Stardom in Cinema, Television and the Web

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INTRODUCTION

Stardom is not a new social phenomenon. Indeed, it could be regarded as something that has always existed and is probably intrinsic to the human being. All of us, whether or not we acknowledge it, are irresistibly attracted by the possibility of looking into the private sphere of people's lives, all the more so if it concerns individuals considered famous in society. Here, besides the voyeuristic pleasure of learning the details of someone's intimate life, there is also the satisfaction of putting ourselves on the same level as the star and feeling that we somehow share their comfortable and privileged world. In actual fact, this is mere illusion, but the mechanism works extremely well at the psychological level.

But the Hollywood film industry, from the 1910s on, has been able to give a precise form to the figure of the star as we know it today. In the last fifty years, the social importance of stars has steadily grown, to the point that stars have now become key role models who strongly influence people's behaviours. In the state of deep uncertainty characterizing today's hyper-modern societies, individuals constantly seek reassuring personalities to be guided by, and in this respect stars provide easily available role models. Stars can be found everywhere – in the entertainment world, in journalism, sports, fashion, politics, art, and even in top-class cooking. What we are witnessing today is a proliferation of stars and celebrities who are gradually spreading into every social sphere.

Our relationship with stars today, however, is not significantly different from what it was in the past, although it is important to note that

the status of today's stars has changed from that of classic Hollywood stars. This is because the advent of television and the spread of a highly pervasive communication system have given them growing exposure, gradually 'normalizing' them as a result. In the past, stars were essentially intangible and distant beings, living in what was viewed as a higher state of existence than human beings and often likened to that of divinities. Today, by contrast, the media offer us truer and more realistic images of stars and their lives.

Consequently, stars have to some extent become more like the rest of humankind. Yet despite this, the phenomenon of stardom and celebrity is clearly of major social significance today and, as such, it deserves to be explored in order to understand the reasons for its success. This book will attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of stardom, first by examining in detail its historical evolution during the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century, and next by focusing on a number of particularly representative cases. In the last chapter, we will then turn our attention to the main stardom theories that have been developed over the years to explain the workings of this highly complex social phenomenon.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when the first processes of psychological involvement with stars began to emerge. The cult of certain individual personalities has existed throughout the history of human civilizations and was once reserved to sovereigns or great warlords, for instance. Ancient history offers several examples of this, as well as of specific strategies designed to strengthen the personality cult. An emblematic figure in this respect is Alexander the Great, who was very successful in spreading knowledge about himself and his feats despite the fact that he had none of the modern media available today. He

commissioned writers to chronicle his deeds, artists to make his portraits, and engravers to create shields, coins and other objects displaying his profile. Most of all, he encouraged the worship of his personality. His example was followed by Roman emperors as well as by many aristocrats in later eras, who engaged painters and sculptors to portray them in order to immortalize their image.

One common feature shared by the cult of personality and contemporary stardom is the practice of gossip, a term referring to the messages exchanged between two or more people whose contents are not related to themselves but to other people's private lives. The personality cult should be regarded as different from stardom, however, because, as Francesco Alberoni has argued, "stars are charismatic figures or leaders but their power to direct action or influence decision making is decidedly limited" (Redmond and Holmes 2007, 62). They cannot impose their cult, which instead is precisely what the sovereigns or great warlords of the past did. Thus, in order to establish themselves, stars need to be deeply in tune with the social culture of which they are part.

But all personalities, once they have achieved fame, become something like collective goods, entering into a peculiar dimension in which they are regarded as the property of the media and the public. They can therefore become the object of various kinds of gossip at people's will. Content about the private lives of stars and celebrities has in fact always played an important role in almost all media, and indeed the stars themselves have always tried to use the various media for the purposes of self-promotion. Photography is a case in point. A few years after its invention in 1839, theatre actors and opera singers regularly had themselves photographed wearing their stage costumes, in images they would then sell to the spectators before the performances. In Paris, some had their portraits taken

by the famous photographer Felix Nadar, who assembled a collection of around 15,000 photos of actors and actresses which he then sold by mail order.

But the media that have forged the closest relationship with stardom are certainly cinema, television and the web. Each of these media has not operated in isolation but in combination with the other two, as well as with others like the press and radio. Yet, each one has been key in the three different phases that the history of contemporary stardom can be divided into. The first phase is cinema, which, as mentioned earlier, can largely be credited with the creation and codification of contemporary stardom.

The second phase is linked to the spread of television, which weakened the Hollywood stardom model and gradually transformed the figure of the star, making it more intimate and familiar. It is no coincidence that the typical television celebrity is the presenter, an average and not particularly well-defined figure that has enabled pop music stars as well as sports and fashion stars to emerge alongside cinema stars.

The last of these phases is 'hyperstardom' (Codeluppi 2012). As Rosa Viscardi has argued, this phase marks the shift towards the "leadership of famousness" (2014, 23). We thus have many 'outsiders', i.e., personalities from a variety of professional domains and experiences, who are able to achieve considerable social visibility thanks to their skilful use of the web.

In the book, we have established a specific connection between three different media and each of the three phases into which the history of stardom can be divided because, in our view, technology has played a crucial role therein. Roland Barthes expressed the same view when he compared two great film stars, Greta Garbo and Audrey Hepburn. He believed that "Garbo still belonged to that moment in cinema when capturing the face still plunged audiences into the deepest ecstasy" (1973,

56). But silent cinema, with its focus on the contemplation of the face and on a model of beauty based on the search for aloofness and perfection, was followed by the era of sound. With 'talking movies', what caught the spectators' attention was not so much the image of the actors' faces but their deportment, their countenance and the use of their whole body – in other words all the personality traits of screen performers.

I.

CINEMA STARDOM

Contemporary stardom began to develop well before the birth of cinema, which is generally thought to coincide with the famous film screening held by the Lumière brothers in Paris in 1895. According to Benjamin McArthur (1984), stardom first emerged in American theatre around the 1820s, when resident theatre companies turned into travelling companies, and as they staged reruns of the same show in different cities and towns, they needed to use the names of important actors in order to draw new audiences each time. Stardom was also influenced by *vaudeville*, a popular variety show that sparked the idea of presenting the star as a symbol of success (McLean 1965). Also in the nineteenth century, the circus entrepreneur Phineas Taylor Barnum developed some effective promotional techniques that Hollywood producers subsequently reproduced and improved on (Cashmore 2006).

But what really transformed stardom into what we essentially understand by that term today was cinema. The film production industry rapidly realized the importance to its own success of the figure of the star. Indeed, as Cristina Jandelli has pointed out, "All screen actors play a character, but only stars know how to impersonate their character convincingly, casting their own image onto it" (2007, 11. Our translation), thereby creating a strong emotional relationship with their audience.

In actual fact, during first fifteen years of its life, cinema did not have any real stars as such. In the late 1910s, for instance, it borrowed heroes from the world of comic books like Fantomas and Nick Carter. It also employed theatre actresses like Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse, as well as other leading stage actors, and classical singers like Enrico Caruso, performing in so-called arthouse films, produced especially in France from 1908, involving screen adaptations of dramatic, historical or literary texts. Usually, however, film actors were anonymous, unrecognizable due to heavy makeup, their exposure to strong natural lighting and filmed in full figure shots. The motion pictures were also short and were sometimes viewed not in film theatres, which were beginning to spread by then, but through devices such as Thomas Alva Edison's kinetoscope by one individual at a time and in dedicated venues.

This phase did not last long, however, as cinema soon began to adopt and increasingly perfect the star model, in some cases even allowing the actors to play an autonomous role with respect to the various characters they portrayed in the films. Crucially, cinema improved its visual language, perfecting the actors' makeup and acting skills and using artificial lighting and close-ups. But the pivotal factor in cinema's development was the fact that it based its production on an industrial model, making it possible to produce feature-length films for mass audiences and also triggering fierce competition between the increasingly numerous film production companies. This process took place especially in the United States, a country that therefore requires to be examined in detail.

I.1 The origins: Hollywood

Cinema developed on an industrial scale mainly in the United States, with the creation of an innovative production model that rapidly overtook the European film industry. By 1909 there were already some ten thousand or so movie theatres in the US, compared to only around two-to-three hundred in France, the country that had brought cinema to the world only a few years earlier (Ortoleva 1995, 111).

For several years the American film production system was controlled by the MPPC (Motion Picture Patents Company), a trust of film producers and distributors set up in 1908 by Edison who, having obtained the patent rights for American made film-making equipment from the courts, had grouped together the eight most important motion picture companies into this corporate entity. In 1914, however, the trust was declared illegal by a federal court, opening the way to the establishment of new companies that came to dominate the American film industry in subsequent years. They were the so-called 'majors', or major studios, MGM, Warner, 20th Century Fox, Paramount and RKO, alongside the three small production companies, or 'minors', Columbia, Universal and United Artists. The majors had considerable market power because they were organized on the basis of an integrated system that enabled them to control and manage the film production, distribution and marketing processes. By the mid-Thirties they controlled almost ninety percent of the Hollywood business turnover and exercised such a strong monopoly that they could afford to keep foreign films completely out of American cinemas.

Stardom originated in Hollywood, which at the time was just a small village near Los Angeles. Numerous film producers and directors moved there from New York and the East Coast of the United States in order to

be independent of the aggressive power of the MPPC. In Hollywood they enjoyed the added advantages of cheaper housing and lower labour costs (thanks to low trade union membership), excellent year-round weather conditions and a variegated landscape – in short, all the ideal conditions for cinema production. The first film studio opened in Hollywood in 1919 and, with the establishment of around fifty studios there by 1920, the village rapidly transformed into a full-scale industrial district.

Having a specific location like Hollywood was critical to the American film studios' success in capturing the public imagination. The idea that all film stars lived in the same locality, a place that could be presented as especially designed for them and perceived as symbolically isolated from the rest of the world, was very important to spectators. The studios rapidly realized that fans were not just interested in films but also in everything that the stars did offscreen. Thus, they almost immediately began to organize trips giving tourists the chance to see the film stars with their own eyes. And as early as 1924, a booklet was published featuring the addresses of the sixty-five biggest Hollywood celebrities (Desser and Jovett 2000, 266). Huge efforts were made to translate the prestigious image enjoyed by movie stars onscreen into a parallel real-life world, with grand villas designed like medieval castles or ancient temples, marble swimming pools, private railway lines and all kinds of luxuries. The actress Gloria Swanson, for instance, had a gold-plated bathtub and a leopard skin-upholstered Lancia.

We could say that the creation of the star model enabled Hollywood production companies to improve their efficiency. They were essentially imitating what the entire American industrial system was doing at the time, with the introduction of the assembly line – a tool that boosted

corporate production enormously – and the adoption, for the first time in history, of a range of marketing and communication strategies.

As mentioned earlier, in the film industry this development started in 1910. Before then, the names of actors remained unknown to spectators, who were only interested in the characters they played onscreen. Biograph Studios, the biggest film production company at the time, simply called its leading actress Florence Lawrence 'Biograph Girl', and continued to do so until 1913, when it had to align with the practices of its competitors. The American scholar Richard Schickel (1962) traces the birth of what came to be known as the "star system" to a ploy devised by Carl Laemmle, the owner of Independent Moving Pictures (IMP). After luring Florence Lawrence away from Biograph with a more lucrative contract, he got the press to publish a story reporting her death in an accident on 19 February 1910. A month later, he denied the report, thereby considerably boosting her media visibility. Almost a year later, Laemmle also lured the actress Mary Pickford away from the powerful rival company and in her case went as far as to make up a story about her kidnapping in Cuba.

In the United States, the actors' names did not actually appear on film advertising posters before 1910. Until then, the posters only featured very brightly coloured images of a key film scene and the trademark symbol of the production company or the producer's name. But within a few years, the situation changed, even though, as Roberto Campari has pointed out (1985), the poster of the film *The Battle of Elderbush Gulch* made in 1913, for example, still did not feature the names of the stars (Lilian Gish, Mae Marsh and Robert Harron) or that of the director (David Wark Griffith), despite the fact that they were all very well known to film audiences by then. The following year, Charlie Chaplin was the first actor whose name was widely featured on film posters – first in Britain, his native country,

then in the United States and elsewhere, including Italy, where by as early as 1909, several film producers were citing the actors' names and using them to promote their films among their audiences.

With the birth of the figure of the star, the film studios immediately began to use promotional tools in order to encourage the establishment of a relationship between the stars themselves and their fans. Vitagraph Studios, for example, launched the first souvenir postcards featuring images of leading actors in 1912. Companies specializing in star-related merchandising were also created, like MP Publishing Co., for example, which issued sets of cards with the pictures of stars in 1915, and the National Stars Corporation, which that same year released teaspoons each with the image of a movie star on the handle. But movie star fans were also offered an array of other goods as well, including cosmetics, clothing, food products and adverts endorsed by actors.

The most important role in fostering the relationship between the actors and their audiences, however, was played by fan clubs. They did this in various ways, including by sending subscribers signed photos of movie stars, creating dedicated magazines, organizing events, and so on. To illustrate the scale of movie fandom at the time, in 1939, each studio received a staggering 15,000-to-45,000 letters or postcards per month addressed to its actors (Morin 1961, 72).

But the main medium used by the Hollywood industry to promote its stars was the press. While the press of course was already around in the nineteenth century, and indeed was first major tool of communication, it did not play a significant role in creating the image of movie stars until the twentieth century, with the birth of gossip journalism. In the United States, the producer Stuart Blackton, co-founder of Vitagraph, launched the first popular movie fan magazine, *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, in 1911.

Within a few years the magazine – which featured the films' storylines along with numerous illustrations, as well as a column with replies to readers who wanted to know the names of the actors and actresses starring in a given film – reached a print-run of over 300,000 copies. Similar magazines then followed in its footsteps, such as *Photoplay*, launched in 1912.

Thus, in the decades that followed, a number of cinema-related gossip columnists became important reference points for film audiences. Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper are emblematic in this respect (Pedote 2013). Parsons was so successful that her columns were published simultaneously in over six hundred newspapers worldwide, but Hopper can probably be regarded as the more successful of the two. She was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine and was cast by film director Billy Wilder to appear as herself in the film *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). Her fame was also boosted by the fierce battle she waged against Charlie Chaplin, whose private life she thought was morally questionable and whose films in her view did not fit in with Hollywood's typically rose-tinted and conservative model. And it is certainly true that through his films Chaplin sought to highlight the contradictions of capitalist society, with a particular focus on the poor and the marginalized.

In the Thirties and Forties, the Hollywood studios improved their model of stardom still further, creating the so-called 'studio system', based on the industry's need to have total control over the stars' image (Sartori 1983). At the time, Hollywood production studios usually drew up seven-year contracts with leading actors, who effectively became their exclusive property for the duration of the contract. Producers invested substantial financial resources on stars, but also wanted complete control over their

public lives. Also, the stars were cast in roles specifically designed to deliver a particular image to the audience. Thus, at the time:

> A particular star was expected to play a particular role, and the film he or she starred in was expected to feature a particular kind of action and a particular kind of storyline. Humphrey Bogart, for example, was expected to play the 'good bad boy' over and over again, in other words to portray a character who is only apparently 'bad', the 'tough guy with a soft heart', as in *Casablanca*, for example, in which the mask of cynicism displayed by Rick Blaine conceals the romantic, angst ridden hero we all know and want to recognize time after time (Alonge and Carluccio 2006, 37. Our translation).

It is no accident that *Casablanca* (1942) was produced by Warner Bros., which the previous year had made *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), the film that brought Bogart his first major success.

So, being a movie star involved becoming familiar to the audience through a specific personal iconography, but also being presented through the various media in a way that was designed to create a particular 'persona', using a mix of biographical details from the actor's own life (whether real or totally made up) and particular aspects of the gender stereotype that the actor had to portray on the screen. All this fuelled certain expectations from the audience in terms of the narrative, linked to an 'acting mask' honed over time into what would become a permanently defined model.

The audience was thus led to believe that the role played by the actor in a film revealed the actor's true personality, whereas that personality was actually the result of a skilful media strategy. People were only able to read what was intentionally filtered through to the magazines concerning

their favourite stars. The latter, in their turn, were free to live their life as they wished, even in a dissolute fashion, but journalists were not allowed into their private space because that would have enabled them to discover and disclose potentially dangerous secrets for the star's image. That is why production studios introduced so-called 'morality clauses' into their contracts which gave them the right to cancel the contracts if the press published any information relating to charges of adultery.

In the process of constructing the image of the star, the way they dressed was attributed central importance. Until the Twenties, actors supplied their own wardrobe, but in later years the studios realized that they had to devote a great deal of attention to this aspect. Makeup also played a key role in the studio system, as Edgar Morin has pointed out (1961), and it is not by chance that the modern cosmetics industry is the offspring of Hollywood makeup artists Max Factor and Elizabeth Arden. The Hollywood film industry moreover has always made ample use of the available cosmetic surgery techniques, going back to as early as 1923, when the leading comedy actress Fanny Brice underwent nose reshaping surgery (Haiken 1997).

Thus, it is easy to see how Greta Garbo, before becoming an iconic star, was just a curvy Swedish brunette called Greta Gustaffson. The name 'Garbo' (which in Swedish means 'wood nymph') was suggested to her by the Finnish film director Mauritz Stiller, while the costume designer Adrian created her clothes and William Daniels totally crafted her public image by directing the photography of almost all her talking movies. It even seems that some of her teeth were pulled out to make her features look more finely chiselled. All this made it possible for Greta Garbo to become 'the divine', from the title of the film *The Divine Woman* in which she starred in 1928.

Similarly, the fairly unremarkable young German woman Marlene Dietrich was transformed into a sophisticated vamp by the film director Josef von Stenberg, who turned her into a key component of his aesthetic and erotic universe. A significant contribution to this transformation was also made by the photographer Lee Garmes, who used a sophisticated interplay of lights and shadows to give a unique identity to Dietrich's face, and by Paramount's lead costume designer Travis Banton, who created the unmistakable masculine and androgynous style which she also adopted off-set at several public events.

Clark Gable's physical appearance too was carefully constructed by the film producer Samuel Goldwyn. When the young Clark Gable walked onto the film set for the first time in 1930, the director is said to have shouted: "Who brought me this ape? His ears are too big; he has a crew-cut hairstyle, bad teeth and thick lips. I'm not shooting. My movie is a love story, not a trip to the zoo" (Séguéla 1982, 57. Our translation). Gable was sent off the set, but he was back on it just three months later, his physical appearance radically changed by the expert hands of the Metro Goldwyn Mayer stylists, with his ears concealed under thick black hair, his teeth whitened and his lips made to look thinner by what would become his signature pencil moustache.

I.2 The early stars

The first Hollywood film stars appeared in movies from the western film genre. The most notable among them were Tom Mix and William S. Hart especially, who made his first film appearance in 1914 and became famous for his particular apparel (big neck-scarf, wide-brimmed hat and cowboy boots) but also for his characteristic face, described by Roberto Campari as "hard and impassive, with an American Indian-like nose in stark contrast

with his blue, or at any rate very pale eyes, which would remain an almost constant trait of western movie stars (Cooper, Wayne, Fonda, Stewart, etc.)" (1985, 18. Our translation).

But the first true form of Hollywood stardom was female. Indeed, we can probably say that Hollywood movies have always had the capacity to attribute a deeper personality to female stars, focusing closely on their inner contradictions, such as between career and sex, action and body, and activeness and passiveness, for example. According to Pravadelli, they successfully created a series of strong and independent yet at the same time exciting women, offering a real, and also erotic, spectacle to the viewers in the film theatre (Pravadelli 2014, 48--49).

One of the first female movie stars to capture the public imagination was Mary Pickford. She started her career by acting in a string of short films directed by D. W. Griffith between 1909 and 1913, but these failed to bring her renown. In subsequent years, however, especially thanks to various child roles she played, her fame grew considerably, and by 1917 she was already firmly established, as shown by the fact that on the poster of the film *The Little American* (1917), directed by Cecil B. DeMille, her name appeared in larger characters than those of the film title itself. Pickford then went on to become even more famous, her celebrity further boosted by her relationship with Douglas Fairbanks. Together they became possibly the most famous couple in the history of Hollywood stardom, especially after they went to live in the luxurious mansion called 'Pickfair', a fusion of their surnames, in 1920.

Italy also saw a marked development in female stardom during that period. The so-called 'cinema of the divine', born between 1913 and the mid-1920s, featured many actresses that came to be known as 'femmes fatales', embodied by the likes of Lyda Borelli and Francesca Bertini.

Borelli was usually cast as a passionate woman, and it was she who conceived the famous melodramatic act of hanging from the curtains. Bertini not only played diverse characters, showing that she was an extremely versatile actress, but also placed great emphasis on her look, demanding from her directors that she appear onscreen with stunning clothes, hats and hairstyles, which were often copied by Paris fashion houses. Her performance in the film *Mariute* (1918) is the

> first self-celebration of true cinema stardom. In this film, directed by Bencivenga, the lead character is actually 'Miss Bertini' herself, the actress who everyone has to wait for at the studio while she sleeps late because she reads for hours (hence she is intelligent), lives in a sumptuous mansion with a butler and a chauffeur (hence she is rich) and, when she finally does go 'to work', is welcomed and revered like a queen (hence she is powerful) (Campari 1985, 22. Our translation).

But, as mentioned earlier, female stardom developed mainly in Hollywood, where, unlike in Italy, the film industry had an extensive promotional system of its own. This system enabled many actresses to achieve great success during that period, including Lillian Gish, for example, who frequently played the typical female character of the persecuted virgin straight out of nineteenth-century literature, and became famous through films like *Broken Blossoms* (1919) and *Orphans of the Storm* (1922).

Another actress who rose to fame during that period was Gloria Swanson. Her first successful film was *Male and Female* (1919), a sophisticated comedy directed by Cecil B. DeMille in which she starred as a rich British aristocrat. The role was emblematic of the sophisticated style she always tried to embody, as shown by the clothes she wore both

onscreen and offscreen, and by her marriage to the Marquis de la Falaise de la Coudraye in 1925. It is no coincidence that in the film *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) she played the role of an ageing silent movie star based on her own life.

Among the leading American film actresses of that period, Clara Bow and Louise Brooks also deserve to be mentioned. The characters they usually played were less strongly associated with the typical female roles from the earlier theatre and literary tradition, and reflected the progress made through the emancipation of women.

Gradually, a world of male stardom also started to emerge. It was a world that led to the success of Douglas Fairbanks, for example, thanks to his considerable athletic skills and his ability to convey the typically American image of vitality and optimism. Through the roles he played he actually created a film genre, the so-called swashbuckler movies, based on adventurous stories set in distant eras and exotic locations. But arguably no other silent film actor embodied the figure of the star as successfully as Rudolph Valentino, who generally played the role of the great romantic lover. His success only lasted five years, cut short by his premature death from peritonitis in 1926, but within that short time span he also became the first sex symbol in world cinema.

When the first sound film – *The Jazz Singer* – was presented in American cinemas on 6 October 1927, the Hollywood film industry had to embark on a far-reaching process of change. Many actors saw their privileged status rapidly disintegrating, and the world of stars lost part of its 'sacred' quality, due among other things to American cinema shifting its focus towards more social and real-life topics. A case in point is that of the actor John Gilbert, a major star of the 1920s silent era who was set

aside because the audience apparently burst out laughing on hearing him pronounce the words "I love you" in a talking movie for the first time.

Still, thanks to its remarkable ability to adjust to the changes brought about by sound, the Hollywood film industry began a new phase of development that essentially lasted until the Sixties. It was so successful that, during the Thirties, American cinemas sometimes reached peak audience numbers of ninety million per week (Sartori 1983, 39). And with existing film production companies continuing to expand, the studio system model grew ever stronger, enabling the studios to make commercially successful products that could easily be exported worldwide. Thus, by the late Thirties the vast majority of films were produced in Hollywood and were then distributed in many countries around the world, including in Europe.

I.3 The Fifties: from James Dean to the paparazzi

In the late Forties, the studio system began to lose some of its momentum, mainly due to the dismantling of the monopoly held by Hollywood production companies following an anti-trust ruling issued by the Supreme Court in 1948 (Alonge and Carluccio 2015). As a result of the ruling, the major studios had to sell their film theatres and started reducing the duration of their contracts with actors, since long-term contracts had become too binding and less financially attractive. Henceforth, actors could be hired even for a single film, and their power consequently grew. As studios made fewer films, the success of individual movies became vital and the actors could be decisive in achieving it. However, since actors could no longer secure permanent employment with film production companies, many of them began to work for the new medium that was rapidly gaining ground at the time: television. Television began spreading

in the United States and Europe during the Forties, and by the late Fifties some ninety percent of American households already owned a set. Thus, within a short space of time TV became a fierce competitor of the film industry. Also, that period saw a massive exodus of people from town centres, where most of the film theatres were located, to suburban areas. This led to a vast reduction in cinemagoers in the United States, with weekly average numbers falling from eighty-two to thirty-four million from 1946 to 1956, the period of the first television boom (Sartori 1983, 52).

In a telling scene from the film *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), the actor James Dean appeared with his back towards a highly conspicuous TV set with nothing but luminous dots on the screen. The empty screen seemed to symbolize the endless flow of programmes that came to radically change the role of stars, including that of James Dean himself. Indeed, he can probably be regarded as both the last of the great stars of the classical Hollywood era and the first star of the new television era. He was certainly a star, but he did not embody the idea of the perfect and wholly fulfilling lifestyle that Hollywood stars had hitherto symbolized – not just because of his tragic death behind the wheel of his Porsche 550 Spyder while still very young, but also because in the only three movies he ever appeared in his personality already seemed fragile and tormented. His death added an element of authenticity to an actor who conveyed very effectively the sense of angst felt by young people at the time in a society unable to fulfil the promise of freedom it held out to them. Dean represented the need felt by youths in the Fifties to be independent and to rebel against the conformist social model imposed by America's highly puritanical society. This brought him closer to ordinary people, thereby facilitating the process of young people's identification with the star,

although it weakened the aura of prestige that stars had previously enjoyed.

Movie stars continued to look young and beautiful and to exert fascination, but with television they were also humanized. Cinema too changed in this respect – probably, in part, as a result of the growing competition it faced from the compelling communication techniques of television, a medium that is more appealing because it speaks directly about people's real lives. Films now began to portray a real world whose characters are full of uncertainties, suffer like ordinary mortals and are often even 'anti-stars', i.e., rebellious and anti-conformist stars. The stars who embodied the social myth of happiness could no longer exist in a society like Fifties America, which was showing clear signs of the growing disaffection that eventually led to the large-scale youth protest movements of the Sixties and Seventies.

It is no coincidence that the other major model of stardom of that era was epitomized by Marilyn Monroe. While Dean personified the figure of a restless and rebellious teenager whom millions of young people identified with, Monroe, with her life of gradual self-destruction culminating in her tragic death, showed many women that behind the dazzling image of the star lay a deep-seated vulnerability and a sense that she could not be completely fulfilled and loved by anyone. To the scores of women who were struggling for social emancipation at the time she reflected many of the challenges they faced personally.

The main thing, however, is that stars saw a significant weakening of their role during this phase. As Roberto Campari argues, "[the] decline in cinema stardom is evidenced, among other things, by the fact that during the Sixties Hollywood frequently cast actors with well-established stage careers regardless of their physical appearance" (1985, 234--235. Our

translation) – as with actresses like Barbra Streisand, for example. This was in stark contrast with previous practises, in which, as we saw earlier, physical attractiveness was deemed a vital requirement by Hollywood producers.

The role of the star changed with James Dean and Marilyn Monroe because, due to the spread of television medium, audiences developed new ways of relating to stars. Previously, going to the movies was experienced almost as a ritual, and was always an exceptional event. Watching a film in a dark and atmospheric cinema is an engaging experience that creates a strong sense of detachment from reality. Television, by contrast, is set firmly within the context of everyday life. People watch it regularly and throughout the day in a totally familiar environment and without the same level of concentration, so it produces an effect of intimacy and immediacy. Also, cinemagoers watch the film on the big screen, a distant and out of reach screen with an overwhelming presence and over which they have no control. TV, by contrast, even in its early rudimentary forms, allows viewers to take some actions, like changing channel or controlling the volume, for instance.

The gradual weakening of the image of Hollywood stars as a result of television also opened a window of opportunity for stars from other countries to appear on the scene. The new cinema model embodied by the French Nouvelle Vague in the Fifties rejected the rules of the American star system, but in turn produced new stars whose personal image often fused with that of the tormented and rebellious characters they played in their films – as with Jean-Paul Belmondo, for example, who starred in Jean-Luc Godard's film *Breathless* (1960). The Nouvelle Vague, moreover, attributed considerable importance to the director, so that,

alongside the usual star actors, it also introduced new 'star directors', like Truffaut, Godard, Rivette, Chabrol and Rohmer, among others.

This made it possible for a European form of stardom (mainly French and Italian) to gradually emerge, even though the new European film stars never achieved the same level of importance as their American counterparts. Some of the most prominent European film stars of the period were Vittorio Gassman, Marcello Mastroianni, Monica Vitti, Claudia Cardinale, Alain Delon, Catherine Deneuve and Brigitte Bardot.

Bardot, in particular, embodied the new figure of the liberated woman that was spreading through Western societies at the time. Her husband Roger Vadim directed her in *And God Created Woman* (1956), a film that rapidly turned her into a symbol of sexual freedom but also of rebellious youth. Despite the strong focus on her sexualized body, Bardot did not actually present herself as a passive, erotic object of the male gaze. As the writer Simone de Beauvoir argued in a famous essay first published in 1959, "Her eroticism is not magical, but aggressive. In the game of love, she is as much a hunter as she is a prey. The male is an object to her, just as she is to him" (1962, 30).

Bardot also showed that she could strongly influence women's behaviour on a mass scale. She actually presented herself as a female model to be imitated with regards to both her sexual behaviour and the way she dressed (Pravadelli 2014). In actual fact, Hollywood had already shown its considerable power to influence the way ordinary people dressed long before then. In the early Thirties, Coco Chanel had been commissioned to style the image of Hollywood's most important stars (Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo and Gloria Swanson). But the huge padded shoulders created by Metro Goldwyn Mayer's chief costume designer Adrian to cover Joan Crawford's broad shoulders in *Letty Lynton*

(1932), which set the trend for a hugely popular style that lasted
throughout the Thirties, were most emblematic in this respect. And the
white dress she wore in the film became the most widely copied garment
in the world: Macy's alone sold fifty thousand reproductions of it in just
one season (Calamai and Gnoli 1995, 37). At the time, there were 'cinema
shops' inside almost all US department stores which sold affordable copies
of the clothes worn by the stars in their most popular films.

> During the Thirties, it was costume designers like Adrian, Travis Banton,
> Howard Greer, Edith Head, Orry Kerry and many others, rather than top
> French fashion designers, who set the trends in international fashion and
> made thousands of women dream. After watching a film featuring their
> favourite heroine, they immediately wanted to wear their costumes (Gnoli
> 2005, 58. Our translation).

Greta Garbo, with the movie *A Woman of Affairs* (1928), famously
launched the cloche hat and plaid-lined trench coat, while with *Ninotchka*
(1939) she started a trend for berets. Her biggest influence on fashion,
however, was with her 'bob' hairstyle, a medium-length pageboy cut
whose popularity rapidly overtook that of the hitherto most fashionable *à
la garçonne* style.

Like Chanel, Christian Dior also worked as a costume designer in
Hollywood, where through the Forties and Fifties he created the look of
many top actresses, including Marlene Dietrich, Olivia de Havilland,
Mirna Loy and Ava Gardner. What made this possible was the growing
success of the realistic cinematic language of *film noir* and of the image of
the 'dark lady' during the Forties. But in the Fifties the leading trendsetter
in fashion and style was Marlon Brando. His jeans, T-shirt and biker