

## The Communal Instinct

Ever since Hollywood was first colonized in the early twentieth century by movie entrepreneurs and their supporting casts, it has been far more than a geographical entity. It represents, at least in the popular culture, an elite society that shares not just an art form but sensibilities, political values, philanthropic causes, and friendships; it is a magic circle of celebrated studio executives, stars, directors, and other insiders.

Steven Spielberg, in discussing the community in 1978, explained, “We see each other when it is convenient and we exchange screenplays, make comments of each other’s rough cuts. . . . We spend a lot of time gossiping, speculating what the business is going to be like twenty years from now.”

A top European executive stationed in Hollywood in 2001 described it in terms of a “feudal system”: “A small number of princes, completely obsessed with personal loyalty, enter into temporary alliances to control territories, including stars and sequel rights,” and then each “recruits mercenaries to do battle for them.” Even those on the less glamorous side of Hollywood, by virtue of working for a studio and their presumed prox-

imity to acclaimed stars, can claim to be part of the universe that creates the world's entertainment—a benefit unique to Hollywood.

As peripatetic and informal as this social intercourse appears, it has profound consequences for the movie business. Hollywood studio executives are often guided in their decisions of which movies to make not just by financial considerations but also by a desire to solidify their standing in this community of celebrities.

The boundaries of the Hollywood community, real or imagined, were shaped partly in response to the outsiders who besieged it during its first half century. Some outsiders, such as the lawyers for the Edison Trust, wanted to garner a share of its profits, while others, such as the Catholic Legion of Decency, wanted to regulate the morality reflected in its movies. There were also politicians who attempted to limit the studios' power over independent theaters; government agencies, such as the Office of War Information, who wanted to use its films for propaganda; and union leaders who wanted to control its work practices.

Many of these intrusions were laced with anti-Semitism. Congressman Martin Dies, who would later steer the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAAC) to investigate a “hotbed of communism” in the movie industry, called for scrutiny of Hollywood on the grounds that “most of the producers were Jewish.” Nor were the references to the religion of the leaders of the Hollywood community limited to demagogic politicians. Intellectuals also carped about the fact that the Jewish moguls, through their control of studios, were determining a large part of American culture. F. Scott Fitzgerald, in this regard, once proclaimed Hollywood “a Jewish holiday, a Gentile’s tragedy.”

The nascent Hollywood studio owners, under siege, sought ways to shield themselves against outside intrusions on their new domain. One of their strategies was to place family members and cronies from their old neighborhoods in positions of power in their studios. (Nepotism had some great advantages: if relatives and friends failed to meet the test of personal loyalty, they could be disposed of with the same arbitrariness with which they had been hired.) At Columbia Pictures, for example, mogul Harry Cohn employed his three brothers, Jack, Max, and Nathan, and a neighborhood friend, Sam Briskin, to run the company. Briskin in turn hired his brother, Irving, and his two brothers-in-law, Abe Schneider and Leo Jaffe. When Cohn departed, Schneider became president and hired

his own son, Bert Schneider, as a production executive. Jaffe became chairman and hired his sons, Ira and Stanley, as top executives.

At Warner Bros., the four original Warner brothers hired more than a dozen relatives, many of them in-laws, such as Mervyn LeRoy, who at the age of twenty-four became the “boy wonder” of the studio and went on to direct more than seventy Warners movies. At Universal, Carl Laemmle appointed his son, Junior, to run the studio on his twenty-first birthday; and at MGM, Louis B. Mayer turned over much of the production to his son-in-law David O. Selznick—leading *Variety* to pen the irresistible headline “The Son-in-Law Also Rises”—and later helped another son-in-law, William Goetz, become head of the newly merged Universal International studio. When producer-financier Joseph M. Schenck took over United Artists in 1924, he had only three stars under contract: Norma Talmadge, his wife; Constance Talmadge, his wife’s sister; and Buster Keaton, his brother-in-law.

The studio owners also tended to rely on kin and cronies to deal discreetly with recalcitrant unions, congressional investigations, government agencies, and other behind-the-scenes problems. Lawyers such as Sidney Korshak, bankers such as Serge Semenenko, and rabbis such as Edgar Maguin became part of their extended community.

To the extent that nepotism became—and continues to be—an accepted part of the Hollywood community, it served to strengthen the value of personal loyalty. Even Rupert Murdoch, who dedicated himself to building a highly efficient company on three continents, has been quoted as saying, “I am a great believer in nepotism.” But it also exacts a cost. As a consequence of appointing people on the basis of personal relationships, the community depreciates the value placed on pure merit. Actors, directors, and writers often assume that their getting assignments depends more on personal liaisons than on talent. Failure to be chosen can then be explained, as it was in David Lynch’s movie about Hollywood, *Mulholland Drive*, as the result of the sexual, drug-dealing, or other hidden connections a rival has with studio executives. Nepotism, to the extent that it is accepted, leads aspirants to seek to cultivate helpful connections rather than to depend on developing their talent.

To deal with attacks on its legitimacy as an arbiter of popular culture, the community adopted a strategy of self-celebration that continues to flourish. In 1928 Louis B. Mayer suggested that the studios set up a

prestigious-sounding unit, called the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Science, to bestow annual awards on films and thereby “establish the industry in the public’s mind as a respectable institution.” The result was the first Academy Awards presentation, in which statuettes called Oscars were handed out to the stars, directors, and other representatives under contract to the studios. The subsequently annual black-tie show—replete with scripted speeches by stars, tearful acceptances, promotional clips from movies, and eulogies—has been successful enough to become one of the televised highlights of the year and has spawned numerous other award ceremonies, such as the Golden Globe Awards, New York Film Critics Circle Awards, and the Hollywood Film Festival Awards.

Indeed, the value of public self-congratulation has become so incalculated in the Hollywood culture that one producer carpingly complained, “These ceremonies have taken over our social life. Almost every week we get into our formal gear, push through a gauntlet of paparazzi to get to some ballroom, give ourselves awards for everything from movies to lifetime achievements, and then applaud ourselves.” Even the green-lighting process has been affected by the spirit of self-celebration, as studio executives find themselves looking for projects that—by touching on social, political, environmental, or cultural issues—have the potential to be award magnets, even if the films lack the potential for making great financial profits.

The community also sanctions, and often lobbies for, movies that express artistic values rather than purely commercial ones. The community’s penchant for seeing itself as engaged in a serious art form took on great momentum during World War II with the influx of refugees to Hollywood from European film and art centers. Unlike the industry’s pioneers, who had little formal education or artistic training, the new arrivals—such as Michael Curtiz, Billy Wilder, Fritz Lang, Anatole Litvak, and Otto Preminger—had cosmopolitan backgrounds and substantial cultural credentials, having already made impressive films in Europe. Many of these exiles found Hollywood, if not entirely devoid of culture, at least a far cry from paradise. To bon vivant producer Sam Spiegel, it was merely “a factory in the sun”; to socialist Bertolt Brecht, it was the “marketplace of lies.” Whatever their misgivings, many not only retained their confidence in themselves as artists but brought this confidence to the community. They had been schooled in techniques that

mirrored avant-garde movements in the art world, such as expressionism and surrealism, and the value they placed on “cinema” as a legitimate art form gradually became part of the Hollywood vocabulary. The most common explanation given by publicity people for almost any Hollywood decision is “artistic reasons.” For example, when Tom Cruise turned down a starring role in *Cold Mountain*, he said through a spokesperson that he had decided against the film for artistic reasons, not financial ones.

The collapse of the studio system also radically changed the social landscape of the community. As has been noted earlier, a large portion of the wealth that had formerly gone to the studios now began flowing to the stars, directors, writers, and musicians. Their multimillion-dollar paychecks for a single movie now often exceed the annual compensation top studio executives receive. This radical redistribution of wealth in Hollywood has resulted in new elites whose values form a critical part of the new system’s social logic.

## The New Elites

### *The Stars*

The Hollywood community has long drawn much of its allure from star actors. Initially, before the movie industry moved to the sunnier and less litigious environment of Southern California, lead actors did not necessarily have public personas; indeed, their names often were not even mentioned in the introductory credits of films. Instead of attempting to brand the actors in the public mind, the studios of the early 1900s branded their products with their own names. The first celebrated movie actress, Florence Lawrence, was referred to in press releases as “the Biograph Girl” while she worked for Biograph Pictures; after she was hired in 1909 by Carl Laemmle for his company, IMP (Independent Motion Pictures), she became “the IMP Girl.”

The creation of stars with names, albeit often invented names, was partly undertaken by the studios themselves as a tactic to defend against the lawsuits that had been filed by the Edison Trust. In disputing the Trust’s claim that the value of movies proceeded from the recording devices that Thomas Edison had patented, filmmakers argued that their

movies achieved their commercial value from the actors who starred in them. To advance their position in the court of public opinion, they began featuring named actors on posters, ads, and marquees—and, by doing so, conferring instant celebrity status on them. Mary Pickford, for example, quickly became “Little Mary,” and other such star brand names followed.

By the time the moguls organized their studios in California, the star system was in full force. Under this arrangement, the studios helped create public personas for their stars by typecasting them in roles and publicizing their on-screen personalities. By establishing stars as brands in the popular imagination, studios enhanced their own position (and profit), since the stars remained bound by long-term contracts, no matter how popular they became.

Under this arrangement, brand-name actors were effectively the property of the studios, just as Mickey Mouse, Pluto, and the other created characters in Disney’s cartoons were the property of his animation studio. Despite the conceptual similarity, and their legal bondage, however, actors did have at least one advantage over cartoon characters: they could use their celebrity status to empower themselves within the Hollywood community, even if it was only by attending dinners, picnics, and other social functions given by those with power, such as William Randolph Hearst.

The advent of sound movies in the late 1920s changed the pool from which stars were drawn. With silent movies, stars had only to look the part. They could be ex-*rodeo* cowboys, ex-stuntmen, ex-models, or ex-vaudeville hoofers. With talkies, stars had to sound as well as look the part, both on and off the screen. For the studios, this requisite meant that new stars had to be recruited with vocal abilities, and that meant drawing largely from the legitimate theater in New York, Chicago, and London.

The new technology, by giving actors voices rather than captions, also elevated their status. Their screen characters, which the public was encouraged to take for their own characters, could now be witty, sassy, coquettish, moving, and, with the aid of the right script, politically rousing. So could their off-screen personas display these attributes on at least two other voice-driven media: radio—which by the 1930s had an immensely powerful hold on the American imagination—and newsreels, which then had a captive audience of over half the population in theaters. Though much of this entertainment news was a scripted product of the studios’

own publicity machines, it nevertheless gave the stars themselves tremendous exposure, as did their sought-after appearances at charity events, political rallies, and society parties. They became the public face of Hollywood.

Unlike the ex-cowboys, ex-stuntmen, mimes, and other silent-screen stars whom they replaced, the voiced actors were also in a position to exert more control over their public personas—and, with their public acclaim, were increasingly motivated to take advantage of their public voices. Studio executives still had the power to edit what their stars said both in their films and in their publicity appearances, but the resentment engendered among the stars, who were becoming furious in their own right, became increasingly taxing to the goodwill on which the community relied. For example, in 1936, when Academy Award–winning actress Bette Davis rejected a role, her studio successfully sued her for breach of contract, arguing, as Jack Warner testified at the trial, that the studio had created her out of “almost obscurity.” Davis had no choice but to go back to work for Warner Bros., but the studio’s Dr. Frankenstein–like claim of creation did not sit well with Hollywood actors. Nor did the clause in their contracts that automatically extended the length of their term of service to the studio if they failed to work for any reason. If a star rebelled, as Olivia De Havilland did at one point, refusing to work on a film at Warner Bros., no other studio would employ her, out of concern that it would be sued for abetting contractual evasion. In 1944 a California court, finding in De Havilland’s favor, declared the extension clause in the studio contract invalid on the grounds that it constituted “involuntary servitude.” This decision spelled the beginning of the end of the stars’ chattel status.

After the studio system ended and its moguls were replaced by corporate conglomerates, stars became the dominant force in the Hollywood community. Their compensation, spurred on by bidding wars between studios and independent producers, rose astronomically. By 2003, the ranking stars were not only receiving fees of more than \$20 million per film and multimillion-dollar perk packages but a substantial percentage of the rental income from film, video, DVD, television, product placements, and licensing rights when the film’s earnings exceeded their guaranteed fee. Arnold Schwarzenegger, it will be recalled, got for *Terminator 3* a fixed fee

of \$29.25 million, \$1.25 million for his perks, and 20 percent of all the gross revenues produced by the film worldwide after it reached its cash breakeven point. Such contracts can take months to negotiate, with the legal bill for a film often exceeding \$800,000.

The average earnings per film for the top ten stars of 2003 was roughly thirty times what the equivalent stars had earned in 1948 under the studio system (even *after* correcting for inflation). To be sure, less than 1 percent of the eight thousand actors in the Screen Actors Guild received multimillion-dollar fees, but for those few who do—and for the many others who aspire to such compensation—the size of those paychecks helps establish their place at the top of the community’s hierarchy.

With these enormous fees, stars began creating their own personal production companies, which became their fiefdoms. Tom Cruise’s production company, Cruise-Wagner Productions, for example, has coproduced not only several of Cruise’s own movies—such as *Vanilla Sky*, *Mission: Impossible*, and *The Last Samurai*—but some of the movies made by his former wife, Nicole Kidman, such as *The Others*. Many of these companies resemble miniature versions of the mogul-era studios. Just as studios frequently rented out their stars to other studios, these companies rent out their stars to other production companies. (Oak Productions, owned by Arnold Schwarzenegger, for example, acted as the “lender” of the star’s services to the film production of *Terminator 3*.) The studios then contractually arranged to pay the lender rather than the star for Schwarzenegger’s acting and publicity services. Through this arrangement, a star can delay paying his state and federal personal taxes if the lender delays disbursing the money. Typically, stars use these corporate vehicles to pay a large part of their personal retinue, which may include lawyers, accountants, business managers, script readers, body trainers, masseuses, bodyguards, pilots, and chefs. Not uncommonly, friends, wives, and relatives are listed on the corporation’s payroll as producers, writers, and consultants.

Even when not acting as coproducers, stars often have the contractual power to choose, or block, many of the people who will work on a production. In *Terminator 3*, for example, Schwarzenegger had the right to “preapprove” not only the director (Jonathan Mostow) and principal cast, but his hairdresser (Peter Toothbal), his makeup man (Jeff Dawn), his

driver (Howard Valesco), his stand-in (Dieter Rauter), his stunt double (Billy Lucas), the unit publicist (Sheryl Merin), his personal physician (Dr. Graham Waring), and his cook (Steve Hunter).

Stars can also lend their prestige to independent filmmakers as: for example, Tom Hanks did by acting as nominal producer of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and Robert Redford did in helping to found and sponsor the Sundance Film Festival (earning “special thanks” for numerous independent films such as *The Brothers McMullen*). Just the use of their names can put rising actors, directors, and technicians in the thrall of stars.

Stars generally expect allegiance and fealty in return for their support. They also often demand that those under their protection exercise extreme discretion, especially where their legend might be damaged by disclosures. Everyone involved in their movies, production companies, or employ is usually “NDA-ed,” that is, required to sign a binding nondisclosure agreement that rivals in strictness anything that existed at the height of the studio system—or in the CIA, for that matter. The producers, distributors, and even insurers are likewise required not to release unauthorized information. The producers of *Terminator 3*, for example, had to agree not to “release, disseminate, divulge, publish, or authorize or cause to be released, disseminated, divulged, or published (including, without limitation, by means of articles in newspapers or magazines or in books, whether fiction or nonfiction) any medical information or other material information that becomes available to their authorized representatives” about the star, Arnold Schwarzenegger. To ensure the stars’ control over their biographies, their contracts frequently prohibit any behind-the-scenes filming of them without their advance approval and give them effective veto power over the use of their photographs in advertisements and any publicity releases involving them.

Stars seek such protection over their public personas because, even if they may be skilled actors capable of playing many different parts, their earning power is largely predicated on their ability to fit a single image both on and off the screen. For example, after it was reported that his father, Charles Voyde Harrelson, had been imprisoned for multiple murders, including the contract killing of a federal judge, studios began casting Woody Harrelson—who had first made his name playing a genial TV bartender—in movies in which he played a prisoner or criminal (in-

cluding *Natural Born Killers*, *Palmetto*, *Wag the Dog*, *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, *Scorched*, and *Money Train*).

Despite the history of nepotism in other parts of Hollywood, the top stars usually achieve their standing entirely by dint of their own efforts. Few, if any, of today’s stars receiving fees of \$20 million—which in agents’ lingo qualifies them as “superstars”—came from privileged backgrounds, inherited wealth, or attended elite schools.

Most of these top stars also have had only limited formal education, having dropped out of college and even high school to pursue their careers. “What it does mean is this: early entry,” screenwriter William Goldman points out in his memoir of Hollywood. “And when you come into show business early, there is one simple truth that applies to one and all: the business takes over your life.”

Consider, for example, the careers of the ranking male superstars of the last decade of the twentieth century: Tom Hanks, Tom Cruise, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Harrison Ford, Mel Gibson, and John Travolta. They were all born to parents of only modest means. Their childhoods tended to be nomadic. None completed a four-year college. Thomas Cruise Mapother attended no fewer than fifteen different schools before dropping out of a Catholic seminary at the age of fifteen, and a public high school at eighteen. He then sought work as an actor and was cast as a teenager in *Endless Love*. Tom Hanks had a succession of stepparents and attended a series of grammar schools during his childhood. Dropping out of the California State University system, he took various bit acting parts before being cast in the television series *Bosom Buddies*. Harrison Ford, after being expelled from Ripon College in California, worked on a number of television series before a casting director chose him to be in *American Graffiti*.

As a teenager, Mel Gibson moved from Peekskill, New York, to New South Wales, Australia, because his father, who had won prize money on the quiz show *Jeopardy*, did not want Gibson to be drafted to fight in the war in Vietnam. In Australia, Gibson enrolled in Sydney’s National Institute of Dramatic Art and, after some minor roles, was cast because of his striking physical appearance as the lead in *Mad Max*.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, the son of an Austrian policeman, became through a highly disciplined exercise regime a world-champion bodybuilder, repeatedly winning the Mr. World title. In 1970 his physical as-

sets won him the title role in *Hercules in New York*, a low-budget exploitation film, under the pseudonym Arnold Strong. He then played himself in the documentary *Pumping Iron*, and finally, after five years of bit parts as muscle men and gym instructors, he landed the starring role in *Conan the Barbarian*, and, demonstrating a willingness to work through the night, if necessary, to help complete a shot, he became a favorite of such top action directors as James Cameron, Richard Fleischer, and John McTiernan.

The obvious importance of their looks notwithstanding, these actors succeeded in achieving stardom in the community not just because they looked the part—there exists at any given time in Hollywood a plethora of actors and models capable of fitting similar stereotypes—but also because they readily adopted the values of the community.

Paramount among these values is the “show-must-go-on” work ethic. “Superstars do not get where they are by throwing temperamental fits, malingering on the set, or not following direction,” explained the head of a top Hollywood talent agency. “Popular misconceptions notwithstanding, they succeeded by being hardworking, highly disciplined professionals.” For one thing, almost all films that use outside financing or equity partners need to obtain “essential-element” insurance on stars. This allows the producers the legal right to abandon the entire project if, for any reason, the stars are unable to complete the shooting of their parts and to get fully reimbursed for all the direct costs of the production from the insurer. If, for example, Arnold Schwarzenegger had been unable to finish shooting *Terminator 3*, the insurers would have had to pay \$168 million to the producers. Insurers will only provide such an essential-element policy if they are confident that the stars themselves have no history of medical, drug-taking, or psychological problems that might result in an inability to perform. To get insurance from Fireman’s Fund, Brad Pitt had to submit to independent drug testing during principal photography of *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (which he passed). The insurers also insist that productions agree to use doubles to film any action scenes that might result in even a sprained ankle, and even when not filming, stars must agree not to engage in any hazardous activity, such as piloting an airplane, riding a motorcycle, or water-skiing. While insurers cannot guard against all contingencies, they attempt to minimize their risk by

refusing to insure actors who have a history of temperamental behavior, depression, risk taking, or other problems.

If productions are unable to get such star insurance, they cannot get the completion bonds that banks and outside financiers require. If actors are not deemed insurable, then no matter how many honors they receive, they cannot be stars in films that require outside financing or coproducers. Nicole Kidman is a case in point. In 2000 she injured her knee during the filming of *Moulin Rouge!* in Australia, resulting in a \$5 million insurance loss, and then quit *Panic Room* in 2001, which led to the insurer having to pay \$7 million for the replacement actress (Jodie Foster). As a result, her public and critical acclaim notwithstanding, Miramax was initially unable to get insurance on her for its film *Cold Mountain*, which had a budget approaching \$100 million. To get such a policy, Kidman agreed to put \$1 million of her own salary in an escrow account that would be forfeited if she failed to maintain the production schedule and to use a stunt double for all scenes that the insurer considered potentially threatening to her knee. Insurers finally agreed to grant the policy only after a coproducer added another \$500,000 to the escrow account, and after the completion-bond company, International Film Guarantors, certified that “Kidman is fully aware that she must get through this picture without a problem. She fully understands this and will not allow anything to get in the way of her finishing this picture.”

Even when films are made without outside financing—and therefore do not require essential-element insurance—studios tend to put a high value on those stars who demonstrate by their actions that they “will not allow anything to get in the way” of completing films on time. Since it usually costs between \$100,000 and \$250,000 for every extra day of principal photography on a major film, studios have a powerful incentive to select performers who demonstrate early, and consistently, an ability to arrive punctually on the set whenever they are needed for makeup and other preparations, and remain as long as necessary, even under adverse conditions, to complete the day’s shooting. Reese Witherspoon, who began her acting career when she was fifteen, prided herself on arriving on the set of *Legally Blonde* at 6 A.M. to give makeup crews two and a half hours to prepare her look and remaining, if necessary, late into the night.

Producers, by the same logic, avoid using stars with a history of causing delays. Such a concern was dramatized in the 2002 movie *Simone*, which concerns the modern filmmaker's problem of relying on the cooperation of stars who may be tempestuous, capricious, or egocentric. When the narcissistic star of the movie within the movie, Nicola (Winona Ryder), delays shooting with her demands for a better trailer, producer-director Victor Taransky (Al Pacino) fires her. He ruefully explains to the studio head (Catherine Keener) that it used to be better in the old days of the studio system: "We always had stars, but they used to be our stars. We would tell them what to do, what to wear, who to date. They were under contract to us." While agreeing, the studio head demands that he either find a new star or quit the movie. Taransky solves the dilemma by creating a computer-generated composite of a star that incorporates the best features of such bygone luminaries as Marlene Dietrich, Audrey Hepburn, and Lauren Bacall.

The creation, named Simone, is then programmed to do whatever Taransky requires. By substituting a computer image for an actress, he is able to keep to the studio's production schedule, and as a result, the studio head suggests that they consider replacing all the other stars with simulations.

While the idea of computer-generated actors may seem like the answer to a studio prayer, in fact the studios (and their insurers) manage fairly well by finding stars who can be counted on to cooperate with them in avoiding delays on sets and locations. With the tacit help of the talent agencies, the studios weed out at an early stage those people, whatever their other acting virtues, who do not share the community's work ethic.

A second requisite for stardom is a willingness to "stay in character"—on television talk shows, in magazine interviews, during ceremonial hosting and award duties, and at all other public appearances. As a top Sony marketing executive said, "The consistency between their on-screen and offscreen image is what makes stars uniquely marketable." To accomplish this feat, stars often follow either scripts or talking points prepared by the studios' publicists to reinforce their movie personas. If they play romantic heroes on-screen, for example, they may have to find occasion to allude to liaisons that did not occur, perhaps even with a person whose sex they do not have a preference for.

Not only may they be called on in their scripted interviews to display

the false, but, to make it credible, they usually also have to conceal the real. It is no coincidence that the sly terms of art—for example, "twilight tandems" and "lavender marriages"—used to denote the phony personal relationships devised by the studios' publicists to conceal stars' homosexuality came in fashion during the era of the studio system. A prime example is Rock Hudson (born Roy Scherer), who died from AIDS in 1985. For more than thirty years, to preserve his image as a romantic lead in films such as *Pillow Talk*, *Magnificent Obsession*, and *Lower Come Back*, Hudson had—and was able—to conceal the homosexual relations of his private life, even though they were well known in the Hollywood community. By this public disguise he managed to stay in character as a strong, silent type of romantic hero. When unavoidable public circumstances, such as arrests or lawsuits, prevent actors from staying in character, their careers as stars are often severely damaged, if not destroyed. Winona Ryder's conviction for shoplifting in 2002 conflicted with the "innocent" persona that had been developed for her, and as a result, it became difficult to cast her in the roles that she had been playing up to that point.

A third requisite for stardom is a willingness to compromise to further the underlying business of Hollywood: deals. Talent agencies, independent production companies, and studios all act as "rainmakers" for these deals. To facilitate them, they often need actors to make concessions on their "quote," as agents call their established fee, or on their objections to the script, director, cast, or locations. If actors resist such accommodations, talent agencies can't put other clients in the "package," the production companies can't get the green light that frees them to develop other projects, and studio executives cannot fill their pipeline with future films. "If stars aren't players, this business simply does not work," the head of a talent agency explained. Talent agents consequently favor among their clients those they deem "team players," who will do what is required to advance projects, even if it means accepting unfavorable terms for themselves, over those who are rigid in their standards. Producers and studio executives also have a mutual interest in advancing "pragmatists," as one studio president termed them. Such stars frequently can be counted on in adverse circumstances. For example, when the budget of *Terminator 3* got into difficulties, Arnold Schwarzenegger offered to help finance the cost of reshooting scenes by deferring \$5 million of his own salary.



The performers who advance to the top rank of stardom therefore tend to have qualities that go far beyond their acting skills and physical appearance, foremost among these an ability to identify with the values of the Hollywood community. This virtue is often described in Academy Award presentations and other ceremonial testimonials as “professionalism.” So long as studios can recruit stars with this virtue, they need not resort to *Sirrone*-like simulations.

In return, stars introduce their own values to the Hollywood community. Consider, for example, the almost iconic value placed on private jets. Tom Wolfe’s description in his essay “The Ultimate Power” of private jets as “one of the last big objects that symbolize power” applies aptly to their use by movie stars. Tom Cruise’s Gulfstream IV jet, which cost \$28 million, is configured with three cabins and a Jacuzzi. John Travolta has not only a private jet but his own pilot’s license. Describing what is virtually a private airline, he said, “We always fly the Gulfstream with three pilots, including myself,” as well as “a flight engineer and one or two flight attendants. Most commercial airlines don’t have the flight-deck crew we have.” Stars who do not own jets frequently insist on having film productions charter them for their exclusive use during the filming of their movies. Schwarzenegger’s contract for *Terminator 3*, for example, specified that he “be provided with exclusive private jet transportation on a G-4SP for travel in North America and on a G-5 for travel overseas.”

Even when they are not filming, stars often get access to studio jets as a goodwill gesture. Gwyneth Paltrow explained that the New Line subsidiary of Time Warner gained favor with her by giving her and her dog a ride from New York to Los Angeles in its corporate jet in June 2002, saying, “It was just after September [11] and I had trepidation about flying out there and I wanted to bring my dog. So Bob Shay, who is the head of New Line who I love, sent me a plane, which made me feel very excited. So that was my payment [for *Goldmember*]. I got a one-way trip on a private plane.”

Studio executives quickly came to realize that private jets could be used to enhance their standing with the stars. For example, Robert Evans, who in 1972 was the head of Paramount, attempted to get Marlon Brando to attend the opening of *The Godfather* by making, as he put it, “an offer that even Marlon couldn’t refuse—a private jet for him and [his son] Christian.” (As it turned out, Brando did refuse it.) Steve Ross ap-

plied the same logic to justify purchasing a small fleet of private jets for Warner Bros. so they could be lent out to such stars as Clint Eastwood, Steven Spielberg, Barbra Streisand, and Madonna. David Wolper, a close business associate of Ross’s, explained, “Steve discovered the one perk you can give Madonna [is] not jewelry, limos, or grand hotel suites. That’s all peanuts. It is your corporate jet. That’s a business thing that glues [stars] to Time Warner.” He added, “The first thing those [former Warner Bros.] producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters did when they went to Columbia-Sony was to get a corporate jet.”

Once the stars established private jets as a totem of success, the symbol percolated down through the community to directors and others. For example, Barry Sonnenfeld, one of the top directors in Hollywood, brought the subject up when he appeared on David Letterman’s show in 2003, claiming that he spends a large part of his income chartering private jets to commute between his homes in East Hampton, New York, and Telluride, Colorado.

The now-central position of the stars in the Hollywood hierarchy ensures that whatever objects or causes they value will assume importance to the community at large. The stars’ gravitational pull, which in no small part stems from their shrewd appreciation of the who-gets-what-from-whom interdependence of Hollywood, helps determine the relative position of the directors, producers, writers, agents, and other key members in the community.

### *Directors*

Today directors, even more than stars, are crucial to the traffic in film production that energizes the Hollywood community. A movie can be made without a star—indeed, many of the most profitable movies do not have stars—but without a director, no production can get a green light from a studio. It will be recalled that directors did not always have such a pivotal role. In the studio-system era, directors were often no more than employees—and even the most celebrated directors of their day were often treated accordingly. At MGM, Louis B. Mayer had no compunction about punching directors like Erich von Stroheim and Charlie Chaplin in the face when they said things to him of which he disapproved. They were also part-time employees, generally arriving at the beginning of

principal photography, after the scripts had been developed, the parts cast, the technicians hired, the sets approved, and the musical numbers choreographed and rehearsed. They generally left at the conclusion of principal photography, which was often before the footage was edited, the soundtracks mixed, and the musical score created. The director's main job during principal photography was to keep the production on schedule by getting the actors to complete a fixed portion of the shooting script each day. The footage was then screened daily for the supervising studio executives, who ordered the directors to reshoot any scenes they were not satisfied with. If at any point studio executives assessed that the production was falling behind schedule, they ordered directors to speed up the process. And if directors were unable or unwilling to conform, which seldom happened, they were replaced.

There were, to be sure, notable exceptions, such as Orson Welles, who not only directed his first film, *Citizen Kane*, but cowrote, coproduced, coedited, and starred in it in 1941. But even such a phenomenon as Welles, who had his own acting and production company, the Mercury Players, was unable to retain control over his next film, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942). The studio, RKO, removed him after principal photography, bringing in new writers to rewrite his script, three new directors to reshoot scenes, and two new editors to cut the film according to the studio's dictates.

Directors in Europe, meanwhile, were enjoying a very different position, assuming authorship of the entire product from its initial concept to its final editing. In the European tradition, films were considered a work of art inseparable from their directors or, as the Paris journal *Cahier du Cinéma* called them, "auteurs." In the auteur theory that developed around them, directors, not the writers or actors, were alone responsible for the artistic achievement—or failure—of movies. When many of these auteur directors fled Europe to escape Hitler, they brought that concept with them to Hollywood.

After the collapse of the studio system, Hollywood directors greatly increased their role in the filmmaking process. The reorganized studios ceded them a much larger measure of control over the creative content of films, not because they were sudden converts to the European auteur theory, but because they had little choice. The stars, now emancipated from their contracts, insisted on prior approval of directors—as did outside fi-

nanciers, on whom the studios now heavily depended, and completion-bond guarantors, on whom the financiers depended. To get stars and money, studios now had to commit themselves to a particular director. Directors, making the most of their new leverage, began insisting on approval of the script and casting. The result was that studios could no longer replace directors, or any elements over which they had approval, without courting disaster. Even though studios reserved the right to make the final cut, by the mid-1950s directors such as John Ford, Howard Hawks, and George Stevens had a hand in the entire creative process, from script development in preproduction to editing, visual effects, and musical scoring in postproduction editing.

Like their European counterparts, today's directors also often act as both cowriters and coproducers. Even when writers receive full credit for the story and screenplay, directors often find ways of asserting their de facto authorship. Consider, for example, the 2002 movie *The Bourne Identity*. Robert Ludlum, the author of the 1980 novel of the same title and the 1988 television movie *The Bourne Identity*, as well as screenwriters Tony Gilroy and W. Blake Herron, received the official screenplay credit. But director Doug Liman took the even grander "A film by" credit for himself. In his DVD director's commentary, Liman asserted that while he "loved the book in high school" and spent more than two years acquiring Ludlum's rights to it, he "jettisoned pretty much everything in the book except the premise, not only to modernize it but to bring it in line with my politics, which are definitely left of center."

With the exception of screenwriters and book authors, most Hollywood participants have little reason to dispute the artistic conceit of directorial "authorship." Studios, for their part, find it convenient to have directors publicly credited with creative authorship, even when the credit rightfully belongs to someone else. Not only do directors serve as the effective lynchpin in organizing the cast and script, but they form a helpful buffer between the stars and the studio (and handy scapegoats if the film fails or receives poor notices). Talent agencies have a similar interest in promoting the concept of directorial authorship, as they can now use their director clients as the building blocks of "packages" that can include their stars, literary properties, writers, and other talent. For production companies, the notion of directorial authorship can lend further credence to the significance of a director's track record and become an ad-

ditional means of persuading investors to participate. Finally, reviewers find in directorial authorship a focus for their criticism and commentary. All these parties thus have independent but complementary reasons for lending their support to the cult of the director.

Directors themselves, of course, greatly profit from the idea of film authorship. Whereas in the studio system they rarely received more than \$80,000 for a film, salaries of more than \$4 million were common by 2003. Director John McTiernan was paid \$5.3 million for his work on the film *Basic*; Roger Donaldson received \$4.4 million for directing *The Reckless*; and Jonathan Mostow received almost \$5 million for directing *Terminator 3* (part of which was to be paid out of the fees for product placements in the movie).

In addition to earning more money, directors get bragging rights, especially with the advent of the director's commentary on the DVD. In many of these commentaries, directors impute to themselves Pygmalion-like powers to physically transform and control actors. Director Alan Pakula, for example, tells how after Meryl Streep had "literally" begged him on her hands and knees for the part of Sophie in *Sophie's Choice*, he had her go on a liquid diet until she lost ten pounds, undergo dental work to change her teeth, wear a wig, and speak her part in German, a language she did not understand. For *Against All Odds*, director Taylor Hackford claims that he physically transformed both Jeff Bridges, who was "a real porker," and his costar Rachel Ward, who looked "too soft." He had Bridges "lose thirty pounds" and wear eye pads and made Ward "cut her hair short." Conversely, director Adrian Lyne relates how, for his version of *Lolita*, he ordered his two stars, Jeremy Irons and Melanie Griffith, to gain weight and Irons to give up his smoking habit. For *The Bourne Identity*, Doug Liman claims that he directed his star Matt Damon to "bulk up" his body by undergoing a rigorous daily muscle-building regime for "three or four months." For *Eye of the Beholder*, director Stephan Elliott claims that he got his star Ewan McGregor "drunk on Cognac" to get a more intoxicated performance.

Hair, or the lack of it, is another way that directors now demonstrate their absolute power over their performers. Director Michael Catton-Jones said in his DVD commentary that he ordered Richard Gere to remove all his "facial hair" for *The Jackal*. For *Anna and the King*, director Andy Tennant had Chinese costar Ling Bai, who had been wearing her beauti-

ful hair down to her waist since she first arrived in America, "completely shave her head" for the purpose of a single scene. For *High Crimes*, director Carl Franklin asked the book's author, Joe Finder, to shave his head to earn a nonspeaking part in the film. And director Betty Thomas explains that she had all the black extras in *I Spy* shave their heads "because I thought it would be fun."

While directors may indeed exercise a great deal of puppeteering power and credit themselves in DVDs and television interviews with singular authorship, they also confront a tacit reality on the set: they need the cooperation of others—and, in particular, their stars—to complete their films on schedule. For the most part, they do not have the power to compel this cooperation. For example, they cannot fire their stars if they do not follow instructions. Nor, in practice, can they force them to do endless rehearsals and reshots. The typical contract limits a star's services to a finite number of weeks of principal photography, and usually only a week or so for preproduction rehearsals and postproduction reshoots. Arnold Schwarzenegger's contract for *Terminator 3* provided that he would make himself available for one week on a nonexclusive basis for rehearsals and five days for reshooting. Even attempting to press stars to perform in ways that they consider to be wrong or inappropriate can pose a great risk for directors' careers, since they depend on stars' prior approval of them for future projects.

There are also limits to what directors can demand from their other coworkers, such as their second-unit directors, who independently shoot their action sequences, and digital-effects subcontractors, who independently create many of their missing scenes. In theory they can order such sequences redone, but in practice any substantial reshooting of second-unit scenes and re-creation of digital material risks running up the budget, which, in turn, requires the approval of studio executives. As a result, the creation of a movie is very much a group effort.

Alexander Mackendrick, who directed the classic films *Sweet Smell of Success* and *The Ladykillers* in succession, made this point with great force. He explains that he could make movies as different as these two because "each was the product of its ensemble. Different writers: William Rose for 'Ladykillers,' Clifford Odets on 'Success'; different directors of photography, Otto Heller and James Wong Howe; different music, Boccherini and Bernstein; different actors, different locations." The fact of

two such disparate films, shot back-to-back by the same director, may not quite demonstrate, as Mackendrick provocatively concludes, that “the director makes no difference,” but it effectively debunks the claim of sole authorship by the director. Even a perfectionist like Stanley Kubrick, who can spend several years personally supervising every element of every shot of a film and ordering as many as sixty retakes, had ultimately to conform to stars Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman in *Eyes Wide Shut*, and even a director as powerful as Steven Spielberg, who effectively controls his own studio, acknowledges that his films are a “collaborative effort.”

For most directors, success depends on the ability to engineer the consent of others. For this task, directors’ skills must include the sort of diplomacy that allows them to get the participants to compromise their own views and collaborate as an ensemble for the duration of the production. Directors here are generally greatly aided if they can persuade writers, actors, and others in the production that their own vision is inalienably associated with the artistic integrity of the product and will be perceived as such by audiences, critics, and award presenters. “If actors believe we can win awards for them, they are much more likely to defer to our judgment,” one director explained. “The trick is building confidence.” In this sense, the projection of artistic integrity is essential to a director’s control.

To enhance this perception of directing as an art form with a distinct tradition, today’s directors frequently include in their films “homages” to past directors—such as Alfred Hitchcock, Federico Fellini, and John Ford—and discuss their films in interviews, at award ceremonies, and in film-studies lectures in the context of past classics. Indeed, at almost every turn, inside and outside the community, they work to lend an aura of aesthetic dignity to the community’s own perception of itself.

### *Agents*

With the disintegration of the studio system, a new player, the talent agent, moved from the community’s periphery to its center stage. Once studios no longer had actors under long-term contracts and had to competitively bid for their services, agents became vital intermediaries in the community. By the 1950s, agents such as Lew Wasserman were bundling their star actors together with directors, producers, and writers into pack-

ages for studios. Hollywood, by then in desperate competition with television, needed stars with name recognition, even if it meant delegating a large part of their casting to these agents. So the agents became not only stars’ representatives but their deal makers. They effectively took over from the studios the task of managing the careers of their star clients.

Some agents parlayed these prized relationships into high positions at studios. Agent Ted Ashley, for example, became Warner Bros.’ studio chief, agent David Begelman became president of Columbia Pictures, agent Ron Meyers took over as Universal’s head, and agent Michael Ovitz became Disney’s president. Other agents, meanwhile, became the executives of independent production companies, such as Paula Wagner at Cruise-Wagner Productions, Jack Rapke at Image Movers, and Gareth Wigan at the Iadd Company. Whether at talent agencies, studios, or independent production companies, these professionals performed essentially the same job: brokering an accommodation between a small group of star actors who were needed in movies for their name recognition and the directors who were necessary to arrange the movies’ financing and distribution. Whatever the title on their doors, they were essentially facilitators who met a basic need in the community: knitting together the services of powerful, idiosyncratic, and often temperamental individuals. To succeed at this delicate task, they had to maintain the confidence not only of the “talent” but also of the talent’s lawyers, business managers, insurers, and, in many cases, spouses and gurus.

By the end of the twentieth century, agents had established themselves as a formidable force in the Hollywood community. “In terms of sheer numbers, they not only dominate deal making, they dominate the press in Hollywood,” the former head of one studio said. In 2005 an estimated 6,000 agents were employed, representing some 120,000 clients.

Most of the profession’s fees are generated by a few dozen top agents who represent almost all the major stars. These “superagents,” as they are called in the trade press, are almost all partners at five major agencies—Creative Artists Agency (CAA), International Creative Management (ICM), William Morris, United Talent Agency (UTA), and Endeavor. CAA, which has the largest number of stars and directors, was alone involved in the negotiations of over half of all the movies produced by the studios in 2005.

The very nature of these agencies’ work, liaising between providers

and buyers of creative services, makes their agents the unofficial gatekeepers to the Hollywood community. It is the agents who customarily arrange their clients' agendas, setting up personal meetings, conference calls, business dinners, and other encounters. They provide convenient meeting places, sometimes offering their own offices and homes as well as selecting restaurants and clubs. They extend invitations to social events, such as screenings, cocktail parties, art openings, and philanthropic benefits.

Agents also act as confidants to their clients. Since they negotiate their clients' contracts, they are often privy to their financial situation, time commitments, and—if they require cast insurance—medical problems. Lew Wasserman, when he presided over MCA, provided a full-service ministry for clients. According to Peter Bart and Peter Guber, he even “mediated divorce settlements for superstar clients.”

In fulfilling their various responsibilities, agents frequently maintain working relationships with their clients' personal attorneys, business managers, tax consultants, real-estate agents, and other advisors. They often discreetly listen in on conference calls. And they are charged with getting informal dispensations for their clients on productions—special requests that can include accommodations and other benefits for their clients' lovers, trainers, gurus, personal dieticians, pet handlers, and other members of their entourage. As one top agent at Creative Artists Agency said, “There are very few secrets our clients have from us.”

Agents also often double as tacit public-relations representatives for their clients, supplying off-the-record items to *Variety* or *The Hollywood Reporter*. As a former studio head explained, “They are constantly whispering in the ear of the media whatever stories, true or false, best serve their clients.” Some agents also claim to hold particular sway over entertainment journalists thanks to their secret weapon: the power to reward with tempting screenwriter assignments. Michael Ovitz, when he headed CAA, was reported to have said: “I’m not worried about the press. All those guys want to write screenplays for Robert Redford.” Even if such conceits rarely have a basis in fact, to the extent that they give their clients a sense of protection from a hostile press, they serve to enhance agents' power in the community.

In their role as facilitators, agents may also help clients obtain services that only peripherally relate to their professional careers. Consider, for

example, Jay Moloney, a CAA agent who came to represent such star directors as Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese before he committed suicide in 1999. In 1986 Moloney, the son of screenwriter James Moloney, was hired at the age of twenty-one by CAA, where he worked for its chief executive, Michael Ovitz. Ovitz assigned him, among other things, the task of arranging table reservations for stars at Spago and other Hollywood restaurants owned by Wolfgang Puck. According to writer Nikki Finke, who spent thirty hours interviewing Moloney for her book on CAA, Moloney became “Puck’s unofficial reservations vetter, verifying for Spago’s maître d’ who was deserving of an A table on any given night.” When he was eventually made an agent at CAA, he and his guests, Finke writes, “hung out at Morton’s or Spago at dinner, the Peninsula Hotel for drinks, Matsuhisa for sushi,” they went “to Hawaii for golf or Colorado for white-water rafting or the Bahamas for a tan,” and he “rented a house in Santa Barbara where they would party when they tired of his Hollywood Hills and Malibu pads.” The services Moloney provided at these parties reportedly included obtaining cocaine and other drugs. Finke writes, “Moloney wasn’t just doing drugs but flaunting them in every hip club and restaurant from coast to coast . . . snorting cocaine out of glass vials.” According to a screenwriter who was a CAA client during this period, Moloney’s drug exchanges, however “dark,” also had a business function: they were part of the agent-client “bonding.” “Since all agents charge their clients the same ten percent fee, the unique incentive they can offer is their personal dedication to their clients,” this writer explains. “By bonding with them, they demonstrate that they identify their clients’ ambitions and problems as their own.”

Whatever its basis in reality, agents help mitigate the intrinsic uncertainties of the film business by projecting an awesome power. During a 1989 panel discussion entitled “What Does an Agent Really Do?” Jeremy Zimmer, then a top executive at ICM, said, “The big agencies are like animals, raping and pillaging one another day in and day out. We’re all out there doing business. It’s very competitive. And at the end of the day the question is always who’s doing what to whom, how much are they doing it for, and when are they going to do it to me.” Hyperbolic or not, Zimmer’s remarks made the front page of *Daily Variety* because they fit in with the general belief in Hollywood: that agents exercise predatory power on behalf of the talent in the community.

Agents' standing in the community is directly related to the way their clients are perceived by the studios. When that perception weakens for any reason, such as the disappointing performance of their clients' films, their status in the community also declines. "Agents dwell in their own sociopathic cocoon," according to former studio executives Peter Bart and Peter Guber. "They dedicate themselves to the proposition that perception is reality." This makes them especially valued in a community largely dedicated to much the same proposition.

### Writers

Writers have always occupied a special, if vexed, place in the Hollywood community. The talking movies brought a new class of them to Hollywood in the 1930s, many of whom—like Nathanael West, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Raymond Chandler, Dorothy Parker, Albus Huxley, and Ben Hecht—were already established in the literary world. Others were struggling novelists, essayists, and playwrights from New York, Chicago, Boston, and other intellectual centers. The lure that brought most of them westward was pecuniary. They generally assumed that, in the Depression, they could earn more money writing film scripts, or even added dialogue, than they could writing articles, magazines, or books.

Often they were disappointed. Studio writers were paid by the week, in some cases by the day. If they failed to write enough script pages to satisfy the studio's story departments, they were often summarily fired. In the mid-1930s, as the Depression deepened, the studios substantially cut writers' wages and simply replaced any writer who balked. One studio fired all its writers the day before Thanksgiving and rehired them the day after the holiday to save one day's pay.

Nor was there much glory for writers. For script doctoring, they often got no credit, and for screenplays they often shared the credit. They could hardly consider their product to be an extension of their literary art, since it was commonly rewritten by other hands, including producers, directors, and actors. The disparaging atmosphere was perhaps best summed up by Irving Thalberg, the creative head of MGM, who once asked, "What's all this business about being a writer? It's just putting one word after another."

Writers also derived little satisfaction from their attempts to insert political content in their scripts. In many cases their political agendas, if anything, served to further isolate them from the wider community. Consider, for example, John Howard Lawson, who, after writing for the Marxist journal *New Masses*, sought a wider audience in Hollywood. He made no secret of his political convictions, openly declaring himself a Communist Party member and becoming the first president of the left-leaning Screen Writers Guild. Although he tried to insert Marxist messages into his own scripts and asked other writers in the SWG to do the same, he succeeded in slipping only a few token images, such as a character whistling "La Marseillaise," into his movies. He found, as did other writers, that almost all politically controversial material was rewritten by studio producers or, if filmed, cut by editors or censored by the Hays Office. When the House Un-American Activities Committee intensified its investigation of subversives in Hollywood, Lawson and many other Guild writers were blacklisted from further studio employment.

With few exceptions, writers in those days remained on the periphery of the Hollywood colony. In most cases they found themselves the low man on the social totem pole, shunned by stars and directors and treated like necessary nuisances by studio executives. Nathanael West describes the grim conditions this way: "All the writers sit in cells in a row and the minute a typewriter stops someone pokes his head in the door to see if you are thinking."

Under such circumstances, whatever their original motivation, writers eventually came to see themselves as poorly treated pawns in a money-driven system. Their writing about Hollywood—such as Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon*, Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, and William Faulkner's "Golden Land"—often expressed contempt, if not outright loathing, for the values of the studios. A principal theme of such works is that financial calculation was systematically destroying the artistic integrity of movies. The same contempt, it should be noted, has also pervaded movies about Hollywood over the years; in *The Big Knife*, *The Bad and the Beautiful*, *Barton Fink*, *The Player*, and *State and Main*, the studio is constantly portrayed as run by philistines maximizing their earnings on the back of the writer's integrity. In Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* (1963), insult is heaped on injury: the heroine, Camille (Brigitte Bardot), holds her

screenwriter husband (Michel Piccoli) in such contempt for writing a movie for a Hollywood producer that she can no longer bear to be in his company.

With the collapse of the studio system in the 1950s, the financial situation of writers—though not necessarily their low esteem of the process—improved. Independent producers largely replaced the studio's story departments and assumed much of the job of initiating studio projects by optioning and developing scripts that could attract the stars and directors that the studios required. They therefore began to seek writers who had demonstrated an ability to provide scripts that were acceptable to stars and directors.

Although there has never been a shortage of screenwriters, only a very select few—such as Robert Towne, who wrote *Chinatown*, Ernest Lehman, who wrote *North by Northwest*, William Goldman, who wrote *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and Shane Black, who wrote *Lethal Weapon*—have the track records to persuade stars and directors to sign on to particular projects. Since the writers with the credentials to do so almost always auction off their services through talent agencies—often the very ones who represent the stars and directors their scripts are meant to attract—the prices paid for their scripts can be astronomically high. For example, Shane Black's script fee, which was \$250,000 in 1987 for *Lethal Weapon* and \$1.75 million in 1991 for *The Last Boy Scout*, had climbed to \$4 million in 1996 for *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. With paychecks like these, Hollywood's top writers can afford the accouterments of the community, including beach houses, ski chalets, and Ferraris. In addition to their million-dollar-plus fees for scripts, they get so-called residual payments from the licensing of movies to television and video. They can also earn up to \$150,000 a week as “script doctors,” rewriting the work of other writers. Robert Towne, for example, has doctored without credit the scripts of such screenwriters as William Goldman (*Marathon Man*), David Newman and Robert Benton (*Bonnie and Clyde*), Elaine May (*Heaven Can Wait*), Oliver Stone (*8 Million Ways to Die*), Norman Mailer (*Tough Guys Don't Dance*), and Stirling Silliphant (*The New Centurions*). Even though producers have to pay in advance only a portion of a writer's fees to secure a script, the rising costs of scripts do strain the limited resources of most producers, especially those who want to have a portfolio of different projects. So producers often attempt to get writers to accept

smaller advances on their options by cultivating them as friends, offering them social solidarity and prestige in the community.

Screenwriter John Gregory Dunne describes the “social tapestry” in Hollywood this way: “The executive mantra goes: I don't just work with these guys . . . they're my friends.” Dale Launer recalled that after his script of *Ruthless People* was made into a successful film in 1986, “producers rushed to bring me into their social orbit with invitations to dinner parties and home screenings,” adding, “They seek to align themselves with any writer who can get a movie made.”

Producers also frequently offer writers credits as executive producer, associate producer, or even coproducer. Since, among other things, this serves to elevate a writer's status in the community, many writers become, at least nominally, producers. In 2002, for example, over two thirds of screenwriters whose movies were nominated for Academy Awards also had producer credits on these movies.

Even though they may enjoy the joint benefits of substantial monetary rewards and social inclusion, writers still have to deal with an “alienation problem,” as one highly successful writer put it. They often perceive of themselves as alienated from their product in a way that runs counter to their creative self-image. After their optioned screenplays are fully purchased, which usually occurs when productions are green-lighted by studios, the writers lose control over them. This is a reality even the top writers must learn to live with. If rewriting is necessary, directors often prefer to hire uncredited writers, who will make the changes they dictate, or do it themselves. By doing so, they not only avoid any objections that the original writer may have to changes that damage the integrity of his story but they strengthen their own claim of authorship. In many cases, directors do not even allow credited screenwriters to visit the set during shooting or to view the rough cut during postproduction. On *Chinatown*, for example, the writer Robert Towne was barred from the set and not allowed to see the dailies.

Alienation, to be sure, can have benefits. One of these is that screenwriters—unlike directors, actors, set designers, stunt coordinators, editors, and others involved in the actual group effort to complete a film under the pressure of a schedule—need not conform to the same standard of compliance and accommodation that is normally highly valued in the community. Instead, writers are allowed to be idiosyncratic and

even antisocial in their behavior. Robert Towne, for example, has been known to arrive barefoot for meetings with executives. Paramount studio head Robert Evans has described him as “lethargic, scattered, perpetually late.”

As it does with these displays of individualism, the community also tolerates screenwriters deprecating the accepted artistic values of Hollywood. Even after screenwriter Joe Eszterhas wrote (and published in *Privateer*) an open letter to Michael Ovitz, attacking the heavy-handed practices of Hollywood, he nevertheless continued to receive major writing assignments. Writers are allowed such latitude because their abuse is usually rationalized as little more than an outburst of intellectual vanity. Even in its apparent tolerance of writers’ protest, the community effectively points to its futility, and thereby reinforces the value it places on pragmatic accommodation.

The writer’s peculiar situation—at once an insider and outsider in the community—is explained by Peter Guber, who, before he founded his own production company, Mandalay, headed first Warner Bros. and then Sony, and Peter Bart, former vice president of MGM and editor of *Variety*: “The writer is at once lionized and scorned,” they observe. “He is treated like the lord of the manor, yet required to eat at the servants’ table. He may sell a spec script for \$5 million, then have trouble getting his agent on the phone.” Treated as such, writers share a “persecution complex” that “has a basis in reality.”

But while the writer’s position may be ambiguous in the community, it is not without consequence. Aside from their work in movies, writers also script much of the content of the awards ceremonies and other events—including speeches, self-deprecating jokes, and nostalgic commentaries. At the end of the day, they are still the ones who write the lines that others speak. And these lines help establish the values of the Hollywood community.

### Producers

The producer is the community’s primary rainmaker. Through skilled manipulation of personal funds, civilian investors, social connections, talent agents, and other resources, the producer can cause the swirling ele-

ments of Hollywood—including stars, directors, writers, and studio interests—to coalesce into a project.

Instead of claiming a single producer, as they did in the days of the studio system, today’s movies boast a half dozen or more producers in their credits. Many of these individuals, whatever else their accomplishments, have had little, if anything, to do with producing the film—at least in the rainmaker sense. The category of “producer,” in fact, is now broad enough to require subcategories: line producers (who are in fact production managers for the day-to-day shooting), coproducers (who may simply be investors), executive producers (who may have demanded this credit in return for some right they held), and associate producers (whose relation to the production may be marginal at best). While the distinctions between these types of producer may be lost on the general public, they signal defined, if subtle, gradations of power within the community.

In the David Mamet movie *State and Main*, when the character of the writer (Philip Seymour Hoffman) asks, “What exactly is an associate producer?” the director (William Macy) answers, “It is a title you offer your secretary when you can’t afford to give her a raise.” Even the vaunted credit of producer may reflect little more than a favor being repaid. For this reason, *Reversal of Fortune* producer Edward R. Pressman agreed to give a producer credit to Oliver Stone, even though Stone had little to do with the production, because Stone had done him the favor of calling (Glenn Close to act in the film. On the other hand, Stone refused to share the producer’s credit on *Nixon* with Eric Hamburg, who had developed the script. Hamburg, who had to settle for a coproducer credit, later complained, “It was inevitable that it would turn into one of his sick and twisted power games, and that he would withhold it simply because I wanted it. In the real world, nobody knows or cares about the difference [between “producer” and “coproducer”], and in fact there is no real difference in most cases. It is just a question of who has more power in Hollywood and can grab the best credit for himself (or for his wife, mistress, agent, or hairdresser).”

The inflation in notional “producers” notwithstanding, there are still a fairly large number of legitimate producers in the Hollywood community. In 2005 the Producers Guild of America, which has exacting standards, counted some eighteen hundred producers in its membership.



Producers are paid a sizable lump-sum fee—usually ranging between \$2 million and \$5 million—when, and if, movies are green-lighted. But if that fee is divided among multiple producers, each one may earn considerably less than the screenwriter on a production, and once they repay their expenses for script development, they may be left with little profit. Even so, better-established producers, either from their studio deals or private funds, usually have ample resources to fund a fairly extravagant standard of living. The mogul-like lifestyle is, of course, not unrelated to their rainmaking function. In hosting dinners, brunches, screenings, and other gatherings in the community, they can bring together the people they need in relaxed settings to forge workable alliances for future deals. By fostering these social networks, producers work to strengthen the bonds that cement the community.

### Suits

The major studios employ between 150 and 250 senior executives—or “suits” as they are derisively called by writers, directors, and producers—to manage their far-flung operations. Only a small proportion of these executives are part of the Hollywood community, and paradoxically, that contingent is rarely drawn from those divisions—home entertainment, television production, international distribution, and licensing—that contribute the most to the studio’s profits. One reason for the disparity between community membership and generating studio profits is simply geography. The executives from the most profitable divisions tend to live not in Hollywood but New York, and those who commute from New York do not always find the place socially amenable. For example, when Warner Bros. moved its home-entertainment division from New York to Los Angeles, the head of that unit, Morton Fink, resigned from the company because he—and his fiancée—considered the prospect of life in Hollywood “too isolating.”

Physical distance is just part of the answer. The real divide between the executives in the studios and those in home-entertainment, television, and foreign licensing divisions is caused by the mental distance of the latter executives from what most interests the community: the creation and celebration of movies and movie stars. Although they may enrich the studios and their corporate parents, they do not make the deals

for the movies on which producers, stars, writers, directors, agents, and other community members thrive. Neither do the suits who manage the studios’ finances, accounting, legal work, research, merchandising deals, theater relations, and physical properties. On the other hand, the suits directly involved in the “creative meetings,” as well as those who liaison with the production, are accepted as communal partners. So are their studio chiefs and anyone in their organization who is viewed as capable of, as one producer put it, “getting our movies made.” William Goldman spoke from the perspective of the community when he wrote that the ultimate importance of the studio executive is his ability to give the “go decision”—or green light.

The suits who do belong to the community get there by various routes. Some are literally born and bred into the Hollywood culture as the children or grandchildren of movie actors, directors, producers, or others involved in the business. They attend the same high schools, acting classes, film courses, and social events. Others come to Hollywood to make their mark as cinematic artists and intellectuals and spend the early years of their careers pitching ideas, auditioning for bit parts, or working on friends’ films. Still others begin as “gofers,” working their way up from the proverbial mail rooms of talent agencies or as associates at entertainment-law firms. Finally, many come from unrelated professions, such as investment banking, that, though they may provide high annual earnings, can’t promise the kind of personal satisfaction that Hollywood can offer. Despite their different backgrounds, and the different proportions of economic man or man at play that motivate them, they often share a common objective: associating themselves with the celebrity culture of Hollywood.

Consider the account Robert Evans gives of his achievements as Paramount’s head of production from 1967 to 1974: “I was a big man in the industry, living in a big home,” and married to a movie star, Ali MacGraw, but “I couldn’t afford to pay my taxes.” He remained committed to the industry even though his struggles in it had reduced him to borrowing money from his brother to maintain his lifestyle in the community, which included socializing with such celebrated “pals” as Warren Beatty, Marlon Brando, Jack Nicholson, Al Pacino, and Sir Laurence Olivier. He sums up his career by saying: “You name ‘em, I’ve met ‘em . . . either worked with ‘em, fought with ‘em, hired ‘em, fired ‘em, laughed with

'em, cried with 'em, figuratively f\*cked by 'em, literally f\*cked 'em." As far as Evans is concerned, these are the satisfactions that only the culture of Hollywood can provide.

Nor does the social intercourse and professional standing within the community necessarily end when top executives leave, or are fired from, their studio positions. They often maintain their role in the community by continuing to buy scripts, recruit stars, and produce movies for their own companies. After he left Paramount, Robert Evans produced films under the aegis of the Robert J. Evans Company. Similarly, when Sidney Sheinberg, who succeeded Lew Wasserman, left Universal, he created the Bubble Factory; when Ray Stark left Columbia, he set up Rastar Films; when Daniel Melnick left MGM, he set up IndieProd; when Peter Guber left Sony, he set up, it will be recalled, Mandalay Films; and when Joe Roth left Disney he set up Revolution Studios. These top executives can also expect fulsome praise on their departure. When John Goldwyn—whose grandfather Samuel Goldwyn had been the original *G* in MGM—did not have his contract as Paramount's head of production renewed in 2003, he candidly admitted, "It would be disingenuous to say that [Paramount's disappointing box-office record] wasn't a factor." Nevertheless, Paramount's cochairman Sherry Lansing, upon awarding the departing Goldwyn a multiyear producer's contract, generously told the trade press, "John is a brilliant executive. I really couldn't have done this job without him. . . . I'm thrilled that I'm still going to be able to work with him [as a producer]."

In making the switch to producers, ex-studio heads can take personal advantage of whatever goodwill they have earned with stars (and their agencies) through their previous green-lighting activity. Since the ability of these executives to consummate deals and make films generally proceeds less from their acumen in administering corporate activities at studios than from their ability to build relationships with stars and directors, they often find their solidarity with the community to be a more valuable asset than their studio title. As one former executive of Paramount wrote, "Once your membership was assured, you could glide from one studio job to the next as the regimes changed. You still played golf at Hillcrest, ate dinner at Ma Maison, and screened movies in your private theater at home."

### Gurus

The Hollywood community, although a celebrity-driven culture, has always relied on less visible advisors to shape it in mind, body, and image. Consider, for example, Edgar Magnin, who served both literally and figuratively as a rabbi to the MGM studio chief at the height of the studio system. He eventually became so influential in organizing Jewish religious, country-club, and fund-raising networks that helped bind together the community that Louis B. Mayer even offered him a top position at MGM (which he promptly turned down). As Neal Gabler writes, "By the mid-thirties, when his power was unchallenged, Rabbi Magnin had come to serve many functions among the Hollywood Jews: legitimizer of assimilation, safe bond to the past, fund-raiser, advocate with the larger Jewish community, friend." As the community's spiritual orientation grew more complex with the waning of the studio system, its "rabbis" transcended the traditional religious qualification and began to include other figures of authority, people who could convincingly promise to improve, enrich, or even extend the lives of community members in a variety of less orthodox ways. These new gurus included not only religious and cult leaders but yoga masters, astrologers, nutritionists, plastic surgeons, political theorists, and other holders of special knowledge.

Well-connected "éminences grises" often fill the guru role by giving community members, especially those who already consider themselves outside the ordinary boundaries (and rules) of society, an increased sense of entitlement, whether that involves helping to get children into elite schools, obtaining green cards for their servants, or quashing unsavory drug charges. Community members often invest their confidence in facilitators, such as lawyers like Mendel Silberberg, who was reputed to have had a hand in the appointment of judges in California; Greg Bautzer, who was reputed to have influence in the 1980s with the Reagan White House; and Sidney Korshak, who exercised immense leverage over business and labor relations in Hollywood.

Some community members revel in the imputed power of their advisors. In his autobiography, Robert Evans describes his "consigliere," Sidney Korshak, in the following terms: "He was a lawyer living in California without an office. Who were his clients? Well, let's just say that

a nod from Korshak, and the Teamsters change management. A nod from Korshak, and Santa Ania closes. . . . A nod from Korshak, and Las Vegas shuts down.” Not uncommonly, the community maintains its faith in an eminence grise even if the perception of the guru’s power proves inconsistent with reality. Evans, for example, kept his faith in Korshak even though Korshak proved unable to extend his employment at Paramount, intervene in an unfavorable divorce settlement with Ali MacGraw, or help him avoid having to plead guilty to a cocaine-possession charge.

The community is also susceptible to gurus who offer enlightenment rather than power. The Hollywood career of Steven Seagal is a case in point. Born to Jewish middle-class parents in Lansing, Michigan, in 1951, Seagal moved in 1975 to Osaka, Japan, where he married Miyako Fujitani, whose family owned a martial-arts studio, and earned a black belt in aikido, taking the name Master Take Shigemichi. After his return to the United States in 1982, he opened up an aikido dojo in West Hollywood and taught martial arts to a number of actors, including Sean Connery, Elke Sommer, and James Coburn. “People come here [to Hollywood] for a need to be adored and a need to be loved,” he subsequently explained on *The Larry King Show*: “When that veil is pierced, [actors] see that illusions are in fact illusions and the only thing that we have is the mind and the heart. . . . Once people find their respective path, it [aikido] becomes, you know, a method for them to perfect themselves.”

In the mid-1980s, while providing such spiritual guidance to actors, Seagal met Michael Ovitz, then the head of CAA. As Seagal tells it, “Michael was somebody that I was teaching the martial arts to,” but subsequently Seagal became his guru. In 1986 Ovitz arranged for Seagal, dressed in baggy black pants and white robes, to demonstrate his aikido skills to Terry Semel, then cohead of the Warner Bros. studio, and Mark Canton, the studio’s head of production. As a result of this exhibition, Semel and Canton offered Seagal a role as an action star, saying, as Seagal recalled, “We’d like to make you part of the family here.” Seagal thus made the leap from being a spiritual guru to playing one on-screen in the film *Above the Law*, directed by Andrew Davis, who was also an aikido student of Seagal’s. In discussing the film that portrays Seagal as an ex-CIA assassin teaching martial arts in Japan, Davis told an interviewer, “What we’re really doing here with Steven is making a documentary.” (After making the transition from guru to movie character, Seagal,

though he continued as an aikido advisor in his Hollywood dojo, acted in another seventeen Hollywood films, as well as in a television documentary on his career as a *sensei* at his mother-in-law’s dojo in Osaka.)

Other gurus have a more materialistic appeal. Dana Giacchetto, a financial advisor whose Cassandra Investment Fund was based in New York, claimed the special knowledge to make community members great fortunes in the stock market. His reputation as an advisor grew in the 1990s after CAA agent Jay Moloney introduced him to his boss, Michael Ovitz. By 1998, in addition to Ovitz, Giacchetto had such disciples, or at least investors, as Leonardo DiCaprio, Matt Damon, Ben Affleck, Courteney Cox, Ben Stiller, and Cameron Diaz. Giacchetto not only managed their money but traveled with them. DiCaprio, for example, reportedly stayed in Giacchetto’s SoHo loft in Manhattan and brought him as his guest to Thailand in 1999 (while he was working on the film *The Beach*). The constant flow of celebrity clients through the loft left at least one guest aghast: “You’d be standing there talking with Leo [DiCaprio], and Alanis Morissette would ask you to hold her drink for a minute so she could sing, then you turn around, and Mark Wahlberg is asking you to dance.”

Giacchetto’s guru status ended with his arrest for misappropriating clients’ funds. On February 7, 2001, a U.S. district court sentenced Giacchetto to serve fifty-seven months in a federal prison and pay a total of \$9.87 million in restitution to his victims, including some of his Hollywood clients.

Whether intellectual, spiritual, or financial, gurus are only transient members of the community. Their acceptance lasts only as long as their claims to specialized knowledge remain credible. Even so, as long as their tenure lasts, they serve to enhance not only the comfort level of community members but also their sense of empowerment.