PART ONE
Star Business

1

The Symbolic Commerce of Hollywood Stardom

Hollywood stardom is founded on the marketability of human identities. As one comment in a 1959 issue of the trade paper *Variety* noted, "Always the same obvious truism – show business is a business of names, personalities, values generated by the traits and skills and charms of potent (at the box office) individuals" (Green, 1959: 1). In the economics of Hollywood film, stars are valued as a guard against risk. Regardless of whether the budget is a few million or in the hundreds of millions, feature film production is an expensive enterprise. At the same time, the film industry is constantly confronted by the fact that it is pouring money into making things that people don't actually need, and so unlike other goods such as basic foodstuffs, consumer demand for films is uncertain and capricious. With this mixture of high-cost investment and uncertain demand, the industry treasures concrete, material signs of content which consistently draw audiences. Popular cycles or genres can offer some certainties through the repetition of thematic and stylistic tropes, whereas the value of stars is tied up with how they represent versions of human identity. In the figure of the star, the symbolic/cultural and economic/commercial are inextricably linked. Film stars have cultural significance because they represent people and as those representations circulate in media markets, so they become figures for exchange. Since stars only portray certain categories or types of identity and not others, then stardom has symbolic and cultural power. Equally, as assets deployed in the market with the aim of securing commercial advantage, stars are a source of economic power. Examining the symbolic commerce of Hollywood stardom therefore requires understanding and critically evaluating the practices and processes which support

the production, dissemination and presentation of popular identities in the film market. Initially this chapter sets out some basic dynamics at work in the symbolic commerce of stardom before considering how stardom is configured in Hollywood.

Commercial and Symbolic Dynamics of Film Stardom

Hollywood film is a form of mass communication. As John Thompson notes, mass communication is characterized by "*the institutionalized production and generalized diffusion of symbolic goods via the fixation and transmission of information and symbolic content*" (original emphasis, 1995: 26). Thompson poses five features defining mass communication, each of which can be applied to Hollywood film generally but can also be applied specifically to identify the foundational dynamics at work in the symbolic commerce of stardom.

1. Industrially produced fame

In common with other industries for mass communication, Hollywood operates by "technical and institutional means of production and diffusion" (Thompson, 1995: 27). Feature films are "complex cultural goods" (Caves, 2000: 10) or "joint products" (Becker, 1982: 35) for they require multiple inputs for their production. Films stars feature in these collaborative efforts as individuals working within the specialized division of labor that facilitates the making, circulation and presentation of film products. At the same time, Hollywood stardom itself is a work of collective creation, involving the co-ordination of numerous contributions and resources.

Film stars are not born, they are made. This may seem an excessively obvious point, yet it is worth emphasizing as popular documentaries and biographies so frequently tell quite a contrary story by reproducing the belief that the fame which a star enjoys arises only from the magnetic, compelling qualities which s/he conveys on screen. Although not philosophically systemized, this popular view is nevertheless a theory of stardom for it makes certain conceptual presumptions which can be summarized as the three I's. The *individual* is presumed to be the source and origin of stardom. Secondly, the qualities which mark out star status are *innate*, something natural which the individual is born with. Usually those qualities can't easily be defined: the star just has a certain "something," the "it"

factor which distinguishes him or her from others. Finally, because the person was born this way, there is the sense that stardom is *inevitable*, a view summarized in popular literature on stardom with observations along the lines of "from the moment of the first appearance in film, s/he was destined for stardom." This manner of thinking can be described as the charismatic theory of stardom, for it attributes fame to the natural enigmatic attractions of the individual. It is a theory which is popular because it would appear to have some proof to support it and so holds a certain persuasive appeal. Stars are indeed individual people. On screen, they do seem to radiate qualities which make their presence far more compelling than that of other performers around them. As all they bring to the screen is their bodies and voices, why not believe star presence is an entirely natural creation, and when faced with that magnetic presence, with the gift of hindsight it can seem the coming of fame was only a matter of time.

While romantically attractive, however, the charismatic theory gives an entirely misleading account of the material conditions in which film stardom is produced. Although this view celebrates the exceptionalness of certain individuals, film production, distribution and exhibition always involves multiple personnel and resources. Now the charismatic theory is not blind to the workings of industry but simply sees such arrangements as mere secondary considerations, a transparent infrastructure enabling the greatness of the star to shine through. When seriously considered, however, these inputs become so central to the making of stars that it is impossible to imagine stardom happening without them. In Hollywood, stars depend on agents to procure work for them. Managers steer their careers, while lawyers draw up the deals which will secure remuneration for the star's services. Casting directors make decisions about which performers are suitable for which scripts. Without producers, there would be no films for stars to appear in. Close analysis of the aesthetics and form of film reveal that whatever compelling quality a performer brings to the screen is largely the result of how cinematographers, grips (i.e. lighting technicians), sound mixers and editors manipulate the elements of film to give the star an auratic presence on screen. Marketing teams aim to cultivate public interest in films featuring stars, and in due course critics and reviewers will judge the merits of those films. Media exposure of film stars is not confined to films alone, and journalists and photographers in the gossip industry continually report and capture the off-screen lives of stars. Consequently, publicists work at managing the star's media exposure. Star films only become available to the public because theater programmers book them,

stores buy the necessary video units to rent or sell, or buyers acquire television rights. After all these efforts, the popularity and commercial success of stars is contingent on ticket sales or units rented and bought, and so the movie consuming public are always participants in the making of stardom.

Film stardom is therefore never an individual, innate or inevitable effect. It requires the organized collective actions of multiple participants. Whatever aura of presence the star brings to the screen is largely due to the artful manipulation of film form. Once these factors are taken into consideration, it becomes impossible to accept stardom is natural or predestined. Instead, fundamental to the symbolic commerce of stardom is the recognition that **stardom is a product of industrialized cultural production, the outcome of multiple, highly organized, inputs and actions**. In common with other arenas of artistic production, Hollywood stardom is an outcome of "collective activity" (Becker, 1982: 1). Hollywood stardom is industrially produced fame, generated at numerous points across film development, principal photography, post-production, marketing, physical distribution, exhibition, reviewing and consumption. Rather than the source, the individual is the outcome in the production of stardom.

2. Mediated fame

Like other forms of mass communication, the film medium produces "a structured break between the production of symbolic forms and their reception" (Thompson, 1995: 29). Film places the actor in the context of mediated performance: the actor is on show but not physically present to an audience. This process of mediation is not limited to films alone but is an inter-textual effect achieved across multiple media channels, including the press, television, internet and book publishing. It is this insight which is at the core Richard Dyer's (1998) concept of "star image": by forcing a division between the star-as-person and the star-as-texts, the idea of star image directly challenges the charismatic theory, for whatever meaning or significance a star has cannot be attributed to the internal innate qualities of individuals but rather to the external material signifying substance of films and other media texts. If stars appear significant, it is because star texts connect with wider systems of belief about human identity. Star images may represent individuals but they are not the product of the individual. A second dynamic at work in the symbolic commerce of stardom is then how **stars appear and circulate in public culture as mediated identities**.

While the break between person and texts is essential to grasping the commercial work of film stardom, by avoiding discussion of the industrial conditions in which star texts are produced, the star image concept still preserves a kind of charismatic mythology, for it leaves unanswered certain pressing questions: where do stars come from?; in what conditions and through what processes are star images created? By ignoring the markets in which those images circulate, star studies have avoided interrogating in any depth the question why does Hollywood produce stars? It is precisely the aim of studying the symbolic commerce of stardom to therefore situate the production and value of star images within these conditions and markets.

3. Dispersed fame

By separating the contexts of production and consumption, mass communication "extends the availability of symbolic forms in space and time" (Thompson, 1995: 30). This is crucial to stars entering the market. Stars are mediated figures: images of the star body and the recording of the star voice can be separated and circulated independently of the star's physical presence. By this separation, **stars are temporally and spatially dispersed identities scattered across local, regional, national and global markets**.

4. Reproduced fame

Tied to the last point, with "the public circulation of symbolic forms," media products take on "mass" characteristics as they become "available in principle to a plurality of recipients" (p. 30). While the costs of making the original film negative are high, the unit cost is relatively low for replicating the film on celluloid prints or digital copies for showing in cinemas, duplicating discs to feed the home entertainment market, or creating downloadable files. Therefore **stars are mass-reproduced identities**.

5. Commodified fame

Finally, mass communication results in the "commodification of symbolic forms" (p. 27). It is worth considering this dynamic at some length for it is fundamental to the symbolic commerce of stardom. Thompson argues symbolic forms become commodities when they are subject to two types of "valorization." "Symbolic valorization" defines how cultural works gain

"symbolic value" by "the ways in which, and the extent to which, they are esteemed by individuals – that is, praised or denounced, cherished or despised by them" (p. 27). Symbolic forms become commodities when their symbolic value is accompanied by "economic valorization," the "value for which they can be exchanged in a market . . . becom[ing] objects which can be bought and sold . . . for a price" (pp. 27–8). By the combination of these two types of value, symbolic works become "symbolic goods" (p. 28).

Once this basic fact is established it is necessary to ask, however, what type of symbolic good is a film? John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny note the film commodity has two aspects: a material aspect, "strips of photographic representations on celluloid . . . which are the object of transactions between producers, distributors and exhibitors" (2005: 10), and an immaterial aspect, "the form in which the film is consumed in the mind of each member of the cinema audience" (p. 11). On the latter note, it is useful to think of any film as an "experience good" (Caves, 2000: 3) or "experience product" (Bakker 2001: 466). A film is both a tangible good – the material film object – and an entertainment service – the delivery and exchange of emotional, humorous, or enlightening experiences.

Stars are not directly symbolic commodities because in the business of the box office or the home video market, consumers cannot actually buy stars. Walk into any multiplex and try buying, say, Sandra Bullock. It's impossible. Across posters in the lobby, electronic noticeboards, the box-office counter, or automated ticket dispensers, all information and systems are focused on buying the film. Likewise in bricks-and-mortar video retail and rental stores, or with platforms for online retail, distribution and downloading, the point of transaction is always orientated toward purchasing the film. So while it possible to buy a ticket to see *The Proposal* (2009) or otherwise to rent or download *The Blind Side* (2009), it is just not possible to buy the star of these films, Bullock. Now the star may very well be the only reason the consumer chooses to pay to see a film, however even in such cases, the star cannot be directly purchased. It is in this sense then that Sedgwick and Pokorny describe stars as a "derivative commodity-type" (2005: 7), for buying the star is secondary to, and so derived from, buying the film. Furthermore, in keeping with the whole experiential exchange of film consumption, the act of transaction only provides an *experience* of the star.

Stars can't be bought by consumers yet the presence of a star may lead the consumer to "buy into" the idea of a film. Stardom is used as a strategy to induce consumers to pay for a ticket or buy or rent a video unit. Any

performer who has gained a track record of positive audience response has acquired symbolic valorization, which the industry may then choose to deploy as a means of securing economic value from the film. In the film market, audiences are never guaranteed and so therefore the industry must work to stimulate and regularize demand. To do this, it is necessary to find a delicate balance between novelty and assurance. As Sedgwick and Pokorny note, uniqueness is a key characteristic of the film commodity (p. 13): although similarities may exist, and genres feed on such resemblances, no two films, even remakes, are exactly identical. Indeed differences between films are crucial to stimulating consumer desires to watch a film. Promoting uniqueness permeates the whole of film advertising: "each film is marketed competitively against all others currently in distribution. In this way, although film advertising differentiates its product, the industry differs from general practices in individuating each item it makes" (Staiger, 1990: 6)

While necessary to the commerce of film, uniqueness equally presents a problem for both the consumers and producers of film. Until a film is actually seen, consumers are left uncertain about just exactly what it is they are paying for. As Sedgwick observes, "If novelty is an irreducible characteristic of film as a commodity, it follows that, *ex ante*, consumers do not know fully what they want" (2005: 197). Repeat viewings of films do happen yet the majority of transactions around films depend on consumers paying for the first time to see something which remains (at least in part) unknown. Stimulating the "want-to-see" aspect of film consumption depends precisely on preserving the unknowability of the film, yet this presents the film consumer with a question: why pay – particularly when the same expenditure could be made on more certain rewards – for an experience where it is impossible to be sure what to expect or whether it will be satisfying? Paying for a ticket, or purchasing or hiring a film, entails a certain amount of risk, for until the film has been watched, a moviegoer can never be certain what s/he will get and whether it will deliver pleasure or disappointment. Now the producers of the film do know of its content but they don't know for certain what the film-consuming public will actually think of it or whether they will even pay to see it. Acknowledging the vagaries of success in the film business, screenwriter William Goldman famously opined that "the single most important fact, perhaps, of the entire movie industry" is that "NOBODY KNOWS ANYTHING" (1984: 39). This is only partly true. Film producers do know what mixtures of content have succeeded in the past, and so with the aim of securing future success, they may

choose to repeat those formulas while still preserving some uniqueness. Yet as the history of the film market demonstrates, simply repeating the particular combination of aesthetic and textual inputs which worked on one occasion doesn't guarantee capturing the popular imagination another time round. This should not be taken as meaning film popularity is open to sheer randomness: consumption choices do demonstrate regular patterns but yet they are never entirely assured. Rather, it is more appropriate to regard the sellers and consumers of film as meeting in a state of what Richard Caves (2000: 3) describes as "symmetrical ignorance": consumers don't know for certain what they will get and producers have no absolute certainty what consumers will like.

This play of certainty and uncertainty is therefore endemic to the commerce of film. To stimulate the want-to-see factor, uniqueness is required, and so the main substance of the movie must be kept tantalizingly unknown by creating differences between films. At the same time, pure uniqueness can only bring risks for film consumers and producers, and so both constituencies depend on similarities or continuities between films for assurance. Stars have their place in the commerce of cinema precisely because they provide a means for managing this balance between uncertainty and certainty, difference and continuity, or uniqueness and familiarity. Sedgwick explains:

> Each film is unique in that it comprises a set of characteristics which differentiate it from other films. Such a set typically includes genre, plot, screenplay, star billing, direction, cinematography, art direction, supporting actors, sets, locations, wardrobe and make-up, music and length. However, this complexity creates a major problem for film production companies because of the uncertainty it poses for audiences. Since box-office revenues are based upon the reception of each film by consumers who make choices between rival unique products, studio heads and producers will be concerned to reduce the degree of uncertainty that uniqueness entails. They will seek to influence consumer choice and hence film earnings by incorporating certain deliberate design features into the product, the most important of which, historically, have been narrative storytelling conventions, stars, genre, production studio and director. (2000: 13)

For this to work, stars themselves must be both unique and familiar entities. No two stars are identical and yet casting a star immediately imports a known set of meanings familiar from other films. In this respect it is worthwhile recalling Janet Staiger's description of stars as "a monopoly on a

personality" (1985: 101). Star monopolies achieve a delicate balance between uniqueness and standardization: there is only one Brad Pitt but he is always Brad Pitt. Foregrounding the distinctive individuality of stars provides the industry with a means of product differentiation and product assurance: casting Sandra Bullock differentiates a film from a Julia Roberts movie while at the same time setting off a chain of associations with previous films featuring the star. In the symbolic commerce of Hollywood stardom, therefore, **stars have symbolic and economic value as signs of difference and similarity**.

This symbolic and commercial significance will be picked up and explored in more detail with the next chapter. Before progressing much further, however, it is necessary to attend to two key questions: what is a star, and who were the stars in the period covered by this study?

Bankability, A-list Status and the Talent Hierarchy

"Star" is a slippery term. For example, search films on Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) and anyone who takes the lead in a film is listed under "Stars." And so, according to IMDb, the environmental documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) "stars" ex-Vice President Al Gore and British comedy *Looking for Eric* (2009) "stars" relatively unknown TV actor Steve Evets (who?). Renowned avant-garde short *Window Water Baby Moving* (1962) "stars" the director Stan Brakhage along with his wife Jane, who is seen giving birth to their daughter Myrrena, who also joins IMDb's star roster. Rejecting the seductive appeal of the charismatic theory of stardom and putting aside the common phase "a star is born," can anyone actually be a star at the very moment they are born? With this casual overuse of the term, nearly anyone who appears on a screen gets to be labeled a star. By potentially accommodating everyone in film as a star, this open definition does not provide ground for understanding Hollywood stardom. Consequently, it is necessary to adopt a more restrictive definition.

In the parlance of Hollywood, stars are "talent." Used in this way the term has no evaluative purpose – i.e., it is not employed to suggest stars are talented – but is rather a classificatory label, a term applied to describe "any person or animal working as an on-camera performer," although its use may be extended "to include all those involved in the artistic aspects of filmmaking (i.e., writers, actors, directors, etc.) as opposed to the people

involved on the business end of film" (Cones, 1992: 508). Hiring star talent is itemized in production accounting under "above-the-line" expenses, "costs relating to acquiring the story rights, property rights associated with the screenplay, script development and signing the producer, director and principal members of the cast" (p. 1). In this way, stars are differentiated from the "below-the-line" costs of "mechanical charges, crew labor, over-head, extras, art and set costs, camera, electrical, wardrobe, transportation, raw-film stock and post-production" (p. 48).

Star talent is part of the creative labor-force involved with the collective work of feature film production. More specifically, film stars are film actors. Frequently professional critics and reviewers, but also the general movie consuming public, reject the quality of star acting – "s/he can't act" – yet this should not distract from the fact that Hollywood stars do act in films. Judgments of good or bad cannot dismiss the practical evidence that film stars serve a particular symbolic function in movie production, for they use their voices and bodies to represent characters on screen. All films stars are therefore film actors, yet not all film actors are stars. Hollywood stardom depends on a talent hierarchy which forms material distinctions between actors. On screen, stardom is produced and differentiated as script and elements of film form differentiate between actors, with stars granted greater narrative time and space as the film medium stages stardom. This audio-visual presentation of the actor is not enough, however, to make the star. Crucial to the workings of stardom is the circulation of the name. For Richard deCordova (1990), public circulation of names from 1909 onward played a key part in developing the discursive system of film stardom by inaugurating the "picture personality" as a knowable figure. Each year thousands of actors work in film but the consuming public never remember their names and those names are not used as vehicles to sell films. As an industrially orchestrated mechanism, naming therefore distinguishes stars from the large professional acting community.

Even so, there are still many actors whose names are known to audience members but yet who do not enjoy star status. Viewers of *Boogie Nights* (1997), *Out of Sight* (1998), *The Limey* (1999), *Magnolia* (1999), *Traffic* (2000), *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002), *Welcome to Collinwood* (2002), *Anger Management* (2003) or the remake of *The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3* (2009) may be able to place the name against the distinctive features of one of Hollywood's favorite Latinos for hire, Luis Guzmán, and possibly to even recognize his voicing of the Chucho character in the dog comedy *Beverly Hills Chihuahua* (2008). Hollywood film employs a multitude of recogniz-

able and familiar character actors, supporting names distinguished from the vast population of anonymous actors. Yet although their names are known, these are not stars. Naming is therefore a necessary but not a sufficient condition of stardom. Rather, star status depends on how the name is deployed. Screen credits, posters, trailers and websites all assert that *The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3* is not Guzmán's film but rather belongs to Denzel Washington and John Travolta, or as some posters for the film paraphrased, "Washington" and "Travolta." Hollywood's hierarchy of actors is physically materialized in time and space as the names of stars appear before or above a film's title. Foregrounding certain actors in this way is the most obvious symbolic evidence that stars are names which sell. Dissemination of the name makes the star a known and recognizable sign of value, a form of currency which can be deployed in circuits of exchange across the film market in anticipation of profits.

Casting directors Janet Hirshenson and Jane Jenkins have a long and distinguished career in Hollywood. After working at Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope Studios, the pair established The Casting Company, casting films featuring many of conglomerate Hollywood's biggest star names, including *Ghost* (1990), *A Few Good Men* (1992), *The Last Action Hero* (1993), *In the Line of Fire* (1993), *Mrs Doubtfire* (1993), *Ransom* (1996), *Air Force One* (1997), *The Perfect Storm* (2000), *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (2000), *Something's Gotta Give* (2003) and *The Da Vinci Code* (2006). As industry insiders, Hirshenson and Jenkins's take on Hollywood's hierarchy of actors is very revealing for how it nuances between different tiers of film actor. "Wannabes" are "the bottom of the ladder . . . people just out of acting school or fresh off the bus from Kansas or New Jersey," while "Unknowns" are "actors no one has heard of (yet!)" but who are members of the Screen Actors Guild with representation by an agent, and who may have a couple of screen credits (Hirshenson and Jenkins, 2006: 16). "Working actors" are "familiar to industry insiders and film buffs . . . but you've probably never heard of them, though you may well recognize their faces"; they are actors who play "the best friends, the doctors, the gangsters, the cops – the bedrock of day-to-day moviemaking" (p. 16). Guzmán could very well be placed in this category.

These actors may be fortunate enough to graduate to become "Names," actors who "might lack the youth, looks, or charisma to be considered Stars, but . . . make a solid, essential contribution to any film they are in" (p. 19). Hirshenson and Jenkins place William H. Macy in this category, for "his presence can green-light an independent film or a TV movie" (p. 19).

Hirshenson and Jenkins acknowledge there are differences of status even within this category, with actors such as Paul Giamatti, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Laura Linney and Frances McDormand sitting towards the top as "actors who are Stars in some contexts and top Names in others. In the bigger movies, these performers play the tasty supporting roles, but they may well get the leads in small, independent, or otherwise offbeat films" (p. 21). Hoffman demonstrates this trend well. On *Capote* (2005) he took the lead role in a film produced by a number of independent companies for an estimated $7m but released in most leading territories through Sony's distribution division. His next appearance, however, was in *Mission: Impossible III* (2006), a high-budget production from Paramount, one of the Hollywood major studios. Hoffman may have played the lead in *Capote* but on *Mission: Impossible III* he was on supporting duties, playing villain Owen Davian opposite the film's actual star, Tom Cruise. *Mission: Impossible III* was made for an estimated $150m by Cruise/Wagner Productions, Cruise's production company, with the studio handling international distribution. *Capote* grossed $49 million internationally, while *Mission: Impossible III* went on to sell $398 million in tickets. Afterwards, Hoffman eased back into the indie zone, sharing top billing with fellow indie player Linney in *The Savages* (2007) and leading the cast of *Before the Devil Knows Your Dead* (2007), before dipping his toes once more into a major studio movie with the Universal/Paramount co-production *Charlie Wilson's War* (2007), where he was squarely ranked behind the star names of Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts.

Further divisions in the Names category are determined by gender. As Hirshenson and Jenkins note, "the Hollywood hierarchy favors men – conventional wisdom has it that movies with strong men in the lead do better than films anchored by women" and so a distinction can be drawn between "the woman who takes second place *only* to a man and the woman who'll take supporting roles under a female lead" (emphasis in original, p. 21). Based on her supporting roles opposite Liam Neeson in *Kinsey* (2004) and Jeff Daniels in *The Squid and the Whale* (2005), Linney is placed in the former category by Hirshenson and Jenkins, while McDormand belongs to the latter for her supporting performances opposite female leads in *Something's Gotta Give* and *North Country* (2005).

Finally, the hierarchy is topped by the "Stars." Again, there are gradations of status within this category. Hirshenson and Jenkins place Halle Berry, Cate Blanchett, Robert De Niro, Cameron Diaz, Will Ferrell, Jake Gyllenhaal, Samuel L. Jackson, Kevin Kline, Heath Ledger, Al Pacino, Meryl Streep,

Owen Wilson, Kate Winslet and Reese Witherspoon in this category as "actors who become the selling point for the movie, one of the main reasons people will come to see it" (p. 22). However, these are topped by the "A-list," "Stars who can get a picture made: their mere presence in the cast is enough to guarantee funding" (p. 22). For Hirshenson and Jenkins, George Clooney, Russell Crowe, Johnny Depp, Eddie Murphy, Vince Vaughn, Mark Wahlberg, Denzel Washington, Robin Williams and Bruce Willis populate this tier, and they note the gendered bias underpinning Hollywood stardom with Julia Roberts "pretty much the only A-list actress in town" (p. 22). Finally, topping the hierarchy is the "A-plus list" – Tom Cruise, Matt Damon, Harrison Ford, Mel Gibson, Tom Hanks, Jack Nicholson, Brad Pitt and Will Smith – "guys who can not only get a picture made but who can practically guarantee it will turn a profit" (p. 23).

As these tiers indicate, the talent hierarchy is defined by commercial considerations. "Bankability" becomes the distinguishing criterion of star status. As John W. Cones explains, bankable "describe[s] someone or something (e.g. actors, directors, producers, projects, distributors, etc.) whose commitments can be taken to a bank and on which the bank will lend money for film production purposes, partly because of the prior successful performances of such individuals, entities or projects" (1992: 43). For several years in the 1990s, Hollywood reporter James Ulmer used estimates of bankability to rank actors in *The Hollywood Reporter*'s regular "Star Power" index. For Ulmer, bankability "is defined as the degree to which an actor's or director's name alone can raise 100% financing up front for a feature film, regardless of any other elements attached to the project" (2006: iii). To measure bankability, Ulmer devised his own proprietary rating system based on polling and interviewing industry professionals. Film buyers, sellers, sales agents, company directors and financiers in North America and some of the leading international territories for Hollywood film scored actors on a 100-point scale in three different levels of production budget, banded as up to $8 million, mid-range films of $8–30 million, and then over $30 million (pp. iii–iv).

With this research, the Ulmer Scale has posed a similar hierarchy to that offered by Hirshenson and Jenkins. The *A-plus list* are "'Fireproof' stars . . . guarantee[ing] an upfront sale, regardless of script, cast, producer of director brought to the package. Their names alone assure studios of a strong opening weekend" (p. 1). Meanwhile, the *A list* do "not trigger an automatic upfront sale, but they're a sure bet if the directors and budgets are right, and the material is consistent with the actor's past work. Like their

A+ peers, they can virtually guarantee a wide studio release for their films" (p. 3). Ulmer further differentiates between the *B+ list* ("actors boast[ing] nearly the same clout as the A stars, but elements in the film package, such as budget and co-stars, may weigh heavier. They can usually guarantee studio distribution" (p. 8)), the *B list* ("sometimes trigger[ing] an upfront sale. But other factors – such as the script genre, director, co-stars and budget – become all the more important. Their name value sometimes guarantees territorial sales for free and pay TV, cable, video and DVD" (p. 20)), and the *C list* ("actors [who] have little, if any, ability to trigger a presale based on their names alone. With the right co-stars, directors and budgets, however, they can occasionally enhance territorial sales in the ancillary markets" (p. 37)). Economic value is therefore central to defining stardom in Hollywood, where stars represent an exclusive elite of bankable actors.

Hollywood Stars, 1990–2009

"Star" is a relational rather than substantive term: certain actors can only be regarded as stars because others aren't. Star status is contingent on the commercial performance of films, and as the market is a dynamic arena of transactions, stardom is never fixed. Saying any actor *is* a star is therefore always conditional on his or her standing in the market. Hirshenson and Jenkins published their account of the actor hierarchy in 2006 but writing five years later it is difficult to imagine Mel Gibson holding his position amongst the A-plus listers or that Johnny Depp would not have progressed to the top tier and Angelina Jolie joined and probably surpassed Julia Roberts as the only female A-lister. As the bankability of actors rises and falls, star status constantly fluctuates. Although the names may change over time, the structure which supports stardom remains. As Hirshenson and Jenkins note, "what never seems to change is the hierarchy itself. Some parts need to be filled with Stars, others with Names, still others belong to Working Actors. Keeping track of who goes where is a big part of our job" (2006: 23). There is then a paradox at the core of the star system, for although Hollywood stardom praises the exceptionalness of the individual, the individual is always the product of collective action and the distinction of star status is dependent on occupying a position relative to others. Star status is therefore forever conditional, a product of the hierarchical system rather than the individual.

Since star status rests on shifting ground, when considering who is a star in any period, it is necessary to therefore find evidence of which actors were perceived to hold bankable status. Ulmer's index provides one manifestation of such perceptions. Similarly, since 1932, the Quigley Publishing Company has annually polled film exhibitors in the US to gauge their views on whom they regard as the top money-making stars in any year. As Bill Quigley (2010) explains, the poll is conducted as

> an annual survey of motion picture theatre owners and film buyers, which asks them to vote for the ten stars that they believe generated the most box-office revenue for their theatres during the year. It has been long regarded as one of the most reliable indicators of a Star's real box-office draw because the selections are done by people whose livelihood depends on choosing the films that will bring audiences to their theatres.

Although not based on any precise calculation of value, the poll offers an interesting if impressionistic account of the commercial status of actors, and as such provides an index of star status (Table 1.1). In the decades covered here, certain actors made one time appearances in the poll based on single films: e.g. Tim Allen, Sasha Baron Cohen, Jackie Chan, Billy Crystal, Robert De Niro, Vin Diesel, Dakota Fanning, Will Ferrell, Tommy Lee Jones, Demi Moore, Michelle Pfeiffer, Steven Seagal, Vince Vaughn, and Catherine Zeta-Jones. As others made repeat appearances in the annual rankings, however, they came to represent the era's elite strata of bankable actors: Sandra Bullock, Nicolas Cage, Jim Carrey, George Clooney, Sean Connery, Kevin Costner, Russell Crowe, Tom Cruise, Macaulay Culkin, Matt Damon, Johnny Depp, Leonardo DiCaprio, Michael Douglas, Robert Downey Jr., Clint Eastwood, Jodie Foster, Whoopi Goldberg, Harrison Ford, Mel Gibson, Tom Hanks, Angelina Jolie, Nicole Kidman, Eddie Murphy, Mike Myers, Jack Nicholson, Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts, Meg Ryan, Adam Sandler, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Will Smith, John Travolta, Denzel Washington, Robin Williams, Bruce Willis, and Reese Witherspoon. These names defined stardom in the decades 1990 to 2009 and so provide the main "cast" of names who will feature in this study.

Stardom depends on exclusion, for the specialness of film stars can only be affirmed if the overwhelming majority of other working actors lack star status. Although the movement of performers up and down the hierarchy may suggest fluidity and openness, it is necessary to recognize Hollywood stardom as a culturally prescribed system. Reviewing the rankings reported

Table 1.1 Quigley poll of the top ten money-making stars, 1990–2009.[1]

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Arnold Schwarzenegger	1	2		3			4													
Julia Roberts	2	4		6				2	10	1	2	3		5	7					
Bruce Willis	3									4										
Tom Cruise	4		1	2	4		1*	5		6	1	1	2	4	2	1				
Mel Gibson	5	10	2	8	7	7	1*		6	8	6		9				8	7		
Kevin Costner	6	1	3	4		10*	9													
Sean Connery	8						7													
Harrison Ford	9			5	5	4	8	1			10								5	
Robin Williams		3	10	3		5	6	9	4											
Macaulay Culkin		5	5																	
Jodie Foster		6			8															
Jack Nicholson			4					6						3						
Whoopi Goldberg			6	9																
Michael Douglas			7		9	10*														
Clint Eastwood			8	1																
Tom Hanks				7	1	1			1	2	8		1	8	1	10	5	10		6
Jim Carrey					2	2		7	2		9			1	5					
Tommy Lee Jones					10			10												
Brad Pitt						3						8			9	4				8
Sandra Bullock						6	5			10										1
John Travolta						9	3	8												

Name	Poll rankings (reading across)
Leonardo DiCaprio	3, 3, 5, 3, 2
Will Smith	4, 7, 7, 8, 3, 2, 1
Meg Ryan	5, 9
Adam Sandler	7, 3, 10, 9, 6
Eddie Murphy	8, 4
Mike Myers	5, 3
George Clooney	3, 2, 6, 5, 3, 8, 4
Russell Crowe	5, 4, 7, 6
Nicole Kidman	5, 6, 2
Denzel Washington	6, 8, 6, 4, 5, 10
Reese Witherspoon	4, 8, 7
Johnny Depp	6, 2, 1, 1, 2
Will Ferrell	9, 7, 9
Nicolas Cage	4, 8
Angelina Jolie	3, 9
Matt Damon	3, 4, 3
Robert Downey Jr.	2, 5
Shia LaBeouf	4, 9

from responses to the Quigley poll supports Hirshenson and Jenkins's contention that Hollywood stardom is a gendered system. In 1995, when *The Hollywood Reporter* took a small poll amongst seven top agents, studio heads and a major film critic, five of whom were female, most agreed Roberts and Bullock had enough box-office attraction to guarantee a good opening weekend for a film. A smaller proportion had confidence in Jodie Foster, Demi Moore, Meg Ryan, Michelle Pfeiffer, Sharon Stone and Barbra Streisand to open a film, and there was some belief Kim Basinger, Geena Davis, Whoopi Goldberg, Whitney Houston, Nicole Kidman, Winona Ryder, Alicia Silverstone and Meryl Streep could open the right film (Waldman, 1995). On the Quigley rankings, between 1990 and 2009, Bullock, Kidman and Witherspoon made repeat appearances but Roberts emerged as the only female star with any longevity over the two decades (see Chapter 9). Additionally, Hollywood stardom remains a racially circumscribed system. Since the Quigley poll began in the 1930s, only a few African-American actors have featured in the rankings. What the A-plus status of Will Smith possibly obscures is how, with the exception of Denzel Washington, he is the only black actor to consolidate a position amongst the star elite since Eddie Murphy in the 1980s (see further commentary in Chapter 6). When considered in this context, the appearance on the poll over two consecutive years of Whoopi Goldberg – a star both female *and* black – was truly remarkable.

In the decades which this study focuses upon, Jennifer Aniston, Cate Blanchett, Kirsten Dunst, Megan Fox, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Anne Hathaway, Katherine Heigl, Helen Hunt, Alicia Silverstone, Kristen Stewart and Naomi Watts were just some of the white female actors to gain recognition. Likewise, the African-American, Asian or Latina actors Don Cheadle, Selma Hayek, Queen Latifah, Martin Lawrence, Lucy Liu, Jennifer Lopez, Bernie Mac, Eva Mendes, Chris Rock, Zoë Saldana, Jada Pinkett Smith also became well-known figures. Frequently these actors achieved lead billings in films: for example Dunst in *Elizabethtown* (2005), Heigl in *27 Dresses* (2008), Silverstone in *Excess Baggage* (1997), Cheadle in *Traitor* (2008), Latifah in *Beauty Shop* (2005), Lawrence in *Big Momma's House* (2000) or Mendes in *Live!* (2007). Yet at best, these were actors who achieved – in Hirshenson and Jenkins's terms – the status of "Names." Even if a claim could be made for these performers as stars, they never joined the pantheon of A or A-plus listers for the films they appeared did not achieve the box-office returns to grant them any bankable eminence.

Reflecting on the status of the female star at the start of the 1990s, Mark Johnson, producer of *Rain Man* (1988), suggested the industry was witnessing a historical transition.

> Actresses have a much tougher time now . . . There aren't nearly as many good roles. In the '40s, you had the great romantic comedies with strong women characters. Carole Lombard, Barbara Stanwyck, Bette Davis outdrew the men. In the '50s, Doris Day was as much of a draw as Rock Hudson. Elizabeth Taylor was enormous in the '60s, Streisand in the '70s. But, for at least five years now, we haven't had a real strong female box office draw. (quoted in Dutka, 1990)

Johnson is mistaken, however, in suggesting the secondary status of female stars is merely a modern trend in Hollywood's history. Even though Lombard and Stanwyck played strong roles they were never regarded as major commercial draws, and in the decades when their box-office power was at its highest, Day, Taylor and Streisand were always exceptions in a male-populated star market. Since the Quigley poll first ran, few female performers have enjoyed consistent runs of three or more consecutive years in the top ten rankings. More women appeared on the poll during the 1930s than in any other decade, but most enjoyed fleeting glimpses of fame. Only Marie Dressler (1932–4), Janet Gaynor (1932–4), Joan Crawford (1932–6), Norma Shearer (1932–4), Shirley Temple (1934–9), Ginger Rogers (1935–7), and Sonja Henie (1937–9) maintained consistent runs, with Bette Davis (1939–41), Betty Grable (1942–51), Greer Garson (1944–6) and Ingrid Bergman (1946–8) the most reliable female names of the 1940s. These decades were the high point of Hollywood female stardom, for after the Second World War the polls overwhelmingly indicated industry opinion regarded male stars as the most reliable money-makers. In a market historically dominated by the box-office power of male stars, those periods of success enjoyed by Doris Day (1959–66), Elizabeth Taylor (1960–3 and 1965–8), Julie Andrews (1965–8), Barbra Streisand (1972–5 and 1977–80), Jane Fonda (1978–82) and Julia Roberts (1997–2001) were uncharacteristic. In Hollywood, the secondary status of female stars is therefore a long-standing trend.

Age is another demographic definer of stardom. Those names who defined Hollywood stardom in the 1990s achieved their status while still in their 20s. Roberts was 22 when her star-making role in *Pretty Woman*

(1990) went on release and Tom Cruise was 23 when *Top Gun* (1986) hit screens. Tom Hanks was 27 when *Splash* (1984) gave him the break from which to build his movie career and Mel Gibson was in his late 20s by the time he transported the fame he'd achieved in Australian cinema to Hollywood. Aged 32, Jim Carrey came relatively late to stardom as his three films of 1994 made him a big screen sensation, while Harrison Ford was already 38 before *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) provided him with a hit built around his central presence. Child performers have achieved prominence in Hollywood but only occasionally: after Shirley Temple and Mickey Rooney in the 1930s, it was over five decades later before Macaulay Culkin's fame briefly glimmered in the early 1990s. As the example of Culkin shows, child actors may achieve fame and may even become "a name" but without attaining the same bankable status as their elders.

  Age intersects with the gendered economy of Hollywood stardom to differentially affect the decline of male and female stars. No ceiling is formally instituted of course, yet there is widespread acknowledgment in Hollywood that female stardom does not survive into the late 1930s: "It's a Hollywood truism that male stars hit their stride at just the same time (mid-30s) that things start to go south for their female colleagues" (O'Sullivan, 2001: 9). An *L.A. Weekly* reporter noted "Today's actresses must be lucky enough to catch a hit in their 20s and hope their agents give them good advice through their 30s – otherwise they play girlfriends as long as their looks last and then fade from view" (Thompson, 1990). Acceptance of this gendered age disparity is most acutely thrown into relief with the multiple instances across the history of Hollywood films when aging male stars have been cast in romantic ties with a far younger supporting female actor. In the late 1990s, as he advanced to middle-age and beyond, Harrison Ford was paired with Wendy Crewson on *Air Force One* (by the time of release he was 55, she 41), Anne Heche (she 28, he 55) for *Six Days, Seven Nights* (1998), Kristen Scott Thomas (she 39, he 57) in *Random Hearts* (1999), and Michelle Pfeiffer (she 42, he 58) on *What Lies Beneath* (2000). The middle-aged female star is maybe a contradiction in terms but even in the rare cases when a leading older woman is cast in a role which sees her form a relationship with a younger man, such films "are almost always about the oddity of the situation" notes screenwriter Janet Roach (1994: 19). Working through its narrative of age appropriate romance, *Something's Gotta Give* manages to stage both trends. When the central couple of Erica and Harry – played by 57-year-old Diane Keaton and (nine years her senior) Jack Nicholson – split up, she has a relationship with 39-year-old

Keanu Reeves, but this ultimately amounts to nothing more than a fling, for Erica finally finds contentment by reuniting with the older and the far more suitable Harry.

What these patterns reveal is how star status is socially and culturally demarcated. Symbolically and economically, Hollywood stardom only valorizes certain forms of identity. The population of the A-list elite is restricted by not only economic status but also social distinctions of gender, race and age. Historically, Hollywood stardom has worked through a system in which commercial value is produced almost exclusively through a small cohort of white male actors roughly aged from their mid 20s to their mid 50s. This is reflected in the study which follows. Case-study chapters on Will Smith and Julia Roberts are included because both belong to the modern star elite and their examples helpfully illustrate general dynamics at work in the symbolic commerce of stardom, and yet they are equally untypical of the general workings of Hollywood stardom.

Genre, Actorly, Prestige and Posthumous Stardoms

Bankability offers a measurable if imprecise gauge of star status. It defines stardom in economic terms and is the organizing principle behind the talent hierarchy in Hollywood. To understand stars as a feature of Hollywood's commercial aesthetic it is vital to recognize how economic value defines star status. Even so, there are other configurations of stardom which are not strictly defined by the highest strata of the film market alone.

There are certain actors who do not belong to the A-list, yet through repeated and commercially successful associations with particular types of film they become *genre stars*. As already suggested, genres perform a similar commercial function to that of stars, creating continuities in the market to guard against uncertainty. Generic conventions contribute to the formation of strongly identifiable and saleable star identities, and the importance of genre has therefore been in evidence amongst the highest echelons of the talent hierarchy. In the mid 1990s, Ulmer's index was dominated by stars strongly associated with action. In 1994, for example, Tom Cruise (ranked 2nd), Harrison Ford (3rd), Mel Gibson (4th) and Arnold Schwarzenegger (5th) populated the A-plus list. Continuing the action theme, Ulmer's (1994: 29) A-list also included Sylvester Stallone (15th), Bruce Willis (20th), Steven Seagal (26th) and Jean-Claude Van Damme (29th). Seagal and Van Damme were never included amongst Quigley's top rated stars and never

appeared in any of the top grossing movies during the decade, yet the direct bond between actor and genre made both box-office attractions. Comedy is the other domain of the genre star. Robin Williams (10th) was the only comic actor to appear on Ulmer's version of the A-plus list in 1994 but other performers identified with comedy such, as Eddie Murphy (28th), Whoopi Goldberg (30th) and Meg Ryan (33rd) were positioned amongst the A-list and Billy Crystal (47th), Bill Murray (49th), Woody Allen (51st), Goldie Hawn (53rd), Michael J. Fox (57th) and Steve Martin (63rd) appeared on the B-plus list (p. 29). Although performers like Seagal, Van Damme, Allen or Martin did not belong to the highest strata of Hollywood, they could still deliver films of a certain type which made some impact at the box office, and so while they did not rank amongst the *most* bankable stars, they still had commercial value.

In other cases, film fame is based precisely on how some actors have acquired high-profile reputations by breaking continuities between films roles and genres and/or by appearing in films which do not belong to the popular market. In 1994, Ulmer ranked Meryl Streep low down on his A-list in 42nd position but this was only after she'd flirted with the popular mainstream in *Death Becomes Her* (1992) and *The River Wild* (1994), which respectively ranked 21st ($30 million rentals) and 33rd ($45 million gross) in terms of their box-office performance at the end of the years they were released in North America (Klady, 1995b; *Variety*, 1993). Otherwise Streep was more strongly associated with resolutely un-commercial fare such as *Defending Your Life* (1991) or *The House of Spirits* (1993), which ranked 76th ($8 million rentals) and 143rd ($6 million gross) in the relevant years (Klady, 1995b; *Variety*, 1992).[1] Dustin Hoffman once referred to her as the "Eleanor Roosevelt of acting" (quoted in Plaskin, 1990: J1) and she has been described as "The Grande Dame of the Cutting Edge" (Goodridge, 2003) and the "First Lady of American Film" (Feeney, 2004: N11). Tom Rothman, co-chairman of Fox Filmed Entertainment and a long-time friend of Streep's called her "the Tiger Woods of actresses . . . a virtuoso talent that somehow exists on a higher plane than even the very best" (quoted in Galloway, 2008). As noted above, for Hirshenson and Jenkins, Meryl Streep was classed as a "Star" but didn't belong to the A or A-plus lists. Writing in *Time*, however, Belinda Luscombe argued "Meryl Streep is not a star. A legend, but not a star. At least not in the business sense. Everyone acknowledges her talent, but very few can be relied on to turn out for a movie just because she's in it" (2006: 55). Following Luscombe's line, it may therefore be incorrect to attempt to regard a performer like

Streep as in any way a star. Yet by her reputation Streep has enjoyed a status which has lifted her far above the rank and file of the general acting profession. What Streep represents is the *actor star*, a performer of renown whose fame is based on artistic over commercial credentials.

Furthermore, a significant part of Streep's renown has come from her outstanding record of winning multiple awards for her performances, most significantly her history of Academy Award nominations and wins. By the end of 2009, Streep had accumulated 16 nominations in the acting categories of the Oscars, including two wins. Awards attach distinction to film actors and in Streep's case she has become the quintessential *prestige star*, a category which, based on their own distinguished records of multiple Academy Award honors, has over time included Ingrid Bergman, Marlon Brando, Bette Davis, Robert De Niro, Katharine Hepburn, Dustin Hoffman, Jack Lemmon, Jessica Lange, Jack Nicholson and Spencer Tracy. A-list status is dependent on the capacity for an actor to accumulate economic capital through the box office and other revenue streams whereas prestige stars gain artistic distinction by accumulating the symbolic capital of awards and other forms of acclaim. Prestige stars are actually a sub-set to actor stars: they are the "A-list" of actorly stardom. A fuller discussion of the role of awards in producing prestige stardom follows in Chapter 8 but for now it must be noted that while actorly and prestige stardom are both configured around privileging the artistic over the economic, it is important to recognize neither category exists independent of commercial forces. Streep may not sit at the forefront of the box office but distributors have used her name to market films which have sold more tickets than many other films released in the same years, even though, as Luscombe points out, the audience explicitly drawn by Streep's name may be relatively few. In which case, actorly and prestige stardom do not oppose art and commerce but rather achieve commerce through art.

Stardom is time-bound as bankability confers value according to the current state of the market. Consequently film fame can therefore be quite fleeting. However, there are other configurations of stardom which are shaped by the enduring longevity of film fame. Articulations of the *star legend* are based on assertions of durability and permanence that exceed the high spots of a performer's marketable value. Through box-office sales, A-list status is linked to public acceptance, but the public have no say in conferring legendary status. Individual film fans may establish websites such as www.hollywoodlegends.net and hollywood-legends.webs.com but legendary stardom is largely mediated through the authority of cultural

businesses and institutions. Publishing houses and broadcasters have their say in making Hollywood legends the subjects of books and documentaries. When the American Film Institute set out in 1999 to identify 25 men and 25 women to be hailed as legends of American cinema, it imposed a definition of "American screen legend" as "an actor or a team of actors with a significant screen presence in American feature-length films whose screen debut occurred in or before 1950, or whose screen debut occurred after 1950 but whose death has marked a completed body of work." Pre-selected lists of 250 nominees was prepared for female and male performers from which members of the "film community," comprising "artists, historians, critics and other cultural leaders," were invited to select (AFI, n.d.). When announcing the project, the AFI's Chairman Tom Pollock admitted the pivotal date of 1950 was arbitrary but that the main consideration was that an actor "had to have lasted a long period of time before leaving a legacy," and the Institute's Director and CEO Jean Picker Firstenberg encouraged jurors to "consider not only the body of work but the context in which it was achieved . . . Wars and social mores had their effect on their careers. This is not a popularity contest" (both quoted in Honeycutt, 1999: 4 and 64). The results produced a list of the great and good of American film stardom (Table 1.2). Some of the selected names had been leading box-office attractions, although commercial value did not define legendary status. Amongst the women in particular, it is notable how enduring renown was not measured by the market. Katharine Hepburn topped a list which also included Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Mae West and Joan Crawford amongst the top ten, all names once described in a 1938 advertisement sponsored by the Independent Theater Owners of America appearing in *The Hollywood Reporter* as "players, whose dramatic ability is unquestioned but whose box office draw is nil." According to the ad "Dietrich . . . is poison at the box office."[2] What the AFI list therefore represents is a canon of star greatness, a cultural historical index of star status independent of the economic measure that defines the Quigley poll.

Although the cultural historical measure of legendary status is defined without recourse to the market, through the mini-industry of popular biographies on stars from the past, legends are still commercial selling points. Furthermore, legendary permanence ensures that despite death, the legend can still be a revenue source. Elizabeth Taylor, seventh of the AFI's female legends, died on 23 March 2011, and within two days of the star's passing, British tabloid newspaper the *Daily Mirror* had published its *Elizabeth Taylor: Hollywood Legend* (Mirror Group, 2011). A week later

Table 1.2 The American Film Institute's greatest American screen legends.

	Male	Female
1	Humphrey Bogart	Katharine Hepburn
2	Cary Grant	Bette Davis
3	James Stewart	Audrey Hepburn
4	Marlon Brando	Ingrid Bergman
5	Fred Astaire	Greta Garbo
6	Henry Fonda	Marilyn Monroe
7	Clark Gable	Elizabeth Taylor
8	James Cagney	Judy Garland
9	Spencer Tracy	Marlene Dietrich
10	Charlie Chaplin	Joan Crawford
11	Gary Cooper	Barbara Stanwyck
12	Gregory Peck	Claudette Colbert
13	John Wayne	Grace Kelly
14	Laurence Olivier	Ginger Rogers
15	Gene Kelly	Mae West
16	Orson Welles	Vivien Leigh
17	Kirk Douglas	Lillian Gish
18	James Dean	Shirley Temple
19	Burt Lancaster	Rita Hayworth
20	The Marx Brothers	Lauren Bacall
21	Buster Keaton	Sophia Loren
22	Sidney Poitier	Jean Harlow
23	Robert Mitchum	Carole Lombard
24	Edward G. Robinson	Mary Pickford
25	William Holden	Ava Gardner

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Source: AFI (1999)

Elizabeth Taylor: The Lady, the Lover, the Legend, 1932–2011 (Bret, 2011) was out and a week after that *Elizabeth Taylor: The Life of a Hollywood Legend: 1932–2011* (Sprinkel, 2011) and *Elizabeth Taylor: A Passion For Life – The Wit and Wisdom of a Legend* (Papa, 2011) were in print, followed a few months later by *Elizabeth Taylor: Last of the Hollywood Legends* (Lloyd, 2011). Legendary stardom therefore feeds *posthumous stardom*. With posthumous stars, the cultural historical value of legendary status finds an

Figure 1.1   Legendary stardom and the tourism business. Ingrid Bergman, Arlanda Airport, Stockholm, 17 November 2011. Photo by the author.

"after-life," or more appropriately an "after-market," as the dead star becomes the subject, or correctly the object, of enduring merchandising lines and other commercial opportunities (Figure 1.1).

Several characteristics are shared by posthumous stars. During her screen career, Taylor was fully endorsed as a box-office attraction, appearing nine times on the Quigley poll between 1958 and 1968 inclusive. Generally, however, posthumous stars attain greater cultural and commercial significance than when they were alive. James Dean (18th on the AFI list of male legends) was a regular television actor with a single film lead in *East of Eden* (1955) at the time he died. *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) was released a month after the fatal accident and *Giant* (1956) just over a year later. The first two films were modest successes, ending in 13th and 12th positions respectively amongst *Variety*'s annual rankings of "Top Grossers" for 1955 and 1956, while *Giant* was a clear-cut hit, ranking 3rd for 1957 and immediately occupying 9th spot on the trade paper's list of "All-time B.O. Champs" at that stage in Hollywood history (*Variety*, 1956: 1; 1957: 1; and 1958a: 60 and 1958b).[3] With the pre-sold security of a best-selling book behind it and established film names Elizabeth Taylor and Rock Hudson

in the leading roles, *Giant*'s success cannot be attributed solely, if at all, to any after-effect of Dean's death. Dean was never a major box-office draw, yet since his death, his film reputation has been magnified and his name and likeness have stimulated multiple product lines for over half a century.

By the time she died in 1962, Marilyn Monroe (the AFI's sixth-ranking female legend) had appeared in enough successes to confirm her star status, although her box-office value was significantly surpassed by several other female stars in the 1940s, '50s and '60s. Monroe appeared on Quigley's top 10s in 1953, 1954 and 1956, but her record fell far short of equaling Betty Grable run of appearances every year between 1942 and 1951, or Doris Day's 10 appearances from 1951 to 1966 (Quigley, 2010). According to *Variety*'s annual round-ups of the highest-grossing films, by the time she died Monroe had taken leading roles in just three films featured amongst the top ten films, while by 1965 Taylor had appeared in 10, Day in five and several other female, performers including Ingrid Bergman, Dorothy McGuire, Lana Turner, Grace Kelly and Deborah Kerr, could claim more successful records (Sedgwick, 2002: 210). Bergman and Kelly remain legends (the AFI say so) but Monroe's posthumous value has overwhelmingly outstripped that of her more commercially successful peers.

Despite limited box-office value, in the decades since their deaths, Dean and Monroe have remained highly visible figures in consumer product markets. From Hollywood's past, possibly the only other dead stars to enjoy similar levels of visibility are Audrey Hepburn and Elvis Presley, although Presley's fame does not result from his film work. All remain not only famous but commercially exploitable after their deaths. Excluding Presley, each made her or his name in films, yet their continuing value has nothing to do with movie sales and everything to do with other products. All have commercial after-lives on calendars, books, posters, t-shirts, greetings cards, mugs, socks, and ironing-board covers. During their lifetimes, each was subject to widespread media coverage, but of the hundreds if not thousands of images generated during the period of their lives, their visibility is largely limited to the reproduction of a small repertoire of key iconic images. Apart from a few shots from *Roman Holiday* (1953), in Hepburn's case her continuing visibility is almost entirely sustained through reproductions of a few posed shots taken by photographer Howell Conant during the production of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) (Figure 1.2). Dean, Monroe, Presley and Hepburn may be dead but the value of the posthumous star lives on.

These versions of stardoms therefore offer different accounts of star significance and value. With the bankable hierarchy of the A and A-plus

Figure 1.2　The Audrey Hepburn industry. Star merchandise at the Deutsche Kinemathek Museum für Film und Frensehen, Berlin, 5 September 2010. Photo by the author.

lists, stardom is delineated by the index of economic valorization. In contrast, alternative versions of stardom are configured outside reference to the market. Actorly and prestige stardoms are measured by artistic valorization, while legendary and posthumous stardoms are the products of cultural historical valorization. While not contingent on the market, these alternative versions of stardom nevertheless remain highly marketable and as such still feature in the symbolic commerce of Hollywood stardom.

The Star Market

Film stardom can be configured in multiple ways, yet in the symbolic commerce of Hollywood, it is bankability and box-office performance which ultimately defines star status. As Ulmer notes

> Some people have asked why the film industry has become so obsessed with measuring and quantifying its actors, poking around into their "bankability" and "financial viability" and "global saleability". Aren't there other "abilities" that those philistine bean counters out in Hollywood care about – such as,

say, *acting* ability? Can't they just loosen up and realize that *this* is what an artist's true "power" is really about?

No, they can't. The town doesn't work that way. (original emphasis 2000: 18)

In Hollywood's commercial aesthetic, it is the bankable elite of the A and A-plus lists who define stardom. In the study which follows, a restricted definition of Hollywood stardom is therefore adopted because Hollywood stars are a restricted category of actors. The focus will mainly be upon the most bankable actors working in Hollywood over the period 1990 to 2009. Taking commercial status as a measure of star status inevitably leads to an economic definition of stardom and it could be argued that this results in a form of analysis which instates an economic determinist account which neglects the cultural dynamics of stardom. Yet Hollywood defines stardom in economic terms and so any study of film stars must confront that fact. It is either by ignoring or only superficially tackling the commerce of stardom that star studies has forced an unsatisfactory and ultimately false division between the cultural and commercial aspects of stardom. As noted in the Introduction, in Hollywood stardom the symbolic/cultural and economic/commercial are inextricably bound together, for money is made through meaning and whatever meanings enter the marketplace are always conditional upon their bankability. Bankability is never, therefore, simply the effect of economic forces. Acting, script, *mise-en-scène* and the circulation of the name are all necessary components of the symbolic production of stardom. A certain elite of actors top the talent hierarchy because of their bankability, yet that status depends on the signs and meanings they bring to the film market.

Hollywood stardom produces and circulates only certain versions of human identity for the film market, regulated by the parameters of gender, race and age. While this system undoubtedly has ideological consequences, whatever cultural limitations exist, Hollywood stardom cannot simply be regarded as the major studios foisting representations on a compliant public; audiences always play their part in forming this market of identities through the tickets and units they buy. "Hollywood," says producer David Brown, "has no principles except profit. If casting midgets and octoroons would get people into theaters, they'd cast nothing but midgets and octoroons. If 90-year-old women opened a picture, Hollywood would be awash in 90-year-old women" (quoted in Roach, 1994: 20). Whatever range of representations and identities are available and circulate in the film

market through stardom therefore emerge from the dialectical exchange between what the industry offers and what the audience chooses to pay for.

Examining and critically evaluating the symbolic commerce of Hollywood stardom then raises certain foundational questions. What arrangements are in place to support the production, reproduction, circulation and presentation of star identities? What versions of identity are generated through those arrangements, and how are they disseminated across media markets? And within those markets, how do stars function as signs of difference and similarity with symbolic and economic value? It is these questions which now motivate the study which follows.

Notes

1 Figures are derived from *Variety*'s annual rankings (Klady, 1995b; *Variety*, 1992 and 1993). Due to changes in the trade paper's reporting, differences appear between "rentals," i.e. the share of revenues returned to the distributor after exhibitor expenses have been deducted, and "gross" representing the total receipts from tickets before deductions.

2 Titled "Wake Up! Hollywood Producers," the advert appeared in *The Hollywood Reporter*, 3 May 1938, p. 3.

3 *Variety*'s rankings did not include films which had opened in the latter months of these years. Hence, *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Giant* were ranked under 1956 and 1957 although both opened in the previous years.