

SPECIAL EDITION

Nick Zegarac's

THE

Hollywood

ART



STATE OF THE ART

**HOW THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION & TELEVISION CONSPIRED
TO SHRINK THE MOVIES**



"There's been a lot of glamorous financial news in the papers lately, multimedia conglomerates... Well, I would like to hear some glamorous talk about elevating the quality of films and television. Making millions is not the whole ballgame, fellas.

Pride of workmanship is worth more. Artistry is worth more. The public is ready for the best you can give them. It just may be that you can make a buck and at the same time encourage, foster and commission work of quality and originality!"

- Gregory Peck



An im '-peck'-able screen legacy. For more than 40 years, Gregory Peck reigned supreme as Hollywood's everyman with a heart of integrity; a screen persona cultivated and nurtured by the studio system, but one that Peck apparently lived up to in his private life. It's been said to the point of absurdity about many a Hollywood legend, but there's never been an actor before or since quite like Gregory Peck. His intelligence, charm and handsome good looks are only part of the package that made him an enviable and highly bankable star.

In the late 1980s, Peck toured the country in an interactive Q&A stage show entitled 'An Evening With Gregory Peck'. After one of these live performances an audience member told Peck backstage that she had come all the way from France to see if the legend she had only known and admired from his movies was indeed the same as the man in the flesh. The patron concluded to Peck that he was. Today, lengthy star careers such as his are nonexistent and the likes of another actor of Peck's magnitude, even more abysmally remote.

Above: from left to right - struggling with his emotions and Dorothy McGuire in *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1947), conflicted but still able to do the right thing opposite murderess, Valli in Hitchcock's *The Paradine Case* (1947), flawed but heroic as the flyer about to crack in *Twelve O'clock High* (1949), rating a date with Princess Audrey Hepburn in William Wyler's *Roman Holiday* (1950) and considering the facts as the ultimate man of compassion and conviction, Addicus Finch in *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962); the role for which Peck was finally honoured with an Oscar win.

* When filming ended, the novel's author Harper Lee presented Peck with a watch belonging to her late father, in reverence to how well she believed Peck had captured the essence of the man. As an actor, Peck arguably received no finer accolade.

In 1989, Gregory Peck, luminous star of the first magnitude, spoke these words before an assemblage of his peers in acceptance of his Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Film Institute. Regrettably,

Peck's words were to fall, primarily, on deaf ears outside of that auditorium. For, in the intervening decades, technologically and artistically speaking, movies have become much less than they once were - either during Peck's reign or at that moment in 1989 when he delivered his speech.

Television is only partly to blame. More directly, there has been a systematic reduction of the hallmarks Peck extolled that began with the introduction of television in the 1950s, but that has since been escalated and blown out of proportion by misguided market research. In this, the first in a series of articles on movie making today, we will examine how the movies have gotten smaller. So, let's begin with an obvious change.

Yesteryear's ornamental movie palace is today's large box stadium styled multiplex. The once enveloping concave surface of Cinemascope and 70mm projection has today been replaced with flat, television friendly aspect ratios that are easily transferable to the small screen. Movies are no longer made for wide screen. Hence, movies are no longer their own enterprise, but rather, just the first stop on a journey into media blitzed oblivion. Even 3D - that fleeting gimmick of the early 1950s has made a resounding comeback in theatres - thanks, in part to new technologies that report to someday have a 3-D TV in everyone's living room...we'll see. But who would have guessed as much even two years before?

RIGHT: Although 20th Century-Fox debuted Grandeur 70mm as early as 1931, it was not until 1953 that the widescreen revolution really took off thanks to competition from television. Top to bottom: Fox's Cinemascope, Paramount's VistaVision, independent producer Mike Todd's Todd A-O created by American Optical and Technicolor's patented Technirama all toyed with making the movies bigger than ever. Eventually, Panavision became the standard. Today, however, many movies are shot in the more television friendly aspect ratio of 1:78:1.





ABOVE: The age, and the end, of innocence. Hollywood's biographical exultations on celluloid once celebrated the high ideals of individuals whose contributions to society at large were unquestionably for the benefit of all mankind. TOP ROW LEFT: Paul Muni contemplates the sin of silence in his defence of an innocent soldier in *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937). MIDDLE: Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon are tireless in their quest for uranium in MGM's lavishly appointed *Madame Curie* (1943). BOTTOM LEFT: Ben Kingsley resurrects the 'little brown man' who indelibly defied British Imperialism in India in *Gandhi* (1982).

The 1980s saw the last spate of biographical movies dedicated to noble minds and kind hearts. TOP RIGHT: Woody Harrelson as Penthouse publisher Larry Flynt cuddles Courtney Love's drug addicted pin up in *The People Vs. Larry Flynt* (1996) a movie that used the First Amendment as grounds to celebrate one man's quest to publish smutty nudes and graphic sexual acts. BOTTOM MIDDLE: Mike Myers as Steve Rubell, the drug addicted proprietor of New York's famed Studio 54 (1998); a club that catered booze, drugs and women to high rollers. BOTTOM RIGHT: the usually glamorous Charlize Theron dramatically transformed into serial killer, Aileen Wuornos in 2003's *Monster*. Despite a dramatic resolution on the side of the law, the film took great pains to critique Wuorno as a flawed and misunderstood woman who descends into madness through the alienation of society.

For some time now, contemporary directors have been encouraged to shoot their stories with future television broadcasts in mind. Excluding the errant overstuffed Oscar contender, the average running time of today's films rarely tops the two hour mark. More often it leans toward the much shorter and peak friendly ninety minutes. Coupled with an inflated price of admission and the absence of newsreels, cartoons and our national anthem, the excitement of going to the movies has on the whole been compromised. Is it any wonder that the contemporary film attendee is inundated with commercial endorsements for Ford, Coca-Cola and Cingular wireless service before the feature presentation? Today's moving going experience has been systematically reduced to glorified television status.

In both content too, movies have shriveled from their once galvanic narratives of Olympian heroism. Hollywood en masse no longer seems interested in extolling the high ideals of humanity, but rather salaciously investigating its lowest common denominators. Take the biographical movie

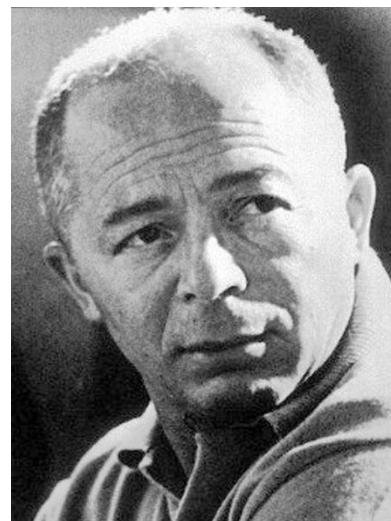
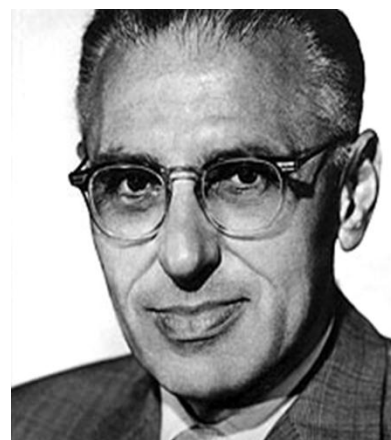
as a prime example; once character driven with introspective critiques of Emile Zola and Gandhi, but today a tabloid-esque investigation of serial killers (**Monster** 2004) or exultations of smut-raking corporate titans like Larry Flynt.

Consider also that today's musicals have supplanted blind optimism and that inimitable sparkle of sheer joy found in such classics like **Singin' In The Rain** (1952), creating instead an artistic discomfort and disconnect in their shift from buoyant fantasy to gritty reality (**Nine**, 2009). In absence of any genuine shock value, contemporary horror merely repulses for its obligatory thirty-second moments of gruesomeness often ladled on top of one another. Perhaps, romantic comedies have suffered the most - usually under political correctness; merely eschewing the all out battle of the sexes, still most astutely handled in films like **Woman of the Year** (1942) or **Adam's Rib** (1949). At best then, today's comedies reaffirm the cliché of idyllic heterosexual romance (**Valentine's Day** 2010) or serve to make light of ethnic stereotypes (**My Big Fat Greek Wedding** 2002).

Stylistically, all genres share in their guerilla-styled editing that has taken over from film aesthetics. The master shot is regrettably dead. Populated by quick cut juxtapositions befitting MTV's music videos, it is a deliberate - often nauseating - tactic that has been designed to mask the problematic shortcomings of today's celebrities - mainly, that few can sustain a scene alone with a stationary camera fixated on them for more than a few seconds at a time. As such, performance in contemporary cinema largely tends to lack the subtlety of movies from Hollywood's golden age.

RIGHT: Directors are the masters of fine art. Here are a few of Hollywood's best. TOP: George Cukor, whose catalogue of classics included Garbo's *Camille* (1936), Garland's *A Star Is Born* (1954) and Audrey Hepburn in *My Fair Lady* (1964). MIDDLE: Cecil B. DeMille, without whom there would have never been a Paramount Pictures Studio. DeMille's cinematic art has today been regrettably distilled into one film; his glossy remake of his own, *The Ten Commandments* (1956). But DeMille also gave us our first glimpse at *Cleopatra* (1936) and made *Union Pacific* (1939) - a celebrated western. MIDDLE: David Lean - the oft' ornery, fastidious perfectionist whose style of film making came to symbolize the ingredients integral to Hollywood epic with films like *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and *Doctor Zhivago* (1965).

BOTTOM: left to his own devices, Billy Wilder created some of cinema's most transitional and progressive entertainments, beginning with 1944's *Double Indemnity*, and continuing throughout the 1950s and 60s with biting social commentary in films like *Sunset Boulevard* (1952) and *The Apartment* (1960). Wilder could also do comedy as he proved numerous times, perhaps nowhere more succinctly than in *Some Like It Hot* (1959). Today, with so much fumbling of stars and singers who desire their chance to call the shots, practically anyone can be a director, though arguably not everyone *can* direct.





It's been said that imitation is the cheapest form of flattery. We'll agree on the cheap part, particularly in today's Hollywood awash in a sea of television remakes, sequels and prequels either geared to continue the saga where TV left off or merely remind us how much better the originals were in their heyday.

TOP LEFT: Jamie Foxx and Colin Farrell in Michael Mann's utterly misguided remake of TV's *Miami Vice* (2006) - supplanting the original's stylish white and pastel suits for grunge, grit and a certain dispensation for the sunnier side of that famed Florida hot spot. TOP MIDDLE: the late Raoul Julia as Gomez Addams entertains a game of chess with 'Thing' as Angelica Huston's Morticia looks on in *Addam's Family Values* (1993).



TOP RIGHT: playing a straight police drama from the 1970s strictly for laughs with Ben Stiller and Owen Wilson as *Starsky & Hutch* (2004). RIGHT: Shelley Long and Gary Cole eerily reincarnated as Mike and Carol Brady for *The Brady Bunch Movie* (1995). Long's performance in particular elevated this remake to the heights of a bizarre resurrection.

MIDDLE: Dishing dirt with the girls in Darren Starr's big budget continuation of the narratives best left to half hour television sitcom status in *Sex and The City: The Movie* (1998). The film was not so much a sequel to Starr's Emmy Award winning series, but more of the same, painfully stretched into a two and a half hour glam bam with nowhere to go but down. From left to right: Kristin Davis, Sarah Jessica Parker, Cynthia Nixon and Kim Cattrall.



BOTTOM: Bradley Cooper takes over the reigns as Templeton Peck from Dirk Benedict (pictured far right) and Quentin Jackson assumes the role of B.A. Baracus made iconic by Mr. T in the 2010 remake of *The A-Team*. Personally, "I pity the fool."



As the audience we are no longer treated to complex thought in a performance but momentary glimpses of reaction delayed by celebrities awash in quick cuts, heavy panning and highly unstable hand-held camera work. This is precisely why older films seem slower when viewed from a contemporary vantage.

Yet, in that slower pace there was the opportunity for stars to prove their metal, to make love to the camera in close up and wow their audience with their gifts and talent. Contemporary actors, do not 'act' per say, but allow the camera to do it all in their stead, with film editors given unprecedented autonomy to hack into scenes as though they were making coleslaw instead of art.

Even more disheartening for the longevity of contemporary American cinema is its concerted effort, nee zest, to mimic its



old arch nemesis – television. What is occurring on screen today is not tributary to the bravado and genius of great American directors like George Cukor, John Ford or Frank Capra. Rather, it is a debasement of the very fundamentals in film making and a direct result of Hollywood’s reverse psychology where television is concerned.

Once considered that tiny gremlin that cannibalized movies by luring prospective ticket buyers away from the box office, television has today become the movie’s newest best friend. As a result, movies are now feasting on T.V. for their own sustenance; **Starsky and Hutch** (2004), **Scooby-Doo** (2004), **Sex and the City** (2010) et al.

Plots that were barely sustainable within a half hour or hour of commercial interrupted broadcasting are being awkwardly stretched to accommodate a two hour time slot. Some small-to-big screen incarnations, like **The Brady Bunch Movie** (1995) or **Addam’s Family Values** (1993), combined several narratives borrowed from the series to fill in these discrepancies in run time. However, these small to big screen mutations narrowly relied on nostalgia to sustain audience interests. One marvels, for example, at Shelly Long’s chillingly on point emulation of Florence Henderson’s Mrs. Brady, or Raoul Julia’s more subtle evocation of John Astin’s Gomez.

Although classic movies found a new audience in the early 1980s via the introduction of home video the inauguration was not without its painful missteps. Another sore spot - colorization. In the mid-1980s Ted Turner purchased the MGM classic film library outright for his cable empire and undertook an ambitious - if misguided - project to re-introduce classic movies to contemporary audiences via adding artificial colors to the B&W image.

Critics and diehard fans were outraged, urging for legislation to ban the practise outright. Orson Welles went on record as saying *"Tell Turner to keep his goddamn Crayolas away from Citizen Kane."* While colorization today is widely panned, it continues to find limited appeal with less discerning audiences and, as a practise, has never entirely been eliminated.

From top: The Three Stooges in *Men In White* (1932), Donna Reed and James Stewart share a pensive moment from in *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946), Steve McQueen and Robert Wagner in *The War Lover* (1962) and Shirley Temple clutches 'a friend' from *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1938).





WHAT ARE THEY SELLING NOW? It is one thing to have an old time celebrity like Jane Russell endorse a Playtex Wunderbra or have Bonanza alumni Lorne Greene peddling Alpo Dog Food. These living icons (at least at the time the commercials were made) had the choice to either resist or embrace their new found commercialism. But in the 1980s Coca-Cola embraced a new rotoscoping technology that isolated the likenesses of Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney and Cary Grant from three of their old movies and relocated them inside a contemporary cafe where singer Elton John was performing the Diet Coke jingle.

In the intervening decade the likeness of the late Fred Astaire would trade in the hat stand he danced with in *Royal Wedding* (1951) for an Oreck Excel vacuum cleaner. ABOVE LEFT: Rodgers & Hammerstein's 'I Enjoy Being A Girl' from *Flower Drum Song* is pilfered by Sarah Jessica Parker to extol the virtues of shopping at discount retailer, Target. Marilyn Monroe appeared in a commercial for Chanel no. 5 singing 'I Wanna Be Loved By You' from *Some Like It Hot* to which an audience member applying the perfume to herself was instantly transformed into Monroe herself. Would these legends have approved of the commercial appeal? We'll never know. Perhaps we never should.

So too is there a hushed reverence afforded to the set and costume designers for their abilities to resurrect the bygone tackiness of 1970s chic for the Brady home or reinvent the lurid gothic appeal of the Addam's family abode. Yet, these imitations tend to reek of parody.

There is a deliberate purpose to the copy cat madness. Nearly two thirds of today's film revenue is derived from a combination of cable/satellite and network broadcasting deals that redistribute old movies and television to the mass market via broadcast rather than produce something new, and, also through distribution and sale of films as byproduct to the home video market (Blu-Ray/DVD). Hence, films have transcended the realm of pop art to become chronic regurgitations and fill-ins; disposable entertainment for the twenty-four hour stay at home junkie. The net result is that movies are no longer considered, as they once were, as 'stand alone' bread and butter for the studios. They must be ripe for press and promotional tie-ins and marketing campaigns that may have little to do with the movies themselves.

What is perhaps even more discrediting to the art of bygone cinema is its contemporary resurgence as easily marketable iconography for television commercials. Through digital manipulations eternal greats like Fred Astaire and Humphrey Bogart have been glimpsed endorsing everything from Coca-Cola to vacuum cleaners. Such postmodern misrepresentations are hardly flattering, but particularly insulting in the case of deceased stars, where their level of compliance remains questionable.

Would Bogie appreciate seeing a tie-dyed version of himself sipping Coke in a trendy café populated by super models and Elton John? Would Astaire, who once danced with a coat rack in **Royal Wedding** (1951), recognize the not so subtle jab at his artistic integrity with the superimposition of his dancing self grabbing onto an Orek Excel?

The answers can never be known. What is clear about these and other marketing strategies is that in the final analysis, the importance of the actual films' they have borrowed such clips from has been diminished into an even more manipulative form of disposable pop art. Thus, the future of Hollywood may continue toward the garishly trendy and spur of the moment cliché, but at what price to future generations who lack the insight of all the great American movie classics that have gone before?

KEEPERS OF THE FLAME: Through more recent years classic movies have enjoyed a nostalgic renaissance with contemporary audiences. In the early years, old movies were considered merely as fodder to be fit into programming schedules when new shows and reruns ran dry.

Beginning in the late 1960s, one of classic movies true champions was the late Bill Kennedy (1908-97 bottom). Each week, Kennedy introduced us to the likes of Grand Hotel, Hondo, Rebecca and other classic features once considered by the studios as having 'no resale value'.

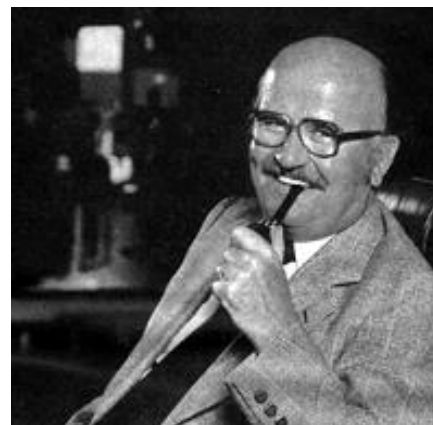
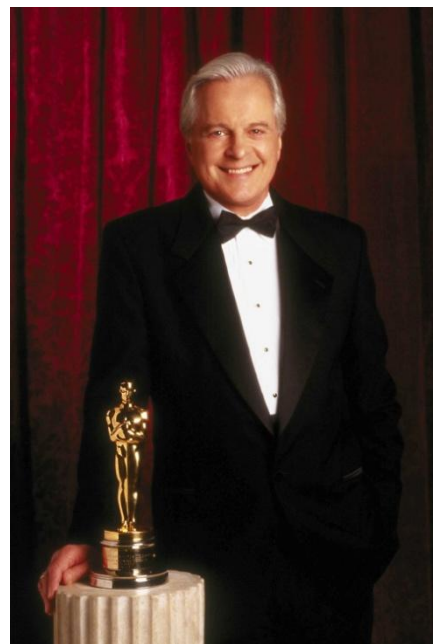
In the late 1970s, Public Television's Elwy Yost (middle) augmented his 'Saturday Night At The Movies' serial with insight and intelligent discussion from surviving cast members from various classic films he was screening to raise money for public TV.

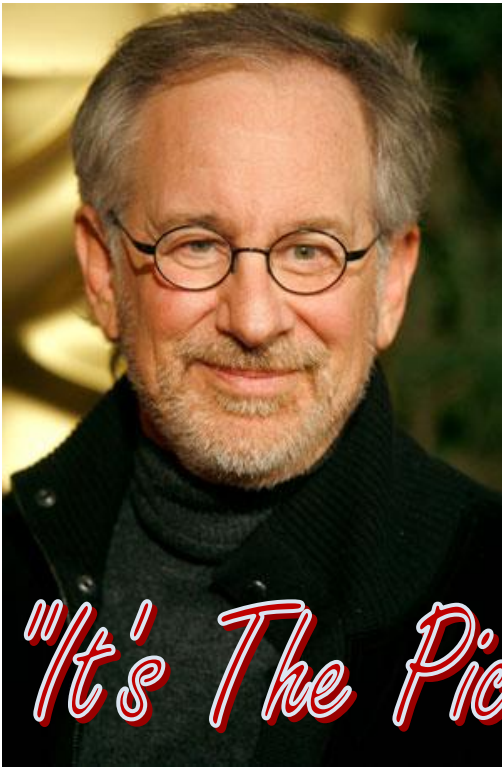
Undoubtedly, Ted Turner's lasting contribution to classic film fans everywhere has been his TCM Classic Film Network launched in April of 1994.

A 24hr. commercial free haven hosted by noted historian Robert Osborne (top), TCM boast not only an unlimited supply of movies from the MGM/Warner, Selznick and RKO holdings, but also original interviews and documentaries on Hollywood legend and folklore.



TURNER CLASSIC MOVIES





"It's The Pictures That Got Small!"

"People have forgotten how to tell a story today. Stories don't have a middle or an end any more. They usually have a beginning that never stops beginning."

- Steven Spielberg

After a brief interlude in expansive film making, that began with the dawning of Cinemascope and ended approximately in 1969; where movie space teemed from the grandeur of widescreen – Hollywood began its slow reverse shot into more budgetary safe film making. This is not to suggest that the 1920s, 30s or even 40s were decades in absence of budgetary concerns, creative progress or technological innovations. On the contrary, they were cutting edge decades in developing motion picture entertainment and, in retrospect, paved the way for the big and bold look of the





ABOVE: movie making on a grand scale: Cecil B. DeMille's staging of the exodus from Egypt for *The Ten Commandments* (1956). Made at the end of the studio system for Paramount Pictures, this scene exemplifies Hollywood's self-imposed edict of "do it big, do it well and give it class!" DeMille suffered a heart attack while shooting this sequence and the film's star Charlton Heston has gone on record as stating that only one or two takes could be done each day because it was virtually impossible to get the 40,000 extras back in line for multiple shots once the sequence was underway.

PREVIOUS PAGE: TOP LEFT: One of filmdom's most revered contemporary directors Steven Spielberg scored a string of unprecedented hits in the late 1970s and early 80s, garner critical and audience praise but more than a hint of animosity from his contemporary artists, if only for the simple fact that whatever he touched during this tenure managed quite simply to turn to gold.

TOP RIGHT: Gloria Swanson as faded silent screen goddess Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) shouts in defiance at the screen. "Don't they know what a star's supposed to look like! I'll show them!" In the Hollywood of the fifties glamour was increasingly falling by the waste side in favor of more economical entertainments to compete with television's pull on audiences. Practically half, who had been avid theatre goers a decade earlier had abandoned movies for what L.B. Mayer once called "the little black box" finding its home in more and more living rooms throughout the decade.

PREVIOUS PAGE: RIGHT: the architect of the Hollywood musical - Busby Berkeley in a double exposure is surrounded by chorine majorettes from his 'Remember My Forgotten Man' number from *Gold Diggers of 1933*. During his tenure at Warner Bros., Berkeley was responsible for rearranging hundreds of chorus girls into lavish geometric patterns. His career would falter in the late forties and all but evaporate by the mid-1950s, but for a time there was simply no one to hold a candle to his artistic brilliance in staging mass musical production numbers.

1950s. For a while, at least, it seemed as though the influence of this “bigger is better” mentality would become the new standard in movie making.

Instead, and almost universally, contemporary American cinema began to abandon its bigger is better philosophy for the more clinical realm of creating digital domains. The move was slight at first and rather inauspicious, beginning with a few minor visual tweaks on 1985's *Young Sherlock Holmes* with 'Renderman': a digital manipulation software program that has since come to dominate the visual cinematic architecture of virtually every film release in the U.S.

Today, there is little incentive to immortalize the timeless beauty of a great city like Rome on location, when it can be fully realized as a three-dimensional facsimile generated by a computer? Lest we remember that the Rome in *Roman Holiday* (1953) or *Three Coins in The Fountain* (1954) or even *Ben-Hur* (1959) is not perfect. It breathes imperfection from





its craggy pavement and masonry, its chipped and fragmented wrinkles that reek of the mastery of the ages. But the Rome that William Wyler glamorized and Fellini scrutinized is, with all its obvious visual flaws, nevertheless eternally haunted, thrilling and alive; visceral qualities that the Rome in Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) decidedly lacks.

In Scott's reincarnation, as example, the human eye is instantly drawn to the obvious absurdity of cleanliness in digital effects; the smoothness of an orb that is too round to have been chiseled by human hands, or the supreme perpendicular incline of a temple that is more blue print schematic than anciently constructed skyscraper.

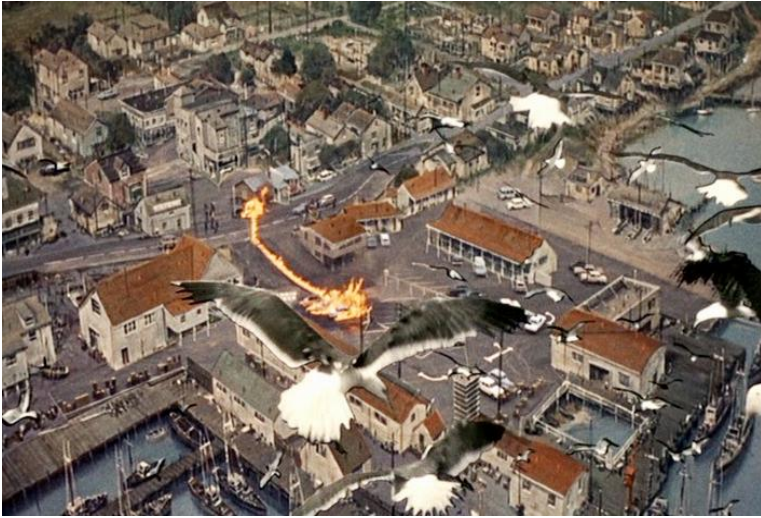
PREVIOUS PAGE: In Hollywood's golden years the penchant for lavish pictorial value was evident from the early 1930s onward, as is evident from this still of Vivien Leigh and Thomas Mitchell set against a fiery Atlanta sunset from David O. Selznick's *Gone With The Wind* (1939). Both the tree and the sky were miniatures matted in later by SFX supervisor Jack Cosgrove.

MIDDLE: In the 1950s all things Roman became popular - if ultra-costly - film fodder. Every studio made at least one lasting contribution to the cycle. MGM made two, bookending the decade with a remake of *Quo Vadis* (1950) starring Peter Ustinov and Robert Taylor and arguably, the Roman epic to put all others to shame; William Wyler's *Ben-Hur* (1959).

BOTTOM: Crowds gather in earnest to witness the march of the charioteers from *Ben-Hur*. The Circus Maximus on which Wyler utilized 14 Technicolor cameras was a full size free standing set built of poured concrete and populated by several thousand extras on the back lot of Rome's Cinecittà film studio. The backdrop of craggy red rock, as well as the sky is a hanging matte painting on glass.

Until James Cameron's *Titanic* tied it, *Ben-Hur* held the record for most Oscars won by a single picture. However, it is important to note that *Ben-Hur* won more statuettes in the major categories, including a Best Actor for Charlton Heston, while *Titanic*'s tally of 11 statuettes included a litany of SFX Oscars in categories that did not even exist when *Ben-Hur* was made.

THIS PAGE: Roman Centurions guard the entrance to the Circus as re-envisioned in a computer for Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000). About 1/3 of this set was actually built full scale while all of the long shots of Rome in its decadence were created using a detailed CGI program.



THIS PAGE: More old school Hollywood trickery. TOP: Albert Witlock's matte paintings for *The Birds* (1963) managed to perfectly capture the idyllic backdrop of a sleepy coastal town into which director Alfred Hitchcock could unleash his fine feathered mayhem.

TOP LEFT: Witlock's bird's eye view was actually a combination of a matte painted on glass, hung from a crane to reveal live action footage shot of a fire at the town's gas station. The marauding seagulls were matted in from live action footage shot at a local dump, employing a sodium vapor matte process that effectively eliminated the distracting halos often associated with the conventional blue screen process used up until that point.

RIGHT: a terrified Tippi Hedren finds herself trapped in a glass phone booth while the birds stage their attack on Bodega Bay. The backdrop of birds wreaking havoc behind her was matted in later, but the shot was also augmented by a combination of real and fake birds being thrown against the booth by a wrangler off camera. One of the fakes was a little too convincing, shattering the confining set and showering Hendren with shards of dangerously sharp glass.

ABOVE: The mythical highland village of *Brigadoon* (1954) materializes from the fog in Vincente Minnelli's film of the same name. Minnelli had wanted to shoot the big budget musical on location in Scotland. However, MGM was under financial pressures and forced the director not only to lens his movie at the studio, but also inside several large sound stages. Creating depth of focus for the town proved a challenge, not entirely convincingly conveyed by a gigantic diorama constructed to envelope the set in a background of hills and semi-opaque cloud filled skies.



FANTASY A LA SPIELBERG: In his early career, Steven Spielberg's zeal for science fiction produced several masterworks that were text book examples of how far the industry had come in utilizing all of the old time technologies while introducing new forms of puppetry into the time honored traditions.

TOP LEFT: before Spielberg opted to go back and re-edit his masterpiece, E.T. The Extra Terrestrial (1982) was a masterful amalgam of puppetry, audio animatronics and a midget in a rubber suit. Together, these techniques created a sympathetic living/breathing alien entity that emoted as few latex puppets had before or since. For the 2001 DVD release many of the film's original scenes were enhanced with digital manipulations that in no way made the creature more sympathetic, proving that the job had been done right the first time.



TOP RIGHT: the mechanical shark in Jaws (1975) didn't work as it should, forcing Spielberg to improvise alternative ways of portraying the danger of a great white attack. Here, however, Roy Scheider is convincingly unaware that the man eater is at arm's length.

RIGHT: A terrified Jeff Goldblum makes a break from the T-Rex in Spielberg's Jurassic Park (1993) the first movie to heavily rely on CGI generated creatures for its thrills. In actuality, close ups of the T-Rex continued to rely on full scale rubber and latex models operated from the inside by wire harnesses. Long shots like this one, however, were pure CGI. The success of this film would usher in the escalated usage of computers that, regrettably, have made movie fantasy increasingly less convincing and more 'video game' like in both appearance and execution.



MIDDLE: Carey Guffey is about to be abducted by aliens in Spielberg's first sci-fi classic, Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977). In actuality, the alien beams filtering through the front door are high powered, colored spotlights being waved back and forth by a pair of prop men, proving that sometimes the best solution is the simplest.

BOTTOM: Spielberg's least successful venture in sci-fi has to be his remake of The War of the Worlds (2005): a gutless and emasculated action/disaster flick in which the alien invaders were pure CGI shot through heavily diffused light and lacking both weight and dimension to make them believable to audiences.



RIGHT: two visions of epic battle. TOP: Acraba is invaded by the galloping hoards of Arab revolt in David Lean's masterful *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Made long before the luxury of CGI, the charge at hand is full scale. Note the raised dust threatening to eclipse the army under its translucent veil.



By comparison, Peter Jackson's raid on Mordor at the end of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003) is a picturesque snapshot of CGI run amuck - its detail too perfect, its razor sharp in-focus image an obvious homage to the zeros and ones of the digital age, that it all but destroys our sense of 'being there'.

In absence of computer wizardry the old Hollywood masters were well schooled in the art of visual deception through trick photography, blue screen effects and matte paintings. Yet, even in the knowledge that some background effects from some of Hollywood's most beloved classics are little more than cardboard



craftsmanship working overtime, more paper mache (*Brigadoon*, 1954) or a series of brush strokes added by matte artists like Albert Witlock (*The Birds*, 1963), not only, but especially in these examples, there is a genuine weight, a presence and a sustainable believability to the image at hand; allowing for the fantastic to seem quite plausible.

The art consumes its spectator, moving our collective consciousness from the darkness of the theater into these labyrinths of visual excitement. The real becomes hyper-sensitive. The illusion burst forth from its two dimensional mirage and becomes its own spectacular reality. It convinces the mind of its own alternate state. The result is artistry that entertains, but never draws attention to itself.

Today's cinematic experience has lost much of that visceral charm. After all, how many times have you been in a theater and instantly thought to yourself "*Oh, that's good (or even bad) CGI?*"

Perhaps from the moment Steven Spielberg imposed his digital dinosaurs on the unsuspecting moviegoer in *Jurassic Park* (1993) he forever altered the tenuous and delicate sustainability of illusion to its own detriment. What has been lost in translation from 'genuine fake' to 'graphic invisible' is the humanity behind the art of cinema fantasy. The differences between the



ABOVE: four frame captures from Jurassic Park (1993) as actor Sam Neill runs to escape a galloping pack of dinosaurs (1.). Despite an earth shattering DTS stereo track that thunders throughout the theatre and an unsteady handheld camera that convincingly jitters the image to suggest vibrations in the earth beneath his feet, the CGI generated dinosaurs project no tangible weight themselves, merely bobbing about the landscape, their movements artificially blurred (2., 3., 4.) to suggest speed, agility and pacing. In general, and despite quantum advancements in the technology itself since Jurassic Park's debut, CGI remains an obvious effect, easily spotted, unlike the invisible seams of traditional matte work and puppetry.

traditional canvas and the computer template have grounded the cinematic world on a much more narrow, deliberate and more easily manipulated plateau, rather than infinite realms of possibilities.

For example; there is a moment in David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) where the valiant charge of Arab revolt on camel raises so much sand into dust that the audience's view of the principle actors is threatened with total eclipse. And yet it is in the immediacy of that threat, in anticipation of the inevitable that never happens, that the screen thunders with a heightened sense of realism.

Now consider a similar scene; the attack on Mordor from *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003). Here the hoards and hellions have been digitally created. They are kept in deep focus but avoid scrutiny from an audience through the new manic style of editing that plagues an increasing number of contemporary films but never allows for our eyes to entirely settle on a single action. This assault on the moviegoer's senses is made complete with the roar of six track stereo rushing in from all sides of the theater. Yet, the spectacle does not stimulate as much as it stifles the audience into a sort of visual submission. The ultimate impact is not enveloping, but engulfing. What the moment lacks in genuine exhilaration is overcompensated for through the exhaustion of the senses.

To be certain, the technical wizards behind these new worlds without end have learned their craft well. Perhaps, too well. Lacking is the good sense to exercise restraint in their ability to dazzle. The on-camera result is akin to executing a trick without sustaining any belief in its magic. The audience is robbed of its suspension in disbelief. Although more cleverly camouflaged, the wires are more than obvious. They are obtrusive. It is impossible not to pay attention to the men “behind the curtains” because their very absence is suggested as deliberate in the handy work seen on the screen.



Illusion becomes mere effect, drawing attention to itself instead of becoming integrated into the arch of the narrative. We are no longer teased from the peripheral edges of the screen but force fed obviousness front and center. The human eye and the mind make the connection and acknowledge that nothing before them is real. What remains then is mere acknowledgement for the hours of painstaking effort put forth in order to create the effect.



While American cinema of the 1950s and 60s sought its stories in spectacle, today’s film makers substitute heavy-handed spectacle for substance, thereby burying hubris beneath artifice. This is why classic Hollywood films retain their aura of mystery that re-invites audiences to multiple viewings. The retention of hubris serviced by spectacle has made these films classics.



Arguably, there can be no lasting future for great American movies that rely on a universe constituted in key strokes and clicks of a computer mouse. Because, in the final analysis, neither offers its audience any tangible resolution beyond that intangible series of zeroes and ones.

RIGHT: three stellar examples of old time SFX. TOP: Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke share a 'Jolly Holiday' in Disney's Mary Poppins (1964), thanks to combined wizardry of live action and animation, a technique Disney had used intermittently since 1929, but arguably perfected with this movie. MIDDLE: Skeleton warriors attack in Jason and the Argonauts (1963). Start/stop animation from effects wizard Ray Harryhausen provided these warriors with a believable menace that even today continues to hold up under scrutiny. BOTTOM: Dorothy Gale (Judy Garland) arrives in Munchkinland in MGM's lavishly appointed, The Wizard of Oz (1939). This impressive set is soon to be populated by several hundred midget singers. In absence of digital trickery, studio logic of the day was to build everything full scale, regardless of the cost: the result - an enduring American classic worthy of celebrating its 70th anniversary.



STARS VS. CELEBRITIES

"Somebody can be an accidental star. A person can be a giant star in one movie or two. But if a star has staying power, generally, they're talented...So, I do think stars are good. I think that the contract players in the old days were special. Those people were very good!"

- Michael Eisner

When the cameras began rolling nearly one hundred years ago in that mythical Eldorado beyond the Rockies known to us today as Los Angeles California, no budding film producer or tyrannical mogul could have foreseen the dawning of a new kind of super hero. In their infancy and shortsightedness the film industry gave birth to the 'star'; the most rarefied and intangible examples of mankind among us. In the last one hundred years of Hollywood many names and





faces have passed at twenty-four frames per second before us, clamoring for a chance at immortality. Yet, the distinction must be made between yesterday's "star" and today's gross caricature of stardom – the celebrity.

In part, because of the well-oiled machinery of studio sanctioned public relations, stars of the golden age (1929-1959) were primarily known for their on camera histrionics and body of artistic achievement. Stars were worth money to studios on the basis and cultivation of their quantifiable talents and unique personalities. Stars were other-worldly, magical, escapist apparitions of shadow and light. No star was quite like another and none were thought of as belonging to regular society.

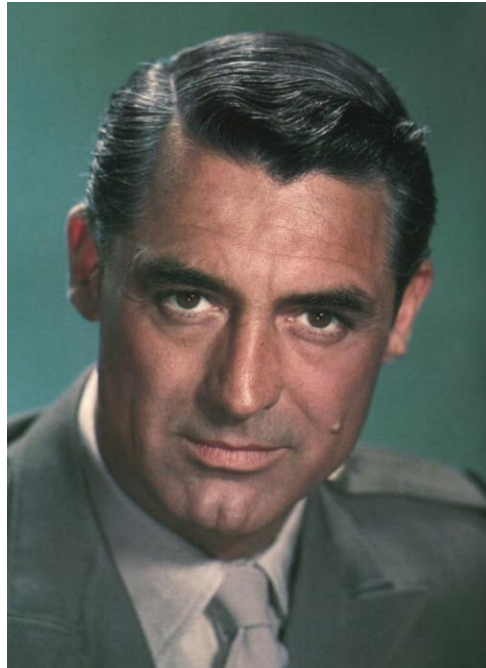
PREVIOUS PAGE: TOP: Greta Garbo and Robert Taylor prepare to shoot a dramatic scene from *Camille* (1936), arguably Garbo's greatest filmic achievement. Owing to Louis B. Mayer's edict that stars are not born, they are made, Mayer's advice to Garbo upon her arrival from Sweden was "*Americans don't like their women fat, and get your teeth fixed!*"

RIGHT: Sophia Loren in a typical sultry pose. Dubbed the 'Italian Cinderella' Loren's fast track to fame was secured after she married producer Carlo Ponti, whose intercontinental influence helped propel her career to meteoric heights.

THIS PAGE: TOP: The 'fifth' Warner Brother - Bette Davis, aptly nicknamed for her supreme reign at the studio throughout the 1940s. Davis began her career on a disastrous note at Universal, was fired and almost didn't make it to the Warner back lot. A persistent George Arliss, then the studio's biggest star, demanded she be cast opposite him in *The Man Who Played God* (1932). Over the next few years, Davis fought like hell for superior roles, but only after walking out on her studio contract in 1934 did Jack Warner take notice. Davis is seen here in arguably her greatest role, that of theatre diva, Margo Channing in Joseph Mankewicz's *All About Eve* (1950), after being dropped from her contract at WB. Said Davis of Mankewicz's insistence that she be cast in the part even when studio heads balked, "*I have to hand it to Joe. He resurrected me from the dead.*"

BOTTOM: Joan Crawford, MGM's perennial shop girl makes good was more restrained in her acting choices than Davis. A symbol of elegance, style and chic good taste, Crawford's star had slipped at MGM by the mid-1940s prompting her move to WB that stuck in Davis' craw, particularly after Jack Warner took an interest in molding Crawford's career over hers. For the rest of their lives, Davis and Crawford remained bitter enemies, venting their mutual hatred of one another in Bob Aldrich's classic grand guignol: *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962). Stars of Davis and Crawford's magnitude no longer exist in our cinema firmament but the intensity of each lady's performances continues to cast its giant shadow in renewed audience admiration.





ABOVE: Male stars of the first magnitude that require no introduction. Even if you've never seen any of their movies, it is impossible to mistake John Wayne for Cary Grant or James Stewart for the other two. Stars from Hollywood's golden age were selected primarily for their uniqueness as opposed to today's cookie cutter approach to fame, where celebrities tend to mimic and actually physically look like one another.

LEFT: John Wayne's career began as a extra in 1929 and continued through 400 movies until the late 1960s. Despite never having served in the military, his iconography as a heroic western star remains indelibly etched with the very essence of what it means to be an American. When asked by a reporter what his motivation was for a particular scene, Wayne coolly replied, "*To remember my lines and make it through the set without bumping into any furniture!*"

MIDDLE: Born Archibald Leach in England, Cary Grant's early childhood was spent in a travelling circus where he perfected his sense of acrobatic timing. The personification of nonchalance and seemingly effortless male sophistication, Grant built his career on the blurring of the lines between his own self and his on camera image. At his funeral in 1986 long time friend Billy Wilder commented that "*The model is gone. Who can we emulate now?*" *Who indeed?*

RIGHT: James Stewart's heartfelt everyman graces our living rooms each Christmas in Frank Capra's *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946). An unassuming, regal gentleman of the old school, Stewart never failed to live up to audiences expectations and, as such, enjoyed a prolific career that spanned nearly fifty years. Like Grant, Stewart was a favorite star of director Alfred Hitchcock. Whether intensely searching for his son in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956) or simply reading a poignant poem about his deceased dog on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson, Stewart gave every performance his all with simplicity and humanity. In accepting his honorary Oscar in 1984, Stewart saved his most touching thank you for the end. "*And last, to the audience. You dear sweet people. Thank you. You've given me a wonderful life.*" Stewart's humility is a quality quite lacking in today's celebrity culture; replaced, it seems by a sense of entitlement for fame and riches.

To be certain, stars did have lives removed from their press releases. Occasionally these were exploited to good effect in gossip columns. Rags to riches overnight success helped to perpetuate Hollywood's dreamland myth that even today finds fuel in the American dream; adding believability for the average star gazer that their own fame and/or immortality might not be far behind. Television programming like *American Idol* and *America's Got Talent* has simply taken the next inevitable step in perpetuating that myth and dream.

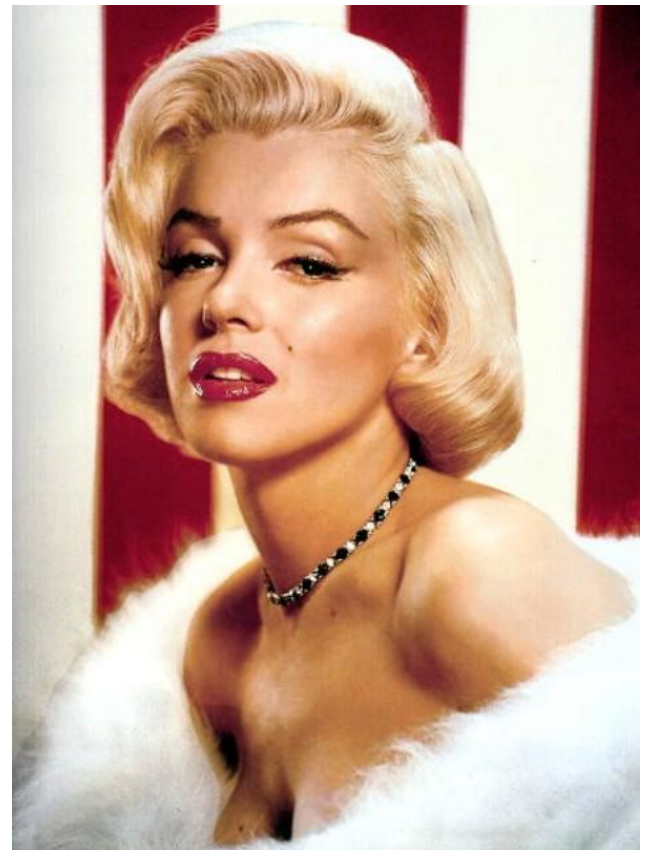
For the most part the birth of stardom remains a mystery to the world beyond Hollywood, as much as stardom's fleeting longevity continues to be for its human guinea pigs. Then, as it is today, stardom's only concern is with the immediate. What mattered most for the public's

voracious appetite was that a star's ability to generate timelessness in a timely manner remained theirs to own. Some stars, like Marilyn Monroe or James Dean, were galvanized by personal tragedy and untimely deaths. Others, like James Stewart or Bing Crosby, have since become renewable commodities, thanks to perennial television broadcasts of their holiday classics *White Christmas* and *It's A Wonderful Life*.

The talent scout of yesteryear was prided on seeking out such unique diamonds in the rough. Buffing out that roughness fell to the responsibility of expert tutelage inside a studio system. After months, sometimes years, of in-house training, the flesh and blood mortal emerged from this artistic cocoon as a symbolic paragon of virtuous humanity. Technically proficient in the art of making it all look too easy and completely natural, at least on the surface, stars were the embodiment of human perfection. They were never ill-mannered or bad tempered. They exuded grace, elegance, charm, and what seemed to be an innately genuine appreciation for their fans.

If any portion of a star's private life was made public, it was usually a garbled translation put forth in carefully sanctioned studio junkets that had been seamlessly blended with detailed fabrications in support of their own myth. Private lives were as carefully and cleverly orchestrated by the studio as highly publicized extensions of a stars' on screen performances. Nothing was left to chance.

TOP: The blonde that gentlemen preferred. So indelible is Marilyn Monroe's iconography as a sex symbol that even 50 years after her death today's starlets go through variations of their own 'Marilyn' phase in the hopes that some of Monroe's old time glamour will rub off on them. Despite such high hopes, no new starlet has managed to recapture Monroe's essential smoldering quality. MIDDLE: Monroe's iconic 'Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend' vs. Madonna's garish recreation for her 'Material Girl' music video. BOTTOM: The late Anna Nicole Smith toyed with her own Monroe image that became gross parody instead of mere cheap flattery.





The price of admission into this land of indoctrinated make-believe for the budding new talent was undoubtedly a name change. Hence, Archibald Leach became Cary Grant; Francis Gumm – Judy Garland; and so on and so forth. Any harsh or unflattering personal history prior to that name change was expunged or concealed. Once stardom took hold the studio did everything in their power to maintain the façade. If any indiscretion proved too great to cover up the studio disassociated itself from that star. As a result, few stars overstepped the boundaries of decency and decorum to the point where their image would irreversibly suffer.



However, between the studio system's demise in 1960 and our contemporary state of pop culture Babylon there has been a complete inversion of these principles behind stardom. Instead of going through a transitional period from old to new stardom, yesterday's star has morphed into today's celebrity. Robbed of their cloistered and concocted existence today's celebrities have had to fend publicly for themselves; increasingly scrutinized, criticized and even ravaged by the press coverage they receive. Cover stories, once the stars' best friend, have almost universally become their less than flattering nemesis.

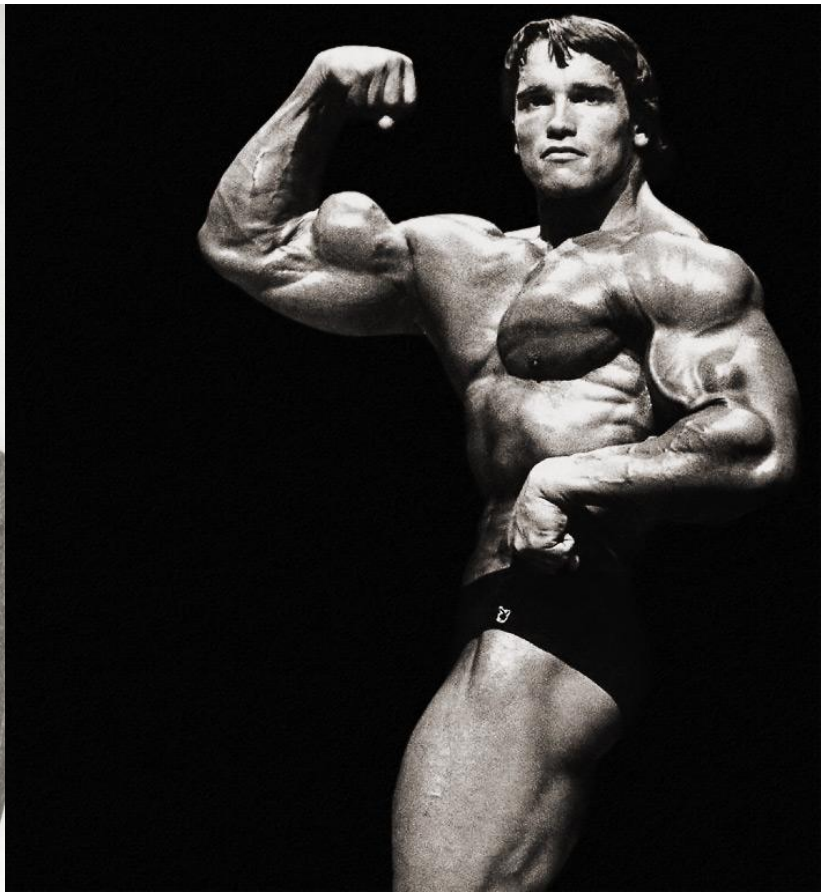


Minus the built in guarantees of protection associated with long term studio contracts and in-house training, today's celebrity has been forced to indulge the gamut of tabloid sensationalism in order to keep their public profiles and careers alive. Compulsory bonds between talent and stardom have been dissolved. As a result, the hit or miss probability

LEFT: The greatest stars have an elusive, timeless appeal that is hard to define. What made Audrey Hepburn (TOP), Elizabeth Taylor (MIDDLE) and Gene Tierney (BOTTOM) popular in their own time has since ensconced their memories into our collective consciousness for all time.

Beauty is but one tangible asset that many of the classic stars had in common; though not all. And there are plenty of men and women today, either in Hollywood or elsewhere who are stunning examples of physical perfection that will never attain the sort of stardom such legends did.

True enough, the studio system was responsible for this manufactured glamour, and while tastes in hairstyles and couture have changed over the decades, the iconography of true stardom has proven to be an eternal for the ages.



ABOVE: Evoking masculinity in the movies often meant that male stars adopted the tough guy persona to satisfy their fans. Just what defined machismo in the movies was open for discussion. In the 1940s, Humphrey Bogart's stiff lipped, hard bitten, careworn loner was perceived as the height of masculinity. Men wanted to be like him and women swooned at the devil-may-care way he dispatched both his enemies and the endless parade of on screen ladies who attempted - largely unsuccessfully - to seduce him to their will.

Bogie may not have needed Arnold Schwarzenegger's muscles to conquer his audience, but in the years of Ronald Regan's presidency, no mere mortal would suffice. To conquer the world bulging biceps and a washboard stomach one could bounce quarters off were enviable requirements. Schwarzenegger may not have been the first muscle man to break into the movies (that honor belongs to bodybuilder Steve Reeves in the 1950s) but his influence on movie culture and society as a whole cannot be underestimated. Following the release of *Pumping Iron* (1977), bodybuilding became elevated from the relative obscurity of a freak show to a mainstream fitness craze that men continue to embrace to this day.

In Schwarzenegger's wake came an army of muscle headed knock offs on the big screen; Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dolf Lundgren and Steven Segal among them. Sylvester Stallone transformed himself into the closest Schwarzenegger imitation, continuing the *Rocky* franchise that had made him justly famous in the 70s, and also introducing us to the character of John Rambo. By the numbers, Bogart outnumbers Schwarzenegger for movie roles, but the influence of each man forever changed the landscape of manly pursuits in American movies.

of achieving and maintaining “celebrity status” has helped to populate an artistic landscape where only the most outlandish are able to survive.

The built in angst of fame has always been that it is fleeting. However, past fame was considerably more durable. The single most perennial favorite among today's aspiring divas for this sort of cheapened flattery is undoubtedly Marilyn Monroe. From the late Anna Nicole Smith to Madonna, in gross caricatures and mannerisms, dress and gregarious parody, Monroe's legacy as a sex bomb has become a chronic regurgitation for starlets. Yet, what eludes all who aspire to emulate Monroe is the very essence of Monroe herself; that intangible



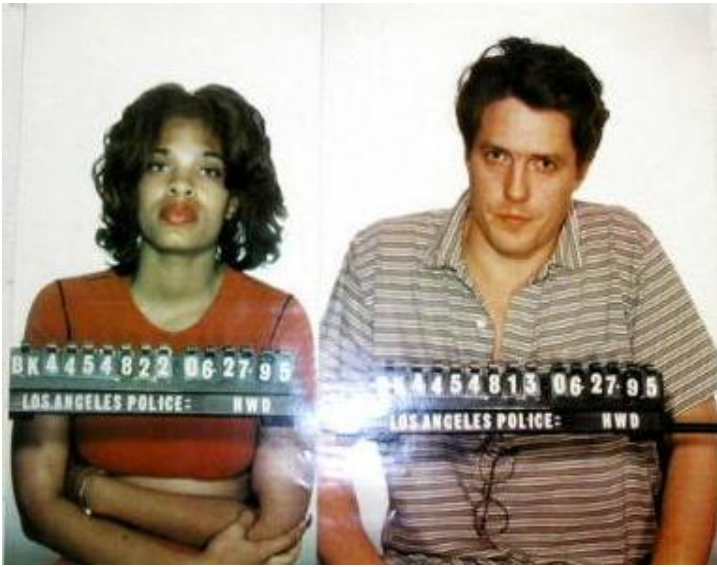
CELEBRITY CULTURE: Where stardom and pop culture diverge. Today's celebrities lack the failsafe of the golden age star system to secure and maintain their careers. In absence of a guiding hand to manage them properly, today's aspiring wannabes find themselves forced to compete in the 'flesh circus'.

TOP LEFT: Rose McGowan arrives on the red carpet with singer Marilyn Manson barely wearing a dress made of braided twine. MIDDLE: Courtney Love's penchant for shock value seems almost tame when compared to other women of her vintage like Jennifer Lopez. The sad reality today is that Love is considered the precursory trend setter to celebrity raunch that today permeates virtually all aspects of female fame in Hollywood. RIGHT: Christina Aguilera disrobes to shoot a music video; her artistry as a songstress taking a backstage to how voluptuous she can look in only a towel.

quality that instantly establishes a great distance between her and the everyday and perpetuates her inimitable mystique.

Paralleling the brief period in which today's celebrity is expected to "make a name" for themselves, is the point of distinction that, in its very essence, today's popularity lacks the resiliency of yesteryear's fame. Popularity diverges from a flashpoint of spontaneous combustion between a skilled publicist and a mediocre story that has been blown out of proportion. For example, today's celebrity is often featured in intimate details about their weddings, honeymoons, infidelities and divorces. During the golden age of stardom, these points of interest would have been footnotes instead of focal points. Regrettably, today's rapid stamp of cookie-cutter celebrity and faux stardom has forced celebrities to achieve their fifteen minutes by whatever means possible before being cast aside in favor of the next disposable property.

As a result, today's celebrity appears, not only to relish scandal, but seem more at home when awash in it – more human in an inhumane sort of deconstruction that is two parts tactless extrovert and one part deliberate reprobate. Hence, while many an old time star has found both



THE UGLY SIDE OF FAME: With so much attention paid their personal lives, one would think that the lives led by today's celebrities would become more circumspect lest some paparazzi steal a moment when the veil of perfection was allowed to slip. In fact, the opposite has been true with celebrities increasing shaming themselves in public under the most embarrassing of circumstances.

LEFT: After the release of *Four Weddings and A Funeral* (1994), British star Hugh Grant was internationally hailed as a hot new leading man. His film career assured and, with a personal romantic attachment to then, supermodel Elizabeth Hurley, Grant was on the fast track to somewhere when a tabloid story broke about him being nabbed by police for soliciting Hollywood Blvd. prostitute Divine Brown. Despite a few more film roles, Grant's personal and professional life did not survive this derailment.

RIGHT: Lindsay Lohan's personal life is a train wreck. A one-time protégée of the Disney regime under Michael Eisner (1989-2002), Lohan skyrocketed to fame via a recording career and several contemporary film remakes of such Disney classics as *The Parent Trap* (1998) and *Herbie: Fully Reloaded* (2000). All set to move from child star to adult performer, Lohan sabotaged her own career, first with a chronic addiction to pills and booze, then by repeatedly winding up in court on charges stemming from a 2006 DUI charge. Most recently a tearful Lohan was sentenced to 90 days in jail for a parole violation. Tabloid journal TMZ later revealed the words 'fuck you' painted on her middle finger that Lohan frequently held to her face while the judge presiding over her case reviewed the charges and passed sentencing.

the time and interest to pen their memoirs, today's celebrity quickly discovers an insufficient body of professional work to sustain such a biography.

As complicit observers to this force-fed consumption of outrageousness, the layering of what would otherwise be considered unacceptable behavior by anyone else, has assimilated celebrity antics as acceptable craziness in our media driven culture. We expect celebrities to be obnoxious. We find nothing shocking or out of order when they start fist fights in nightclubs or are photographed in the company of under aged prostitutes. In fact, as consumers of celebrity culture, we have come to expect so very little from our celebrities that when they reveal to us an ability to disappoint or disgust – perhaps even beyond our own modest expectations – the sycophantic exhilaration generated by the fallout of their actions is akin to that fan based rabid fascination once reserved for and generated by a movie premiere.

To be certain, and still to be clearer, classic stars rarely lived up to the banana oil of studio sanctioned PR. Some, like Ingrid Bergman, fell from grace, were given a cooling off period then resurrected anew. Others, like silent matinee idol John Gilbert were cast into the abyss of forgotten has-beens, never to return. In the face of such magnificently obtuse fiction no mere mortal could hope to compete.



WHAT CAUSE HOLLYWOOD?: The Academy Awards have long since been a public forum where celebrities feel right at home championing their causes. Misguided as these outbursts now seem, at the time they were met with indifference and odd compassion by the press. In 1970, a bit player, Sacheen Littlefeather declined Marlon Brando's Oscar win for Best Actor in *The Godfather* citing Brando's own condemnation of the Academy for its treatment of Native Americans in movies. The statement received sneers and hisses from the audience.

In 1978 Vanessa Redgrave preached to continue her fight against anti-Semitism around the world for which she was publicly booed from the stage. Moments later, screenwriter Paddy Chayevsky approached the podium to offer his opinion on the debacle. *"I am sick and tired, personal opinion of course, of people using the Academy to promote their own causes. I would suggest to Ms. Redgrave that her winning an Oscar was not a pivotal moment in history and a simple thank you would have sufficed."*

In 2003, documentary film maker Michael Moore used his Oscar acceptance speech for *Bowling for Columbine* to accuse President George W. Bush of being a war mongering 'fictitious' leader shouting *"Shame on you, Mr. Bush!"* to a packed auditorium of largely indifferent attendees. To break the ice, MC Steve Martin returned to the stage moments after Moore's speech, suggesting that the teamsters were about to load Moore into the trunk of his limo for the ride home.

Yet what is missing from today's celebrity is not merely the essence of living the fairy tale, but a complete lack of interest bordering on unwillingness to even emulate the possibility for the general public. Far from being role models, today's celebrities most often seem to delight in flaunting their impervious Teflon coating against any and all moral and legal ethics. As far as they are concerned, the rules simply do not apply to them. The new *laissez faire* attitude that has debased freedom of speech to embody any provocation that might reek of a good piece of scandal, has liberated today's celebrity into a foot-in-mouth existence of trivial sound bites.

Yet, the defiant conviction of postmodern celebrity pales behind the power of stardom. The ability of today's celebrity to achieve a note of distinction goes against the contemporary grain of postmodern amnesia and cannot find originality in a world of simulacrum. As a result, today's celebrity is neither all powerful nor iconic.

Perhaps the most telling example of celebrity decline derives with Michael Moore and his *Fahrenheit 911* (2003). Designed as muckraking to topple the prospects for a second term presidency for George W. Bush, the film did little to sway young voters. Neither did Moore's subsequent campus campaigning for incumbent John Kerry with free pre-screenings of the film. Instead, the reinstatement of the President served to reiterate the point that, when proclaiming their own self worth and importance on the world stage, today's celebrity has an over-inflated opinion of themselves.

The point of distinction between stars and celebrities is therefore not hinged on how successful personal esthetics, tastes and attitudes are in catching the public interest, but rather in how long afterward these same esthetics spark renewal and consideration. Movie stars from the 1920s, 30s, 40s and possibly even the 1950s retain their ability to inspire new generations, primarily because the talent in front of the camera continues to offer only glimpses into that shadowy world beyond the footlights.

Exposed on the nightly news and in entertainment-themed tabloid shows; bombarded with the ever gossipy, though vapid and self-deprecating sound bites from celebrities themselves – often too incoherent to conceive that the concept of “less is more” might apply to them – , and splashed incriminatingly on the covers of tabloid rags, the proliferation of celebrity culture has made the essence of star quality its black hole; unattainable in a world of one-hit wonders and twenty-minute disposables. There is nothing left in the world of celebrity but an implosion of its already highly unstable existence. The world of film, chained to and damaged by its problematic reliance on celebrity culture, may eventually find new ways to recover its own dignity and ultimately survive.

BELOW: WHEN HOLLYWOOD WAS SHINY AND NEW. In 1944, MGM Raja, L.B. Mayer gathered his stars together for this impressive portrait - a glittering exemplar of the entertainment value the studio wielded during its heyday. This photograph represents the largest assemblage of star power ever brought together for a single portrait. The names are many and distinguished.

