach (see Edwards 1988). Shirley Temple's rapid rise to popularity meant that within a year Gertrude was able to re-negotiate a salary of \$4,000 a week for her daughter and \$500 for herself, with a \$20,000 bonus for each film completed.

Temple's films dramatised both the anxieties and escapist fantasies of childhood. As Jeanine Basinger describes, the Shirley Temple film involved a familiar formula:

Shirley played an orphaned child adopted by a rich father ... or rich mother ... or perhaps a rich grandfather or grandmother. Or she played a child whose father wandered off absentmindedly, leaving her to cope. She was torn out of the arms of benefactor after benefactor ('Oh, please, Cap, don't let them take me away' ... 'I want my daddy' ... 'No, no, I don't want to go to any old orphanage'). This basic ingredient of the child alone was mixed together with crusts of old codgers, heaps of adoring adults, pinches of heartbreak, and generous helpings of poverty (which quickly melted into lavish living) – all stirred up with the subtlety of a McCormick reaper and garnished with a few songs and dances. (1975: 11–13)

According to this narrative logic, the loss of one family is replaced by an idealised version of the family as an all-providing, all-caring unit. Through this drama of the family, Temple was able to appeal to both child and adult audiences. Basinger argues that adult audiences were drawn to Temple through the fantasy of childish escape she represented: 'The adult's fantasy was not so much to have a little girl like her (although that might do),

but actually *be* her. To be taken care of, fussed over, listened to' (1975: 14; emphasis in original).

Charles Eckert (1974) situates Temple's popularity against the background of crisis during the Depression era, and explains the star's appeal through the capacity of her image to displace the economic realities of the period. During the early 1930s, Eckert discusses how government-appointed bodies mounted an ideological war against appeals for state welfare. Instead of state-funded welfare relief, the President's Organisation on Unemployment Relief and the Committee on Mobilization of Relief Resources espoused the values of charity against welfare, the act of giving rather than taking. Although not a direct reflection of state policy, Eckert views Temple's image as having a relevance for the period through performing a similar work of ideological displacement. In her films, Shirley's characters were frequently seen to come from humble backgrounds, however the realities of those social and political conditions were effaced. Instead, Shirley was seen to put hardship behind her with an overflowing bounty of love. Shirley solved the problems of others by her pure and unselfish acts of giving. This ideology of charity leads Eckert to argue that 'since her love was indiscriminate, extending to pinched misers or to common hobos, it was a social, even a political, force on a par with the idea of democracy or the Constitution' (1974: 68). Ideologically, therefore, the Temple image displaced the social and economic conditions of the era by offering a natural solution to the world's problems based on faith in the transformative power of love.

Such was the appeal of Temple's image that before the end of her first year at Fox, the studio was efficiently marketing the star in a range of secondary markets outside the film business, across a range of merchandise. In October 1934, *Playthings Magazine* carried the first advert for the Shirley Temple Doll from the Ideal Novelty and Toy Company (see Basinger 1975). A full wardrobe of clothes and other accessories was produced for the dolls. Sales of the dolls were so successful that in the first years of her career, Temple was earning more from the licensing of her image to Ideal than from her film work. Shirley Temple comics, colouring books and sheet music appeared, together with endorsed products such as soap, clothes, mugs, playhouses and watches.

Although the narratives of Temple's films would achieve a sentimental resolution of childhood anxieties, Basinger regards Temple as offering a

mixture of mischievous 'salty little wench' and 'out-and-out baby sexpot' (1975: 14). Both in her on- and off-screen lives, Temple displayed her gutsy handling of adult authority figures. On occasions, Temple appeared in roles as the 'little wife', tending the house for her father. The problematic sexual connotations of such a situation were barely masked, as Temple would sing to the father, 'Marry me and let me be your wife', or 'In every dream I caress you'.

These sexual connotations of Temple's image were to blow up in public controversy. In his review of *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937) for the London magazine *Night and Day*, the British novelist Graham Greene criticised the sensual display of the child star:

Wearing short kilts, she is a complete totsy. Watch her swaggering stride across the Indian barrack-square: hear the gasp of excited expectation from her antique audience when the sergeant's palm is raised: watch the way she measures a man with agile eyes, with dimpled depravity. Adult emotions of love and grief glissade across the mask of childhood, a childhood skin-deep. (1937: 363)

Greene accused Temple of crudely appealing to an audience he characterised as middle-aged men and clergymen through her 'dubious coquetry' and 'well-shaped and desirable little body, packed with enormous vitality' (ibid.). While the following libel case found against *Night and Day*, with the British judge calling Greene's review 'a gross outrage', the case exposed an underside to the Temple concept that was always at least implicit in her performances.

From the time she had first risen to stardom, observers had frequently speculated on how long Shirley Temple could retain her appeal as a child star. Falling box office receipts led to her departure from Twentieth Century Fox in 1940 at the age of twelve. There followed a short period at MGM, in which her salary dropped dramatically from \$9,000 to \$2,500 a week (see Zierold 1965). MGM tried unsuccessfully to create projects teaming Temple with the studio's existing young stars, Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland. Completing only one film for MGM, Temple's teenage years were served on a seven-year contract (1943-50) with Selznick International. David O. Selznick appeared uncommitted to reviving Temple's career and, during the period of her contract, she was loaned out to other studios, with her

final feature coming with *A Kiss for Corliss* (1949) for Strand Productions. Temple's association with childhood continued into adult years, appearing as the narrator of fairytales in two television series: 'Shirley Temple's Storybook' (1958) for NBC and 'Shirley Temple Theater' (1960-61) for ABC.

While Temple's fall from popularity was almost as swift as her rise to fame, her four-year domination of the star listings represented a more consistent record than most adult stars of the period. Through the Temple image, Fox was able to produce a clear and direct vision of childhood that could be marketed across films and in secondary markets during the 1930s. Although the child star may still appear an unusual and possibly eccentric phenomenon, Temple's stardom was not a peculiar aberration of the studio system, but rather the product of the studios' ability to construct star images that could make the most direct appeal to popular sensibilities and preoccupations.

Contracts and the Control of Star Image

In the 1930s and 1940s, stars were hired by the studios on contracts lasting for a maximum of seven years. During that period, the studio retained the exclusive option on the use of a performer's services. For performers new to the industry, a term contract with a studio offered an attractive and secure prospect. As a performer's career matured, however, the initial conditions laid out in the studios' contracts frequently proved restrictive. The term contract granted executives and producers an unprecedented level of control over the construction of a star's career and image. While contracts granted the studios the option to terminate a star's contract, the star had no legal right to break that contract (see Clark 1995). For the period of the contract, the studio had the power to determine a star's salary and control decisions over the productions and roles the performer would appear in. Contracts allowed for management to loan stars between studios and without the consent of the performer. In these arrangements, the renting studio would pay that star's salary plus an average of 75 per cent to the studio that held the star's contract (see Huettig 1944). The cost of hiring contracted stars from the studios was too high for most independent producers and the exchange of stars between the studios was one of the ways in which the majors collaborated to maintain their oligopoly.

Studio management held the contractual power to decide which and how many roles a star would play over a year, and control of casting allowed the studios to typecast stars (see Walker 1970). By offering a series of similar roles, the studio could unify the on-screen image of a star. Any star who showed dissent over the roles he or she was offered, or else refused to be loaned to another studio, faced the threat of suspension without pay. Following suspension, a star could expect to be offered less desirable roles at a lower salary. After the recalcitrant star returned to work, the contract allowed for the period of suspension to be added at the end of the original term, lengthening the total period for which a star was owned by the studio (see Gaines 1992). An alternative way of punishing a difficult star was to lend the performer to an independent production which was predicted to be unlikely to succeed at the box office. Mae Huettig described the latter option as 'the Hollywood equivalent of Siberia' (1944: 93).

Typecasting created continuity across a star's on-screen image but contractual terms also extended to cover the private lives of stars in ways designed to protect against the possibilities of stars behaving in ways that threatened to bring any scandalous contradiction or discontinuity to the image. During the 1920s morality clauses were included as part of the standard personal services contract, with the effect that the private lives of stars also came under the scrutiny of the studios. As Jane Gaines suggests, the term contract offered the studios 'image insurance' (1992: 148). Stars therefore found that the term contract controlled both their on- and off-screen lives.

While the contracts of stars shared many common conditions, there was no uniform star contract. Individual terms could be negotiated by any star who could demonstrate his or her value to the studio. This was possible for stars who had achieved previous popularity in the theatre or at another studio. Stars who were a product of the studios' in-house talent development departments, however, faced greater difficulty negotiating better terms as they had signed their contracts before their rise to fame. Paul Muni was already well-known as a stage star before he signed to Warner Bros. in the early 1930s. After making his screen debut for Howard Hughes in the independently produced *Scarface* (1932), Muni was signed by Jack Warner on a one-picture deal to appear in *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932). When the film was a success, Warner Bros. offered Muni a two-year, eight-picture deal, with Muni receiving a salary of \$50,000 per

picture. Muni's deal granted many individual concessions: the approval of story, role and script; billing as sole star; loan outs to other studios contingent on the star's consent; a fifty-fifty split with Warner Bros. on any salary average paid by the borrowing studio; definition of a year as 21 weeks; and the right to take stage work between films (see Schatz 1988).

On occasions, stars did openly contest the restrictive conditions imposed by their contracts. Amongst the most famous contract battles between a star and a studio was the fight between Bette Davis and Warner Bros. In March 1936, when the studio refused to loan her to RKO for *Mary of Scotland* (1936), Davis delayed returning to the studio for additional work on *The Golden Arrow* (1936). Davis made a series of demands: a new contract for five years only; a salary rise from \$100,000 to \$200,000 per year; the limiting of her services to four pictures a year; star or co-star billing; and clauses granting her freedom to do one picture a year for another studio; her choice of cameraman and a three-month holiday. When Jack Warner refused Davis's demands, she turned down the role offered to her in *God's Country and the Woman* (1937) and was suspended without pay. She promptly departed for England to make films for Toepfritz Productions.

Warner Bros. sued Davis for breach of contract, claiming that any film produced by the British company would compete with current releases from the studio. In an English court, Davis referred to the contract as a form of slavery. Warner Bros.' barrister Sir Patrick Hastings replied: 'This slavery has a silver lining, because the slave was ... well remunerated' (quoted in Warner Sperling *et al.* 1994: 220). In his summary for the defence, Davis's barrister Sir William Jowett argued 'Miss Davis is a chattel in the hands of the producer. I suggest that the real essence of slavery is no less slavery because the bars are gilded' (1994: 221). According to the negative service provision in Davis's contract, the British court found in favour of Warner Bros. and the star returned to the studio. The case showed that even a star of Davis's prominence could not escape the controlling power of the term contract. Davis stayed at Warner Bros. until 1948, completing *Beyond the Forest* (1949) before appearing in *All About Eve* (1950) for Twentieth Century Fox and *Payment on Demand* (1951) for RKO. The practice of extending the contracts of suspended stars ended when Olivia de Havilland took Warner Bros. to court over the length of her contract. After refusing to work on *The Gay Sisters* (1942), *George Washington Slept*

Here (1942) and *Saratoga Trunk* (1945), de Havilland's contract was due to expire with her performance in *Princess O'Rourke* (1943) and a loan to RKO for *Government Girl* (1944). When Warner Bros. claimed the contract had a further six months to serve due to periods of suspension, the studio added a third feature, intending to loan the star to Columbia. De Havilland took the studio to court, and in May 1944 the Supreme Court of California ruled she did not have to work the period added for suspension as this was a debt that violated the state's antipeonage laws (see Schatz 1998). De Havilland subsequently left Warner Bros. for Paramount. The victory affected not only de Havilland's career but also questioned the whole system of hiring stars on term contracts. Many stars would remain on term contracts into the 1950s, but the de Havilland incident was a landmark case that would lead to stars wresting control of their careers from the studios and seeking greater independence.

Case Study: Cagney vs. Warner Bros.

Davis and de Havilland were not the only stars to confront Warner Bros. over their contracts. James Cagney mounted a running battle with Jack Warner over many years during his time with the studio. Following a career in musical theatre, Cagney signed to Warner Bros in 1930, appearing in a supporting role on *Sinners' Holiday* (1930). After working for William Wellman in a small role on *Other Men's Women* (1931), Cagney was cast by the director as second lead to Edward Wood in *Public Enemy* (1931). However, within days of starting rehearsals, the director had the actors exchange roles. Warner Bros. was the main producer of the gangster genre in the 1930s and in *Public Enemy* Cagney's portrayal of Tom Powers set an image that would stay with him throughout his years at the studio.

Versions of Cagney's gangster persona appeared most famously in *Angels With Dirty Faces* (1938) and *The Roaring Twenties* (1939). The popularity of Cagney's fighting gangster figure was a product of the Depression years and the immediate aftermath. Discussing the significance of the gangster hero in the context of the depression years, Nick Roddick suggests the gangster film 'showed characters responding actively and often with a strong sense of personal honour to social circumstances which, in real life, seemed to condemn their audiences to inactive frustration in the face of a "system" which often appeared dishonourable' (1983: 99;



FIGURE 3 James Cagney and Joan Leslie

emphasis in original). Cagney never left behind his musical background and frequently appeared in comic roles, even playing Bottom in Max Reinhardt's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935). It was most frequently the case, however, that Cagney would be cast as gangsters or, more generally, as figures outside the law.

In the 1930s, Cagney and studio head Jack Warner continually engaged in battles over the star's contract. Cagney expressed his dissatisfaction

with the limited roles he was cast in and attempted to re-negotiate the terms of his contract with the studio. Following the release of the comedy *Blonde Crazy* (1931) Cagney took the occasion of the film's quick success to enter into his first conflict with Warner Bros.' management. Cagney complained that he was underpaid compared to other stars at Warner Bros. Jack Warner had succeeded in raiding Paramount's star stable by offering high salaries to Kay Francis and William Powell. Francis was paid \$3,000 a week for 40 weeks a year and Powell received \$300,000 a year for two films (see Hagopian 1986). Joe E. Brown earned \$5,000 a week and Douglas Fairbanks \$1,750 a week. Edward G. Robinson, the other major gangster star of the period, made \$280,000 over 18 months. Cagney demanded a rise in his salary from the standard \$450 a week and, after several months of negotiations, at the end of 1931 signed a new contract for \$1,400 weekly. As Cagney became Warner Bros.' major box office attraction, the star continued to request that the studio raise his salary. While a rise in 1932 took Cagney to \$3,000 a week for four films a year, the star continued to protest his terms of employment. Kevin Hagopian (1986) identifies several grounds for disagreement in Cagney's dealings with Warner Bros. Cagney was dissatisfied with the directors and leading ladies employed on his films. He also resented the studio's continued casting of him in variations on the gangster type. On more economic terms, Cagney believed the studio should offer him a share in the profits of films that performed well at the box office. While not a specific complaint against Warner Bros., Cagney also found that as his salary grew, so his tax burden increased, an issue that would become significant in the star's later career. Billing became an issue when the name of co-star Pat O'Brien appeared above Cagney's on the marquee for the release of *Devil Dogs of the Air* (1935). Cagney argued that the billing contravened the terms of his contract. As the case progressed through the courts, Cagney took a contract with the small and short-lived Grand National studio, making two films before Warner Bros. moved to settle out of court.

Cagney returned to Warner Bros. on favourable terms. According to the contract signed by Cagney in July 1939, the star was required to work a maximum of three films a year and to undertake a minimum of publicity work for the studio. The contract also gave him the option to reject a certain number of stories he was not suited to and the right to terminate his contract with five months notice. The contract gave Cagney \$150,000

per picture plus ten per cent of the gross, and also required that William Cagney, the star's brother, be employed as associate producer on his films.

Although the new contract granted Cagney more control over his work, he left Warner Bros. after winning an Academy Award and second New York Critics prize for his famous performance as George M. Cohan in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942). Cagney's departure was not brought on by any particular falling out with the studio but was the result of changing conditions in the industry during the early 1940s that favoured a move to independence. Potential gains for independent producers appeared imminent when, in 1940, the Justice Department began a series of actions, continuing through the decade, that ruled against the oligopolistic control of the studio system. Also, between 1940-42, the Roosevelt administration pursued a policy of raising taxes to meet high levels of expenditure on defence, which would see the salary of high earners, including film stars, reduced to \$25,000 net per annum. Independent production presented Cagney not only with control over his career but also with ways of securing income other than his salary, by means of investments and deferments. After leaving Warner Bros. Cagney signed for occasional films with Twentieth Century Fox before he and his brother formed Cagney Productions, Inc., signing an agreement in March 1942 which saw the company bankrolled as a production subsidiary of United Artists.

The management of Cagney Productions was mishandled. A record of financial extravagance and arguments over publicity resulted in an output of only three films in six years, and United Artists and Cagney Productions parted ways. With his previous history, it appears surprising that on 6 May 1949 Cagney signed a new contract with Warner Bros., taking Cagney Productions with him. *White Heat* (1949), Cagney's first film back at Warner Bros., returned him to the gangster type, however his power and status in the industry had changed. The new contract was non-exclusive and granted the star extensive decision-making powers together with a salary of \$250,000 per picture.

Back in 1932, during one of his battles with Warner Bros., Cagney walked out on the production of *Blessed Event*. Returning to the studio, he was cast in a production that saw him take a typical role as a conman. Originally titled 'Bad Boy', the film was renamed *Hard to Handle* (1933), the irony of which was not lost on the studio's publicity machine. Advertising

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