

SPECIAL EDITION

THE

Nick Zegarac's

Hollywood

ART

ART VS. COMMERCE



The Curdling of AMERICAN HISTORY 'M'

The Exodus that transformed Hollywood
from Starlit Mecca to Celebrity Babylon

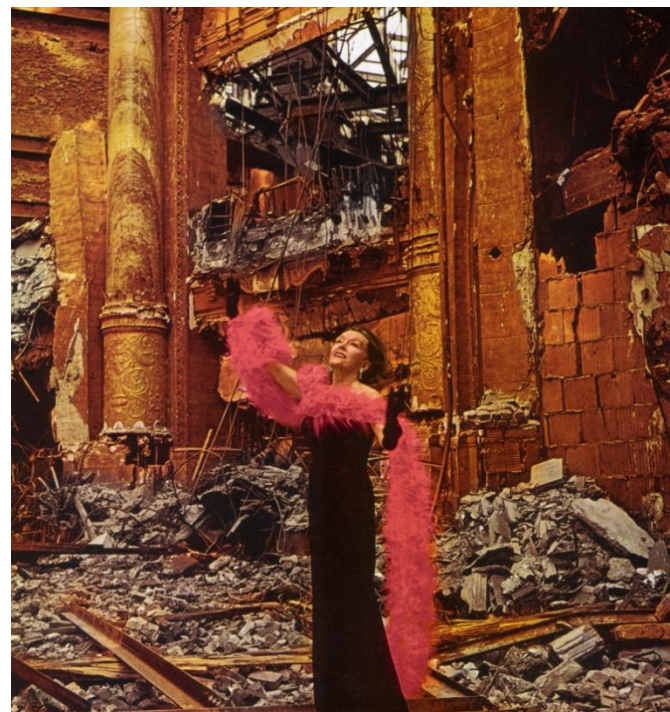
by Nick Zegarac

"The distance between your life and that life in film was enormous. That was part of the success."

- Sydney Pollack

Hollywood's major studios were to lose much of their autonomy through government intervention in the mid-1950s that effectively splintered their monopolistic kingdoms into little satellite companies made almost extinct by the television age. Those who had lived through the 'good ol' days of union and guild-busting found little use from the sudden infusion of young talent that effectively exposed, then dismantled Hollywood's saintly surface glamour throughout the 1960s and beyond. All that Hollywood had allowed up until that point had come to an end – violently, suddenly and with casualties on both sides of the lens.

Gone was the star system that once seemed so necessary for the industry to survive. Stripped of their flesh and blood assets, studios transformed themselves into modest production companies, leasing their facilities and logos to independent interests on a picture by picture basis. A few were bought outright by non-film producing entities. MCA, a talent agency, acquired Universal Studios. Warner Brothers briefly became associated with Seven Arts and then Kinney - a shoe company, before merging with Time Publications and



then, internet provider AOL in a move that nearly crippled both companies.

After a bitter round of corporate struggles, Las Vegas financier Kirk Kerkorian purchased MGM, selling off its assets to the highest bidder. Ted Turner bought the film classic library for his cable apparatus; TCM. MGM's studio facilities went to Lorimar Telepictures - later taken over by Sony Corp. Priceless props and costumes were traded at one of Sotheby's grandest auctions for a song. Literally thousands of animation cells from the old Tom & Jerry cartoons, hundreds of thousands of production stills, scripts with original director and star notations, sheet music written by the likes of Max Steiner and Victor Young were unceremoniously dumped into trash bins - left for the accidental collector to discover and later hoard in their basements.

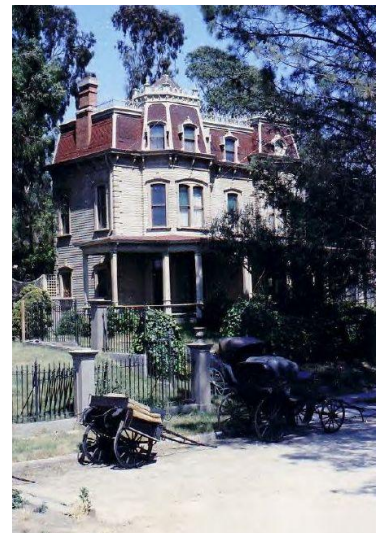
MGM's superior back lot, comprising sets from nearly every period in history met with a wrecking ball so that the land could be sold for condos. And all of this needless pillaging was merely done in service of Kerkorian's desire to build two glitzy hotels in Nevada; one, the Las Vegas MGM Grand that met with its own fiery end on the morning of Nov. 21, 1980.

Still others studios found themselves changing hands like the discard in a poker game. Selznick International, which had been the old RKO-Pathé back lot, morphed into Desilu under the savvy business sense of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnez.

PREVIOUS PAGE: TOP: Marilyn Monroe knock off Jane Mansfield and her buff husband, Mickey Hargitay pose for 'beef' and 'cheesecake' photos respectively in their famous heart-shaped backyard pool in 1958 shortly after their marriage. Mansfield, a minor star, was a major pinup. In hindsight, Mansfield and Hargitay heralded the age of celebrity, where backstage antics sell more tabloid copy than on screen achievements.

MIDDLE: the first attendees enter the grand lobby of New York's famed Roxy Theatre in 1927. Billed as the 'cathedral of the motion picture' by its builder Samuel L. Rothafel the 5,920 seat behemoth epitomized the chic grandeur of an era that even by the time the Roxy opened, was already beginning to show signs of fading. BOTTOM: Actress, Gloria Swanson bids farewell to The Roxy amidst the collapsed rubble of its 1960 demolition.

THIS PAGE: TOP: Hollywood's raja, L.B. Mayer. His studio, MGM was truly an empire, employing enough people to be legally classified as a city. In addition to its formidable creative assets, the studio boasted its own school, fire department, hospital, film processing lab, the finest recording studio in the world and the best commissary in all Hollywood. MIDDLE: MGM's memorable trademark of Leo the Lion framed by Howard Dietz's halo of coiled film with the motto, *Ars Gratia Artis* or 'Art for Art's Sake'. MIDDLE: MGM's Thalberg Building, housing the creative writing staff and executive offices, named in honor of Irving G. Thalberg, MGM's wunderkind producer who died of a heart attack in 1937. BOTTOM: The Smith Family Home, built on the backlot for *Meet Me In St. Louis* (1944). The house was accidentally destroyed by fire in 1972. Probably, just as well. The rest of MGM's famed outdoor sets met with the wrecking ball in 1975.





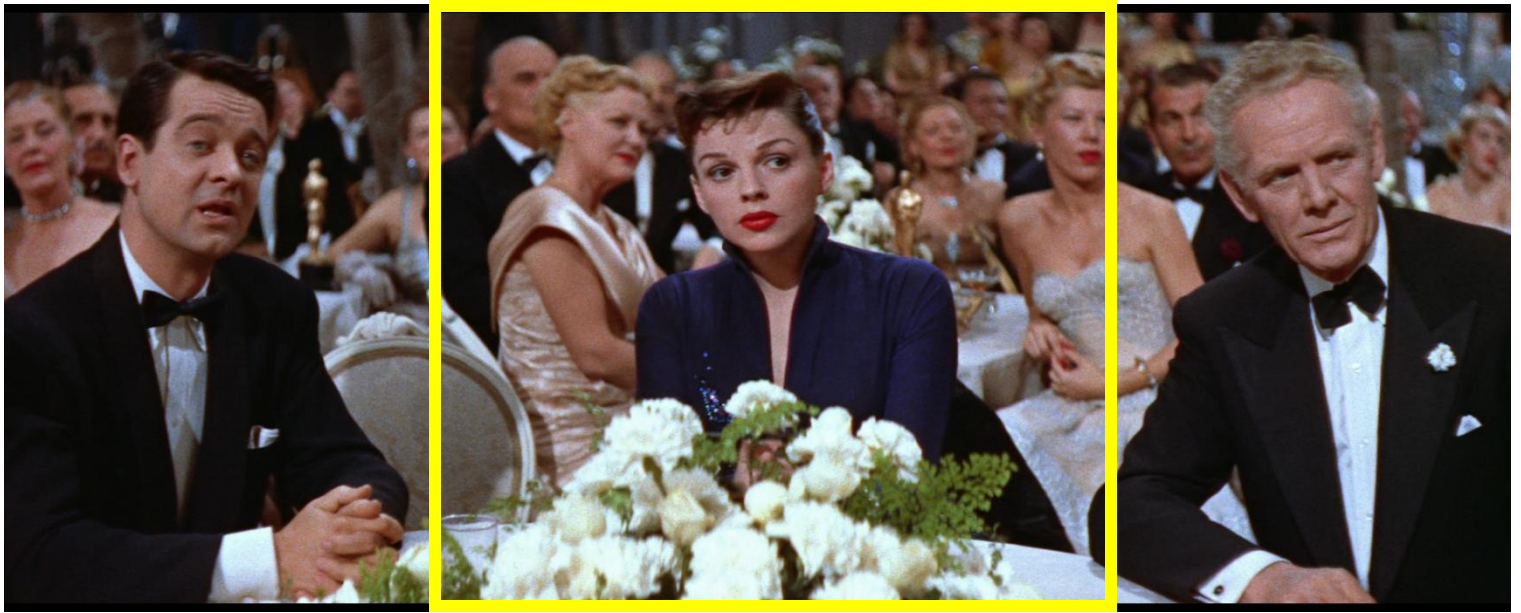
THIS PAGE: Pretenders to the throne. TOP LEFT: Dore Schary, a producer/writer/director of low budget gritty crime dramas at RKO took over as Head of Production at MGM in 1948 at the behest of Loewe's Inc. President Nicholas Schenck. The move, meant to stabilize what the New York offices perceived as Mayer's top heavy producer system, instead created a creative rift that threatened to tear the studio apart.

After one particularly nasty disagreement, L.B. Mayer picked up the phone, telling Schenck *"It's either me or Schary."* The die was cast. Schenck, who had never appreciated Mayer's star making talents, fired Mayer on the spot, leaving Schary to waffle on his own. Schary's stay as Head of MGM would barely last the 1950s, buffeted by clashes in personal taste and a certain disregard for the roster of talent that Mayer had single-handedly amassed. Schary's departure was followed by endlessly appointments to the top spot that failed to gel. As television and changing audience tastes blacked the studio's once sterling reputation for grand entertainment, MGM fell deeper into the red.

TOP MIDDLE: Las Vegas financier Kirk Kerkorian fields questions at a press conference in 1986. In 1969, Kerkorian launched a hostile corporate takeover of MGM, gaining control, then liquidating all of the studio's perceivably valuable assets. The studio was sold to Ted Turner who eventually was forced to sell everything but MGM's classic film library back to Kerkorian to survive the crushing debt. *"MGM is a hotel company," Kerkorian later issued a statement, "And a relatively insignificant producer of motion pictures."*

BOTTOM LEFT: Kerkorian proudly preens before his Vegas hotel, The MGM Grand - built from such flimsy and potentially flammable materials that it received a wood structure rating from the Fire & Safety Commission. TOP RIGHT: A real towering inferno. On Nov. 21, 1980 the MGM Grand became the third worst hotel fire in history, injuring 650 visitors and killing 85 patrons - mostly from smoke inhalation.

It was a case of everything that could go wrong - did. Fed by combustible materials that included PVC piping, plastic mirrors, glue and wallpaper, the flames burst forth from a restaurant adjacent the casino gaming area, engulfing patrons at 19 ft. per second. As black smoke rose through the air conditioning ducts it entered guest's rooms in the tower, asphyxiating them almost instantly. Although exonerated of any wrong doing, the stigma associated with the event was enough for Kerkorian to sell off the Grand to Bally's and move his entire enterprise down the strip to a new location where it continues to operate to this day. BOTTOM RIGHT: The new MGM Grand, sporting an entirely different look than its predecessor, also has improved fire and safety features built in: a lesson regrettably learned the hard way.



ABOVE: One of the great travesties is that we will probably never get to see George Cukor's masterful *A Star Is Born* (1954) as it was originally intended. The victim of heavy editing after Cukor had already premiered his classic to rave reviews, the film was recalled by Jack Warner when theater distributors complained that the run time of nearly 3 hrs. prevented them from reaping revenues from two showings a night. Rather than ask Cukor for his input, Warner simply hacked into the film with merciless effrontery - all but destroying Cukor's carefully crafted pacing, tempo and mood. When the film finally debuted on television it endured one final insult - having its expansive Cinemascope image cropped to fit standard 1:33:1 TV screens. This shot shows the full Cinemascope image with Judy Garland flanked by Tom Noonan (left) and Charles Bickford (right). On television, only the image as framed in yellow was seen. While the advent of DVD and Blu-Ray releases have corrected the aspect ratio framing dilemma, a complete working print of the film has yet to resurface.

In this deluge of shifting corporate alliances, Hollywood's biggest loser was undoubtedly its artistic achievements from their past. First deemed by the new powers that be to have little resale value, classic films had been stored in appalling squalor inside poorly ventilated sheds; left to chalk up and become flammable trash. Following television's introduction into the marketplace, the more popular titles in a studio's back catalogue were infrequently rented out for late night broadcasts.

There, movies were hacked into and re-edited by workers who quite often had never seen the movie they were editing and therefore were ill advised on where to cut for 'questionable content' and/or to conform to television's limited running time that was thereafter endlessly interrupted by commercials. Run through dirty projectors that often damaged their sprockets, cropped to fit the square television aspect ratio, and shown in black and white even though some had been shot in Technicolor; this was the way that most newer generations - not fortunate enough to have seen these movies on their original theatrical run - saw movies for the first time.

But most damaging of all was the exodus of the old time mogul in favor of that new breed of executive who clearly did not define his tenure by a résumé of past artistic achievements, but rather from a law or business degree attained at one of the more prestigious universities. The creative thinking cap was replaced by a calculator and increasing dependence on market research. 'Finding' your audience became the norm, rather than allowing the audience to discover what had already been produced; the price of a three piece suit becoming more the talk of the town than who was ordering what off the menu at the Brown Derby.

The close knit community had been annexed. Studios were now considered property to be rented, converted, demolished or reborn as facilities for television and commercial shoots. For the most part, 'new' Hollywood was not to be found inside those cavernous sound stages that had once housed an Oz or

Brigadoon. The 'new' Hollywood was a traveling sideshow, shooting under the most limiting of conditions and without much flair for the way things looked. Budget and realism had become paramount. If one could find it looking out a front window or down the back alley then it was shot, even dirtied up a little to make it less than larger than life.

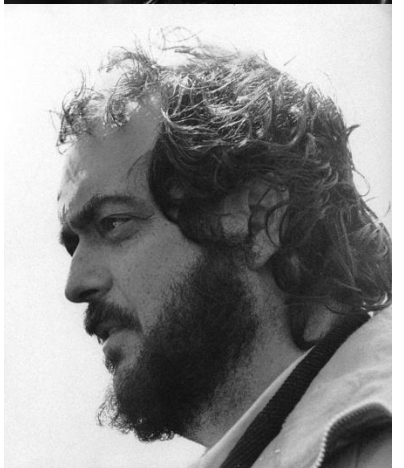
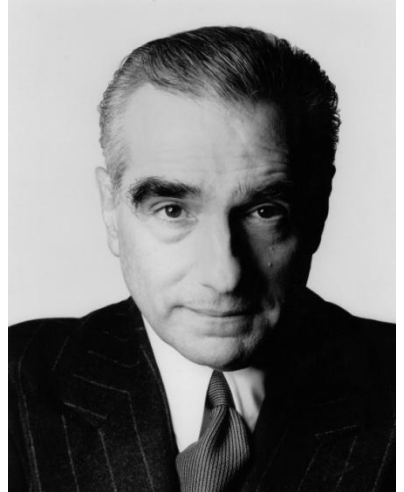
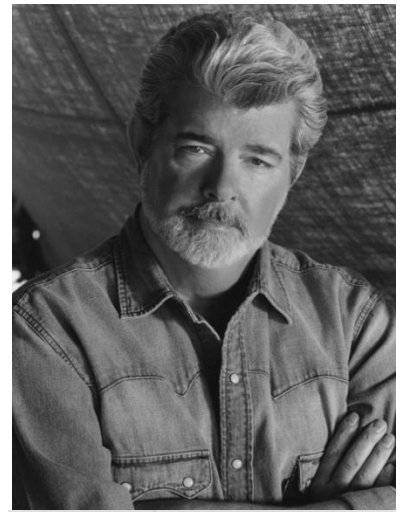
This was the Hollywood awaiting directors like Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg and Roman Polanski. And it is saying much of their talents that what little was left to them was enough to sustain and nurture their dreams for the Hollywood that is today. But the Hollywood then, the antithesis of the Hollywood that had been for so long, must have seemed like some apocalyptic black hole for the creative auteur. Any cohesion between the front office and the layman on location was gone.

If a 'creative' could convince an exec' that what was being proposed would make them money, he had first to be hard pressed under the scrutiny of market research in order to prove his illusive faith. A project that began as a proposed comedy could easily mutate into dark melodrama, the hero – once a gentleman, transformed into a vigilante with a gun. Any resemblance between the pitch and the general release was purely coincidental.

Even when a 'creative' proved to the studios through box office receipts that the hunch had been right all along, such dreamers were sneered at behind closed doors. Consider that as George Lucas' nostalgic American Graffiti (1973) rang registers across the nation he could find no one willing to finance Star Wars (1977). The Godfather (1972) narrowly escaped being shelved by Paramount after they fought with Francis Ford Coppola to recast Brando as his Don. And Spielberg?...well, Spielberg was rarely taken seriously in his youth perhaps because his early stock in trade was puppetry, not people, even though his glib and charming fantasies frequently ranked among the most profitable entrées served up for studio coffers.

RIGHT: The new regime of Hollywood after the studio system are today's old guard. TOP: George Lucas, who showed such promise with early hits like American Graffiti (1973) and Star Wars, but thereafter chose to largely rest on his creative laurels in favor of repackaging his success through savvy mass merchandising. MIDDLE: Martin Scorsese has consistently produced clever, well timed, engaging entertainment throughout his forty plus year career. Whether turning his camera on a disgraced boxer (Raging Bull 1980), a raving psychotic (Cape Fear 1991) or the mob in all its self-deprecating depravity in hits like Goodfellas (1990) and Casino (1995), Scorsese is a film maker of formidable style.

MIDDLE: Roman Polanski showed directorial promise until wife, Sharon Tate was murdered by Charles Manson in 1969. Afterward, Polanski sporadically directed in the U.S. - his best film still Chinatown (1974). Following charges of rape with a minor, Polanski was forced into exile in Europe where he remains to this day. BOTTOM: Perhaps the most artistically perverse of the bunch, director Stanley Kubrick. Whether exploring sadism and sex in A Clockwork Orange (1971), or madness and murder in The Shining (1980), Kubrick's filmic legacy often explored the most twisted inner workings of the human mind.



"The trouble with movies as a business," actor Charlton Heston once mused, "is that they're an art; of course, the trouble with movies as an art is that they're a business."

As Hollywood prepared to round yet another corner in its increasingly indecisive and unstable history, this adage would ring more pronouncedly true.

PART II: TWO STEPS BACK IN TIME

"Hollywood is a place where they put you under contract instead of under observation."

– Walter Winchell

The history of Hollywood is only one third fairytale. No, that's not entirely true or open-minded to the reputation of the fairytale – except if one regards those watered down predigested versions made for the kiddies by Disney. No, Hollywood is all fairytale, as in the Brothers Grimm; both the light and the fantastic, and, the disturbing and the frightfully dismal – effortlessly blended in one tight-knit community.

THIS PAGE: Spiders in the parlor - dishing dirt with the gossip columnist. For a time Hollywood's studios controlled the mavens of talk with a mutual admiration society approach to the 'tell all' scandal. As such, the columnists enjoyed unprecedented autonomy in their access to the stars. TOP: Walter Winchell's column basically adhered to the 'who's seeing who' and 'what famous 'married' couple is about to have a baby' scenarios. The banana oil doled out was largely ingratiating and sanctioned by studio heads as good PR.

BOTTOM: Louella Parsons was more insidious in her approach but just as benign with her printed word. Occasionally, she could be catty rather than clever with her barbs, but no one seemed to mind it. Here, a rather flustered Parsons seems unable to get the best of actor Danny Kaye as they attend a formal house party together. Actor, Paul Stewart looks on.





Hollywood's earliest history is of trial and error; a tale about making great strides with blind ambition despite steadfast adversities. It is a history of the 20th century's most resilient art form, even though eighty percent of all art made between 1919-1939 has been lost for all time through shortsightedness and neglect that almost universally failed to even classify motion pictures as anything beyond cheap thrills. Indeed, it took until 1983 and an actor in the White House - Ronald Reagan - to reverse the government intervention that by the mid-1950s had effectively crippled Tinsel Town's ability to hold dominion over the world's most popular entertainment.

In retrospect, Hollywood's history is a 'shiny' rather than 'shining' example about the transformation of nobodies into enviable epicenters of worldwide idol worship. But it is a dark history too, peppered in failed attempts at stardom, backroom suicides, unsolved murders and untimely natural deaths. The scores of forgotten, faded legends have largely been left for the scholar and film student to rediscover. Yet, they are far more plentiful than those few trail-blazing accidents who have since entered Hollywood folklore; the stories and the gossip still worthy of those lost in the great shuffle toward that flickering light.

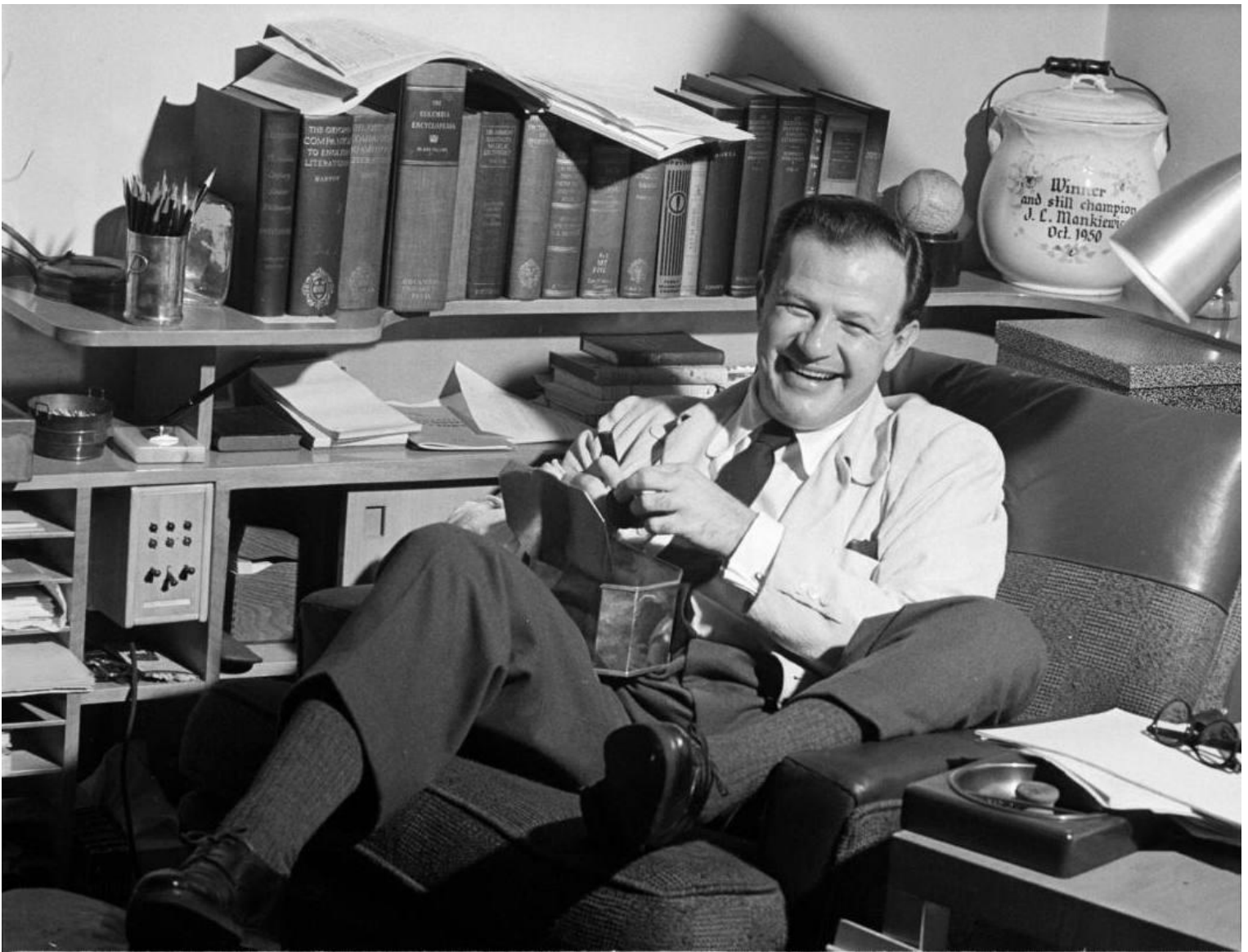
Only a very small percentage of the Hollywood story concerns what goes on in front of the camera. The manic, profit-driven Mecca of make-believe on celluloid pales to the unraveling going on back stage. Behind each camera and beyond every soundstage are the real stories about Hollywood – those rarely made public, never celebrated, quietly swept under the red carpet. The stench of success is far more odious and palpable here.

Behind every executive suite and darkened screening room is the story of possessive moguls and spurious agents, trading starlets for studs and auctioning both to the highest bidder after their fifteen minutes of fame are up.

THIS PAGE: Hollywood scandals of yesteryear are fairly tame when compared to today's celebrity teeming craziness. Two worth mentioning from the golden years. TOP: Lauren Bacall gave Bogie's wife, Mayo Methot something to complain about when she fell in love with Bogart on the set of *To Have and Have Not* (1944). Before then, Bacall was being pursued by director Howard Hawks (MIDDLE: pictured with Cary Grant and Rita Hayworth on the set of *Only Angels Have Wings* 1939), who was himself a married man.

BOTTOM: screen siren Jean Harlow with husband Paul Bern who turned up face down with a gunshot wound in him in their upstairs bathroom a scant four months after the wedding. It was eventually ruled that Bern's first wife, Dorothy Millette had murdered him before shooting herself. Her body was discovered face down, floating in the Hudson one week later.





ABOVE: enjoying a good laugh at home in his office, writer/director Joseph L. Mankiewicz had reason to smile with back to back Oscar wins for writing and directing *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949) and *All About Eve* (1950). It would take him until 1962 and the disastrous *Cleopatra* to hit his creative wall. Afterward, Mankiewicz's reputation never recovered. He never directed in Hollywood again.

Who can say what makes a star famous or which agent was responsible for casting those twinkling apparitions from the heavens after all the polish and allure had been vigorously rubbed off. After all, the casting couch plays strange tricks on those enticed to trade their tangible flesh for that brief taste of the intangible dream.

Perhaps the story of how stars are made to serve is best summed by Rick Nicita, who explained *"You become a prisoner of your image. It's a gold-plated cell, but it's still a cell."* As example: director Howard Hawks might have thought nothing to ruin Lauren Bacall's fledgling career after she spurned his sexual advances. If only Bacall's new love had not been one of Hollywood's most successful leading men with backstage clout – Humphrey Bogart. Certainly actress Jennifer Jones' star outshone her prowess as an actress so long as producer husband, David O. Selznick continued to fetch and field offers as well as mount super productions tailor-made for her. But Ms. Jones fared less than average in her career after Selznick's death.



No, the story of Hollywood cuts deep behind the curtain of faux magic we have affectionately coined 'the movies.' In 1950, Joseph L. Mankewicz's *All About Eve* provided a telling glimpse into that seedy backstage struggle; affectionately recast to exemplify the theatre. But Mankewicz's astute observations were equally at home in Los Angeles, where quiet in-fighting amongst its most creative personnel reigned supreme: some driven by greed, others by vanity, most all by profit and in their manic need to be successful, if only at the expense of dismantling a rival's popularity to briefly attain their own, almost as quickly eclipsed by a new arrival waiting in the wings.

Gossip columnists played their parts: Walter Winchell, Louella Parsons, Hedda Hopper, Mike Connolly: the minions working for unseen, but widely known and feared newspaper magnets like William Randolph Hearst. "*The way to become famous fast is to throw a brick at somebody famous,*" Winchell once mused. Hedda Hopper offered a more brutal assessment of stardom. "*Two of the cruelest, most primitive punishments our town deals out to those who fall from favor are the empty mailbox and the silent telephone.*"

Given the prestige associated with 'brick throwing' did any star from that golden age honestly believe they had a chance at defying a Darryl F. Zanuck or Jack Warner? Olivia de Havilland (TOP) tried – and won. Bette Davis (BOTTOM) tried and lost. To each there came the proportionate backlash. For example: de Havilland's request to costar in Selznick's *Gone With The Wind* was first emphatically denied by Jack Warner, then granted only after de Havilland made her impassioned appeal to Warner's wife. De Havilland's penitence? A string of substandard roles in Warner movies she was forced to begrudgingly accept. What else could she do? To be blacklisted in Hollywood meant to be dead anywhere else.





ABOVE: The high cost of fame. LEFT: Sen. Joseph McCarthy's hunt for communist infiltration in Hollywood quickly degenerated into a legendary witch hunt that ruined careers and destroyed lives. MIDDLE TOP: Director Elia Kazan proved he could be intimidated. Kazan's naming of names of possible communists and communist sympathizers branded him a parasite within the Hollywood community.

RIGHT: Richard Conte, Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall read the list of HUAC's indictments toward some of their friends. The Hollywood blacklist is attributed to several high profile deaths including that of actor John Garfield (MIDDLE BOTTOM) who dropped dead from a heart attack in his hotel room after giving testimony, presumably brought on from the strain of being accused.

In the 1950s, such threats became less subtle. If one were to write, act or produce a piece of fiction that even remotely challenged the status quo they were suspected of belonging to that hateful breed of anti-capitalists who secretly desired to topple the American way of life. Most branded communists and communist sympathizers probably found their way to HUAC's pulpit by such backdoors – casual rumors and innuendo, done first in jest, then more readily, more seriously, looking for that moment when the guard had been let down just enough for jealousy to creep in.

To large degree, the Hollywood elite were a private club of autonomous investors, dedicated to business instead of art. If art was the byproduct of money then supreme power was its most elusive and destructive commodity. Yet, few who wielded such power with all the sensitivity of a buzz saw ever possessed it completely.

One recalls, as example, the sad final days of L.B. Mayer at MGM: a cautionary lesson in how not to misperceive one's own importance in the industry. Seeing as Mayer did, his stronghold at the studio crumble under ever so slight naiveté, he had assumed that a threat by telephone would remove the stone from his shoe at Culver City – Production Chief Dory Schary. Instead, Mayer was deposed by Loewe's Corp. President Nick Schenk in one of many seismic shifts that rocked MGM's executive cabinet and eventually forced the studio into receivership.

As for Mayer, he was made to bear the brunt of an even more disquieting humiliation. One of the old mogul's many studio perks had been the bequeathing of a luxurious Chrysler touring car. In the brief span

of time it took for L.B. to receive the bad news by phone the embittered lion was also to discover that his studio car had been towed from his parking space.

From that point on L.B. Mayer – the man who had maintained control over Hollywood’s most successful film studio; the star maker responsible for the creation, shaping and maintenance of so many careers; the ‘father figure’ who sought to maintain his roster of talent under the guise of his extended family - was persona non grata in Hollywood.

No one came to his racing box or home. No one bothered to look in on his failing health as he expired with only his press agent, Howard Strickling at his side. *"Nothing matters..."* Mayer whispered, *"nothing matters"*.

Perhaps L.B. was right. For, in that transition, Mayer’s removal from MGM was not so much billed as a departure but an erasure, an absolute cleansing of the palette and a stiff warning to anyone who thought their contributions to ‘the industry’ were indispensable. And although Mayer could not have known it at the time, the most damning changes to Hollywood at large were yet to come.

RIGHT: Moldering with the past. TOP: In the days before film preservation, Hollywood’s forgotten gems and golden classics alike were allowed to sit in their canisters, either stacked on top of one another or on rickety shelves, left unattended and unloved, improperly archived and locked in un-air-conditioned vaults that only hastened their already precarious state of aging disrepair.

With so much history at stake of being lost, is it any wonder that the bean counters who inherited Hollywood from its original moguls did little to foster the proper care and maintenance of such works of art? If not for the invention of the VCR we might all be a little poorer for not having seen films like *An American In Paris* (1951) or *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962).

MIDDLE: A cutter inspects a few feet of film during an editing session in 1933 without the diligence to put on some protective gloves. Film was always considered a commodity first to be sold for the price of admission. Hence, what happened to that footage once it had run its course in a theater really did not concern anyone in Hollywood, least of all the folk who had made the movie in the first place.

BOTTOM: the famous Life Magazine photograph of theater goers mesmerized by the ‘new’ 1950s fad of 3-D. Today’s resurgence of that gimmick is being celebrated as a renaissance, but is it really...or simply more of the same?



PART III: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

"It was a world you created. It was not a world you went out and found."

- Richard Sylbert

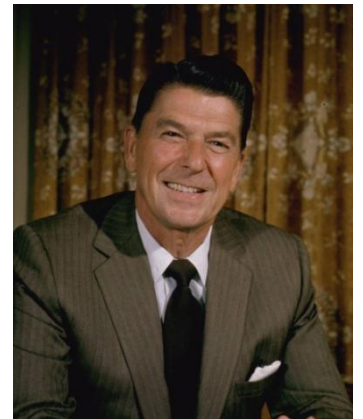
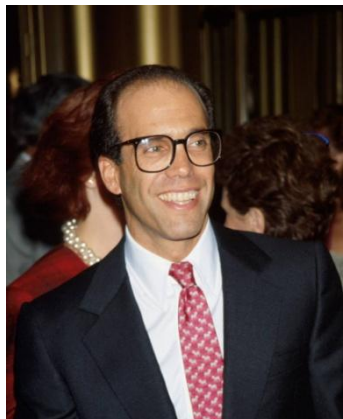
What emerged throughout the 1980s in American cinema perhaps more than any other decade before it embodied the age old struggle between commerce and art. The studios were gaining ground again, in part because they were slowly being allowed to acquire those raw elements that had once made them the envy of film production throughout the world.

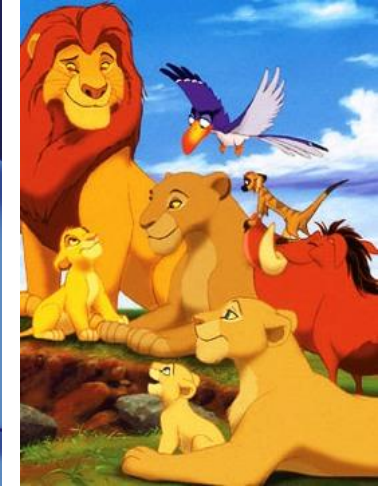
Slowly but most surefooted, the old monopolies came marching forth once again, buying up talent on a limited contract basis. Freed of the anti-trust laws that had splintered their empires in the mid-1950s, the 1980s saw the surviving major studios once more begin to acquiring music publishing apparatuses as well as struggling independent film companies to feather their own nests.

THIS PAGE: Hollywood re-envision itself - again! TOP: In the 1950s it was Cinerama. MIDDLE: In the 1970s, prosthetics revolutionized sci-fi and horror movies. But the bate, switch and Curly shuffle from Hollywood mid-1980, produced some interesting bedfellows and curious anomalies.

Producer Jeffrey Katzenberg (BOTTOM LEFT), reached a monumental settlement with The Walt Disney Company in 1994 after being ousted from his position at that studio.

But who could have guessed that a former actor named Ronald Wilson Reagan (BOTTOM RIGHT) would become President of the United States and help reverse the Consent Decrees that had crippled Hollywood's ability to procure magic on celluloid after the fifties?





ABOVE: By the time Michael Eisner assumed the reigns of the Walt Disney Empire in 1986 it was a kingdom virtually on the verge of collapse. After Walt's death in 1966 the studio continued to produce both live action and animated films but with increasing indifference at the box office. The crisis came in the early 1980s with a series of high profile flops that included live action horror flicks like, *The Watcher in the Woods* (1980) and *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1983), and the studio's lugubrious attempts to move beyond the realm of fairytale for their animated features with *The Black Cauldron* (1985).

Under Eisner's guidance the fat was trimmed, the animation department relocated to more modest quarters and an ambitious split was made. For animated features the Disney banner would continue to fly high, but for more adult themed live action features Disney would rely on a new branding - Touchstone Pictures.

TOP LEFT: Richard Gere and Julia Roberts in her breakout mega smash, *Pretty Woman* (1990) - the tale of a Hollywood Blvd. hooker who lands herself a mega millionaire corporate raider. She gives him sex, her heart and a good piece of her mind while he introduces her to the finer things in life. It was the sort of fluff-laden fairytale that audiences simply could not resist. TOP RIGHT: Touchstone also branched out into producing TV shows. *The Golden Girls* (1985-91) was undeniably one of their best. Stars Rue McClanahan, Estelle Getty, Beatrice Arthur and Betty White, all TV alumni from other shows, excelled as four Miami widows sharing life experiences with frank honesty and hilarious one line bars.

BOTTOM LEFT: Disney's animation renaissance began with a return to its roots with the musical, *The Little Mermaid* (1989), reaching its zenith two years later with *Beauty & The Beast* (1991) - a memorable telling of the French fable. The score, by the Howard Ashman and Alan Menkin was of perfection quality; the title song indelibly sung by Angela Lansbury in the film and rising pop diva, Celine Dion for the album cover.

MIDDLE: Relying heavily on the comedic genius of Robin Williams, as the voice of the genie, the studio's release of *Aladdin* (1992) ran into angry protests by Arab Americans over the a song lyric that went "*Where they cut off your nose if they don't like your face...it's barbaric, but hey, it's home.*" For subsequent home video releases the lyric was altered as follows: "*Where it's flat and immense and the heat is intense, it's barbaric, but hey, it's home.*"

RIGHT: *The Lion King* (1994) was by far the most profitable of Disney's 'new' animated features. Basically, Hamlet for the kiddie set, the story follows Simba's struggle to reclaim the throne he vacated after his father, Mufasa; the lion king, is murdered by his uncle, Scar. Invoking the Nuremberg trials during Scar's crusade to recruit hyenas as they goose step past him was fairly gutsy, haunting imagery but the Black Coalition of America didn't much care that one of the three central hyenas was voiced by Whoopi Goldberg. Elton John and Tim Rice contributed a chart topping score, and John himself sang a cover version of *Can You Feel The Love Tonight*?



The Walt Disney Company established Touchstone Pictures for its more adult film fare and throughout the 1980s and early '90s had a string of highly profitable - if featherweight - hits like *Splash* (1984), *Adventures in Babysitting* (1987), *Beaches* (1988), *Pretty Woman* (1990) and *Father of the Bride* (1991). Touchstone was later sold to Paramount. But Disney also had to reinvent itself - particularly its animation empire which had been in steep decline since Walt's death in 1966. After the near lethal flop of *The Black Cauldron* (1985), the company made a stunning return to form under the tutelage of CEO Michael Eisner with *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty & The Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992) and *The Lion King* (1994).

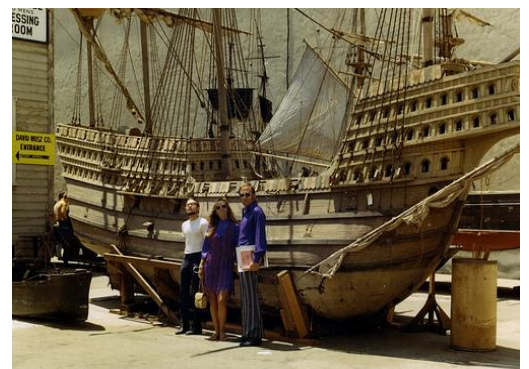
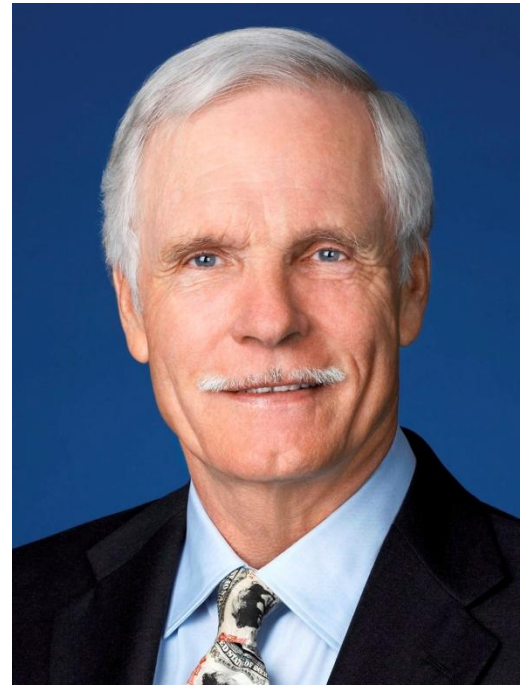
MCA/Universal swallowed whole Don Bluth Animation, then spit Bluth and a few colleagues out after the success of *An American Tale*. Undaunted, Bluth moved to 20th Century-Fox, producing the superbly entertaining *Anastasia* (1997) and then the exhilarating *Titan A.E.* (2000) before once again finding himself on the outside looking in. Universal, the only studio to have barely hung on to its back lot, was even more aggressive in repackaging its films; this time as theme park attractions. Like Disneyland before it, Universal Studios today exists largely as a game and ride metropolis, rarely producing films outright, but rather acquiring product from smaller independent production companies.

Such leapfrogging was imminent and healthy to the mounting climate of 1980s corporate mergers and acquisitions. Of all the studios to go through this morphing process, only MGM failed to find a suitable successor. Instead, came Las Vegas financier, Kirk Kerkorian and Ted Turner. While Turner expressed an interest to acquire the studio outright as a production facility, Kerkorian merely wanted the name 'MGM' for his casino and hotel empire.

RIGHT: TOP: Media mogul Ted Turner was heavily criticized, and rightly so, for his attempts at colorizing some of Hollywood's great B&W movies. However, there's little to deny that without Turner's intervention in 1979, we would not have regular access to the MGM, Warner Bros., RKO, Selznick International early catalogues of movies. Since inaugurating his Turner Classic Movies network in 1994, Turner has been instrumental in bringing many major and minor classics to home video - a proud achievement film lovers the world over are exceedingly grateful for.

MIDDLE: *Sleeping Beauty* Castle welcomes visitors in 1956. It seems only Walt could see the future of entertaining the masses, taking the commerce of his celluloid creations and transforming it into concrete three dimensional sets and attractions where anyone could live inside the movies. Universal Studios followed Walt's lead several decades later by throwing open the gates to their backlot. Regrettably, 20th Century Fox and MGM, the two studios who had the biggest backlots demolished theirs to make way for housing projects and parking garages.

MIDDLE: The Columbia Pictures logo hangs on the tower where once the old MGM logo was prominently displayed. Columbia moved onto MGM's lot in 1981. BOTTOM: new proud owners stand before a model of 'The Bounty' used for MGM's 1936 sea epic. In 1971 Kirk Kerkorian put MGM's vast library of props and costumes on the chopping block to raise more money for his Vegas empire. Debbie Reynolds bought what she could and turned it into a museum in Vegas.





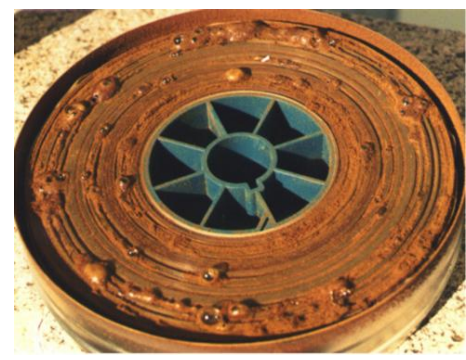
In the fledgling sale of MGM's studio facilities to Turner the gamble proved too great to win. To save his cable empire from the crushing debt incurred by the sale, Turner was forced to sell off almost all of his controlling interest in MGM. The studio went to Columbia/Tristar (later Sony), as did most of the filmic properties that MGM had briefly toyed with making before being raided into extinction. But Turner and film buffs everywhere were arguably the real winners – for in that trade off, the media mogul had managed to hide away MGM’s library of classic films for his own cable network exploitation and later, renewed video release.

Television, once that arch nemesis that had sent shock waves of imminent doom throughout the industry in the 1950s inadvertently aided Hollywood in its rebirth throughout the early 1980s with the dawning of the home video revolution. Executives were frankly shocked, however pleasantly, by the public’s immediate fascination for these treasures of old buried inside their vaults. They ought not to have been.



During the last gasp of MGM, the studio had released *That's Entertainment!* (1974) a compendium of classic clips derived from the studio's rich musical heritage and narrated by six of its most prominent stars from the golden age. The film was the biggest and brightest money maker of that year, spawning two sequels and proving - if proof was needed - that when it came to audiences, old time quality trumped new age crass commercialism any day of the week.

At approximately this same time, the American Film Institute and The Library of Congress came on board; effectively reclassifying such ancient relics as rarified art in need of protection and preservation for future generations to behold. While initial excitement from the studios was apprehensive to downright negative at the onset of the VHS cassette, that for under thirty dollars made such classics as *Casablanca* (1942) and *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) cheap enough for anyone to own - and bootleg - they almost as quickly realized that selling such titles to the masses meant yet another lucrative stream of profits. Even if one chose not to own, there was still the prospect to be derived by lending classic film art out for a modest fee to retail video stores. In the comfort of their own homes, consumers could endlessly replay the memory, or at least play it until the tape wore out.

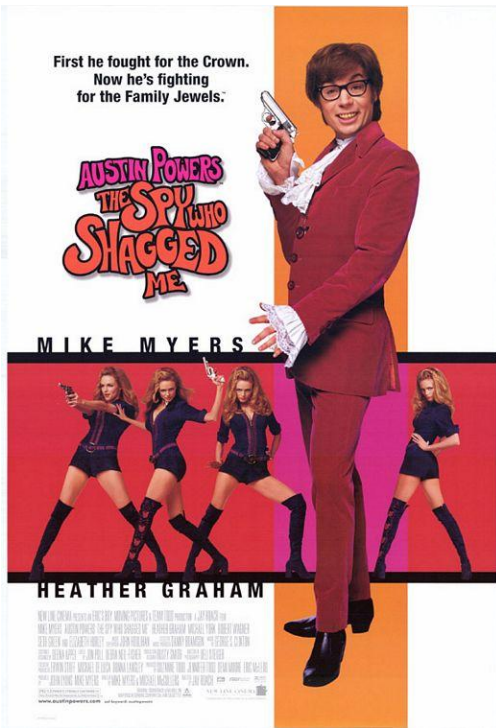


LEFT: The march of time and changing technologies have worked both against and for film preservation efforts. TOP: It began with the battle over VHS vs. BETA tape technology. MIDDLE: Laserdisc, a superior storage format was too cumbersome to store. DVD shrunk laserdisc to the size of a CD and HD/Blu-Ray technologies made digital compression capable of capturing virtually all of the information available on original film stocks. LOWER MIDDLE: Unfortunately, these advancements have come too late for far too many movies that have already decomposed beyond restoration in their cans. BOTTOM: an archivist at The Library of Congress inspects a preservation master made for the reissue of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, restored to its original brilliance by Robert A. Harris.

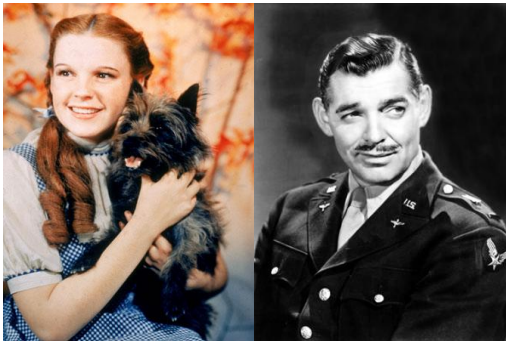


If studios lamented the fact that once sold on tape, laserdisc and more recently DVD/Blu-Ray, there was no telling as to what end of misuse and piracy their movies might endure, then they quickly discovered the luxury of re-issues on home video for a very limited time and countless re-issues with improved image and sound quality as well as extra features that could sell for more than the previously issued tape or disc. Disney proved itself at the forefront of this marketing strategy with the 'for a limited time only' campaign that sent prospective buyers scrambling for the latest edition of Cinderella (1950) and Sleeping Beauty (1959).

Yet, perhaps the most disparaging fallout spawned by the home video market has been the increased interest from studios to shy away from originality at the box office in favor of remaking its past. Originality is, after all, unpredictable. A studio might have the next Gone With The Wind at their fingertips. They might also have the next Ishtar. Pre-sold titles rarely recast to perfection as in the originals, relegate the moviegoer to an unmemorable déjà vu. Yet, they have increasingly come to dominate the central focus of film production. Thus, when one asks today 'have you seen War of the Worlds?' the inquiry must first be met with another, 'which version?'



However, this trend has cost future generations their film art dearly. Nobody commands the output of studio product but the public. Therefore, if it sells it must be good. If it doesn't it is destined for an early video release, and maybe just a bit more strenuous marketing PR that never fails to insight public interest for less than stellar entertainment. As example, the 1997 theatrical release of Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery was a disastrous flop that quickly made its way to home video without fanfare. There, however, its camp poke at the James Bond franchise found a following primarily amongst teens and college aged audiences. So great, in fact, that Alliance resurrected the character in two more movies The Spy Who Shagged Me (1999) and Goldmember (2002) that were immediate hits, earning Mike Myers instant celebrity then that has since almost as quickly faded from view.



Myers is certainly not alone in this arctic desolation of on/off popularity. It is arguably safe to say that in today's Hollywood there are no stars anymore. Today's celebrity has proven to be all too disposable and far removed from the legends of Gable, Crawford, Hepburn and Garland, even as those legends - absent from the big screen for over forty years - continue to sparkle and have their reputations renewed.

Ironically, the current story of Hollywood behind the camera is not so far removed from the legend of its ancient casting couches, with press agents and tabloid journalism having taken over the domain of the once prominent gossip columnists.

Starlets still gravitate to men in the industry with considerable clout, money and box office potential. Male stars try to retain their level of virility for the average star gazer but inevitably grow older and less popular with all but their die hard female fans. Both sexes continue to have their relationships and marriages - failed or otherwise - splashed across the front pages while trying, mostly in vain, to sustain their careers.

In the commissaries and upscale restaurants, inside boardrooms and barrooms - uptown, downtown and otherwise, it's still the same old story - get all you can or be had; sell or be sold off. Yet today, these ironies are more tragic than ironic; that in a town where so much on the surface has been irreversibly, and rather forcibly, changed to its own detriment, so much behind Hollywood's closed doors continues to remain exactly the same.

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