



# Manufacturing Stars & Stardom

Part 2

# Introduction

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> part of this lecture on manufacturing stars and stardom, will consider why some actors become stars rather than others, considering the qualities associated with stardom by using Gwyneth Paltrow as a case study.

# That special something

- Stars stand out.
- Something: exceptional talent or strikingly good looks. But not necessarily.
- Ugly men have often become great stars of the cinema: e.g., the German actor of the 1920s **Emil Jannings** and the British actor of the 1930s **Charles Laughton**.
- In contrast, it has mainly beautiful women who have become cinema's greatest stars.



# Beautiful, youthful stars

- ‘Beauty is one of the sources of “star quality,” and the star system does not content itself with prospecting for it in merely its natural state: it has created or revived the arts of cosmetics, costume, carriage, manners, photography, and, if necessary, surgery, which perfect, prolong, or even produce beauty’ (Edgar Morin, *Les Stars*, 1957/2005: 31).
- The ‘requirement of beauty is also the requirement of youth’ (Morin, 36).
- ‘... in the American cinema before 1940, the average age of female stars was twenty to twenty-five; their career was shorter than that of male stars, who ripen, if not age, in order to attain an ideal seductive status’ (ibid.).

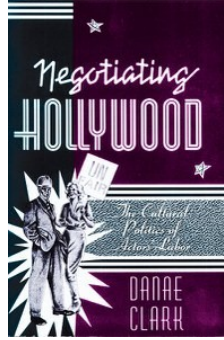


# Something more than beauty

- Neither Bette Davis (the biggest Hollywood female star of the early 1940s) nor Barbra Streisand (the biggest Hollywood female star of the 1970s) was acclaimed for her beauty.
- Indeed much of their publicity concentrated on their unconventional looks.
- Stardom clearly requires something more than beauty.



# Acting talent



- By the early 1930s, ‘slightly more than two-thirds of the actors under contract with the major studios had begun their careers on the stage’ (Danae Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood*, 1995: 112).
- ‘although the studios may have looked initially to beauty for star material, the addition of talent legitimated and gave depth to the spectacle of beauty’ (ibid.).

# Acting talent as a requirement

- During the 1930s and 1940s, the Hollywood studios 'revived the talent school system, which provided aspiring actors with a nominal weekly income, some on-the-job training, and, for those who were lucky enough after three months, an opportunity for bit work or feature roles' (Danae Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood*, 1995: 110).

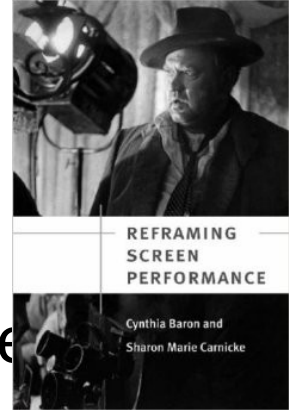
# Studio drama schools & coaches

- By the late 1930s, virtually all of the major studios operated a drama school headed by women, such as:
  - **Phyllis Loughton** (Paramount and, later, MGM)
  - **Lillian Albertson** (Paramount and, later, RKO)
  - **Florence Enright** (Universal and, later, Twentieth Century-Fox)
  - **Lillian Burns** (Republic and then MGM )
  - **Lela Rogers** (RKO)
  - **Sophie Rosenstein** (Warner Bros. and Universal)
  - **Josephine Hutchinson** (Columbia)
- Many of these women published influential film acting manuals during the 1930s and 1940s
- (See Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance*, 2008: 18-19).



# Modern acting methods

- By the 1940s, acting training and coaching formed an important part of the Hollywood studio system.
- Many of the big stars of this era were required to gain and perfect their acting methods and skills.
- Studio acting teachers taught actors to use the script as a blueprint for building characterization, while preparation was required to ‘integrate directorial suggestions and interact effectively with other actors’ (Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance*, 2008: 27).



# Preparation

- With scenes shot out of sequence, film actors need to know how each scene fits into the story and their character's development.
- 'Often required to portray moments of extreme emotion without rehearsal or without the presence of their scene partners, screen actors depend on the work they have done alone and in advance' (Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance*, 2008: 236).

# Fitting together

- ‘Because performance details are combined with a dense array of filmic elements, actors learn to home in on essentials so that audiences can locate the meaningful qualities in movements, gestures, and expressions’

(Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance*, 2008: 236).



# Taking acting seriously

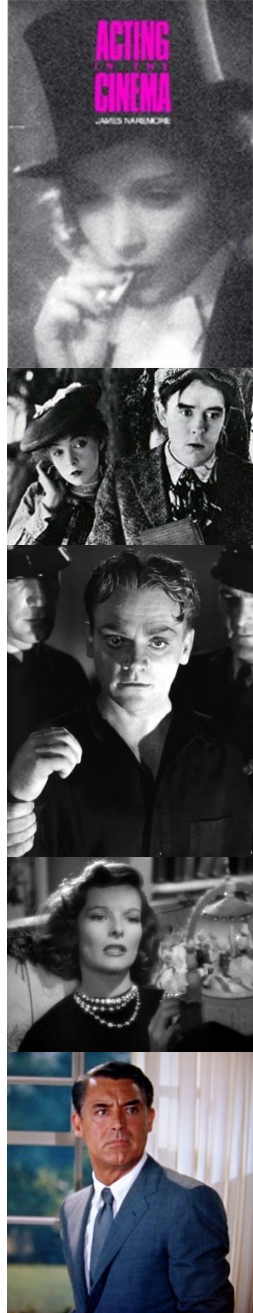
- Many film actors become stars following a ‘break-through’ role in which their performance attracts the attention of film critics, receives rave reviews and is subsequently nominated for a major film award.
- On the back of this, they often gain a higher public profile, attain star status (with leading roles, top billing and star vehicles) and sometimes acquire a recognisable and distinctive (often imitable) **signature style**: that is, an idiosyncratic set of gestures movements, poses and expressions that become a major part of their trademark.
- Stars go to considerable lengths to extend and improve their acting skills, while their publicists ensure that attention is drawn to their achievements.

# Attending closely to star performances

- Critics and journalists pay close attention to star performances, charting their highs and lows, comparing one performance with another, either from an earlier film or by another actor in the same film.
- Film performances are scrutinized, interpreted and evaluated, repeatedly and in detail, by different kinds of people from all over the world: audiences, fans, buffs, newspapers critics, industry analysts and trade journalists, magazine feature writers, interviewers, gossip columnists, internet bloggers, celebrity reporters, film scholars and media students.

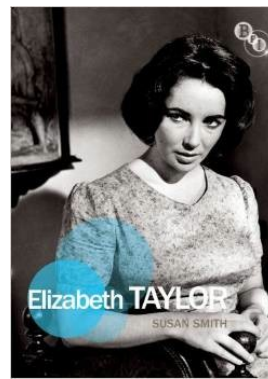
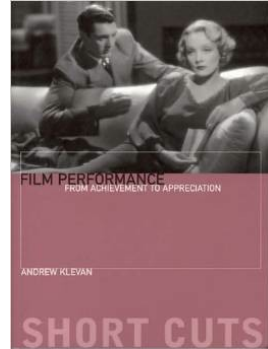
# Idiolect

- ‘Idiolect’ - an idiosyncratic acting style or a signature style.
- Philip Drake uses this term in his essay ‘Reconceptualising Screen Performance’, *Journal of Film & Video*, volume 58, number 1, 2006, pp. 84-94.
- He borrowed (and extended it) from James Naremore’s *Acting in the Cinema* (1988), which analyses the different acting styles of **Lillian Gish**, Charlie Chaplin, Marlene Dietrich, **James Cagney**, **Katharine Hepburn**, Marlon Brando and **Cary Grant**



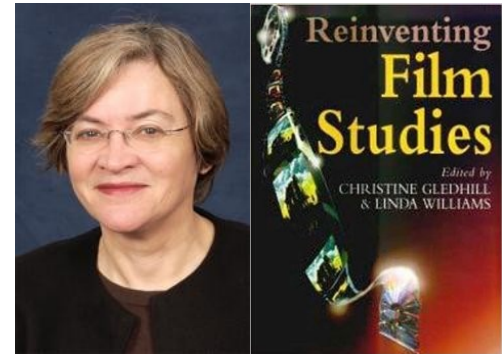
# Detailed attention to an actor's acting

- Andrew Klevan:
  - *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation* (2006)
  - *Barbara Stanwyck* (2013)
- Susan Smith, *Elizabeth Taylor* (2012)



# Different kinds of star actor

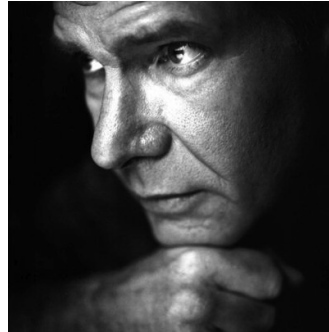
- Christine Geraghty has identified three types of film star:
  - stars as celebrities
  - stars as professionals
  - stars as performers
- These are determined by the relative exposure they receive in terms of their off-screen or non-professional life and also the degree to which their acting skills are showcased in publicity (Geraghty 'Re-examining stardom: questions of texts, bodies and performance', *Reinventing Film Studies*, eds. Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 187)





# 3 types of film star

- **Celebrity** film stars are those whose personal life circulates most widely and in greatest detail.
- **Professional** film stars are defined largely in terms of their work rather than their private life, maintaining fairly consistent screen personae (e.g., Harrison Ford and Whoopi Goldberg).
- **Performers** are also defined largely in terms of their work rather than their private life and are known for playing a wide selection of character types (e.g., Meryl Streep and Dustin Hoffman).



# Celebrity film stars

- In the 1990s, the relative slowness of film production and the inevitable long gaps between the release of one star vehicle and another, prompted many actors to take work in other media like television, theatre and advertising in order to maintain a more continuous public profile. This gave them a high celebrity profile (e.g., Nicole Kidman and George Clooney).



# Professional film stars

- Other stars have worked exclusively in film, taking roles in a wide variety of genres while avoiding the celebrity spotlight.
- Stars who appear in a wide range of film genres need higher levels of consistency in terms of performance (i.e., a recognisable idiolect) in order to maintain the promise of a reliably specific set of pleasures, particularly when viewers choose films from the comprehensive selection available in video stores (e.g., Denzel Washington).



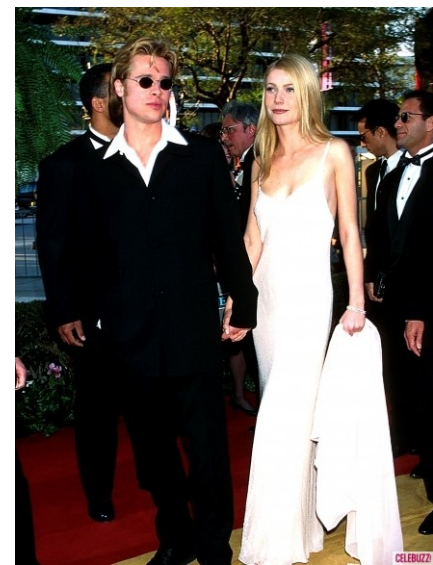
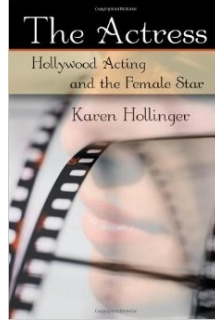
# Star Performers

- The film star-as-performer is more or less reinvented from one film to the next, eschewing consistency in favour of versatility.
- Christine Geraghty points out that the nineties, some film stars used displays of (visible) acting to distinguish themselves from other types of celebrity and also from other types of film star (i.e., stars-as-professionals).
- In such cases, experience, training and intelligence possess cultural capital in a market otherwise dominated by youth and good looks (e.g., Michael Sheen and Daniel Day Lewis).



# Gwyneth Paltrow

- However, clear-cut distinctions are actually quite hard to make. Consider, for instance, Gwyneth Paltrow.
- Is she a celebrity star or a star performer?
- The ‘barrage of publicity surrounding their [Paltrow and Brad Pitt’s] relationship suddenly made Paltrow a major celebrity and shaped her star image even before she had a starring film role’ (Karen Hollinger, *The Actress*, 2006: 195).





# Paltrow as celebrity

- On the cover of many different celebrity and fashion magazines, including *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Marie Claire*.



# Paltrow as Performer

- Paltrow is the daughter of acclaimed stage actress Blythe Danner.
- Break-through role in *Emma* (Douglas McGrath, 1996).
- Her role in *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, 1998) showcasing her acting skills, most notably her ability to perform with an English accent.
- She turned down leading female role in James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997) in order to do low budget films such as *Sliding Doors* (Peter Howitt, 1998), *Shallow Hal* (Farley Bros., 2002) and *The Royal Tannenbaums* (Wes Anderson, 2002).



# A serious actor

- ***Possession*** (Neil LaBute, 2002), based on A.S. Byatt's acclaimed novel.
- ***Sylvia*** (Christine Jeffs, 2003), a bio-pic of the poet Sylvia Plath.
- In May 2002, Paltrow appeared at London's Donmar Warehouse in David Auburn's Pulitzer Prize-winning play ***Proof***.
- Starred with Anthony Hopkins and Jake Gyllenhaal in ***Proof*** (John Madden, 2005).
- Subsequent films: as Pepper Potts in ***Iron Man*** (2008, 2010 & 2013) and ***The Avengers*** (2012).





# A would-be actress?

- Karen Hollinger concludes that there is ‘a would-be actress concealed under this conventional movie star exterior’ (Hollinger, *The Actress*, 2006: 219).
- I have suggested that beneath the surface of this star-as-celebrity is a star-as-performer (Shingler, *Star Studies: A Critical Guide*, 2010: 60).



# Conclusion

- Stars are seldom straightforward and investigating the meanings and functions of film stars is rarely a straightforward process.
- Stars operate and signify in ambiguous and contradictory ways, as Richard Dyer argued in *Stars* (1979) and *Heavenly Bodies* (1987).
- This is particularly true when we consider what they mean for different types of people and the ways in which they embody different types of social groups or cultural moments.
- This complex area of star studies will be our next (and final) topic.
- Any questions?



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