

FROM STARS TO STARMAKERS. SPOTLIGHTING THE PRODUCERS OF POPULAR SCREEN IDENTITIES

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Abstract: Forty years ago, Richard Dyer almost single-handedly inaugurated a new discipline within film studies devoted to the study of stars and their social significance. Since the publication of his ground-breaking book, there have been many attempts at expanding his semiotic and sociological paradigm and also at redirecting the focus to gain a better understanding of the role of ideology, performance style or historically positioned audiences. One meaningful avenue of research was opened up, in particular, by Paul McDonald who has called for studying the industrial and economic processes behind what he calls the production of popular identities. While his model proved influential, it seems that most research projects are still dominated by emphasis on individual stars, neglecting or marginalizing other important agents in the star-making process. In this article, I propose to move one step further and refocus our attention on film producers, talent scouts, agents, publicists and other skilled professionals whose business was in the Hollywood studio era to discover, develop, promote and sell stars. Using a case study focused on producer David O. Selznick and his “Swedish discovery” Ingrid Bergman I demonstrate that the actress’ public identity – often assumed to be wholly authentic and autonomous – was in fact systematically constructed by Selznick’s independent production company.

Keywords: star studies, industry studies, producer studies, stardom, production of stars, Hollywood, David O. Selznick, Ingrid Bergman

“Those who employ the star will scarcely make an appearance. By diminishing the presence of audiences and owners, stars are made to seem more independent than they ever could be in real life.”¹

Shining Stars and Hidden Starmakers

Even though it has been more than four decades since the publication of Richard Dyer’s seminal *Stars*² – a book that almost single-handedly inaugurated a new discipline within film studies devoted to the exploration of stars and their social significance – it remains a highly influential text informing much of the research that goes on in this ever-vibrant area. For instance, in the special issue of the Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities on stars and star systems in film and television on which I worked as editor,³ there was not a single article that did not make a substantial reference to *Stars* or to Dyer’s another essential contribution to star studies *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* published in 1986.⁴ It seems evident to me, then, that Dyer’s approach, located at the intersection of semiotics and sociology, remains a cornerstone of the discipline.

¹ FOWLES, J. *Starstruck: Celebrity Performers and the American Public*. Washington and London : Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992, p. 257.

² DYER, R. *Stars*. London : British Film Institute, 1979.

³ *Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities*, 2019, Vol. 9, Issue 1.

⁴ DYER, R. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. New York : St. Martin’s Press, 1986.

However, in his helpful overview *Star Studies: A Critical Guide*, Martin Shingler discusses developments in star studies after the publication of *Stars* and notes that there emerged two important alternative approaches, “the first involving a more in-depth investigation into the part played by audiences in terms of how they engage with stars and the second in terms of a more detailed examination of stardom as an industrial process.”⁵ The latter avenue of research was opened up and explored particularly by Paul McDonald who has, in his three books and several journal articles and book chapters, called for studying and analyzing the industrial and economic processes behind what he calls the production of popular identities⁶ (a term I have adopted for the title of the present study). As he remarked in his 1998 essay published in the revised edition of Dyer’s *Stars*, “to appreciate the social activity of stardom, a pragmatics of star practices is needed to accompany a semiotics of star meanings.”⁷ In his excellent book on stardom in conglomerate Hollywood, McDonald proposed an elaborate alternative to textual and discursive analyses – which still prevail in star studies as well as in film studies in general – by combining interest in the cultural significance of stars with the principles of industry studies, treating stardom as a commercial phenomenon.⁸ As he explains in the book’s first chapter, “stardom is a product of industrialized cultural production, the outcome of multiple, highly organized, inputs and actions.”⁹ Viewed through this lens, stars become primarily phenomena of production (as opposed to phenomena of consumption);¹⁰ they are highly valued assets necessary for stabilizing the industry practices and maximizing profits since their presence on screen and in promotion and publicity contributes to product differentiation.

While McDonald’s inspiring model invites us to study the mechanisms behind the discovery, development, circulation and consumption of stars and star images, it seems that most research projects are still dominated by the emphasis on individual stars, neglecting or marginalizing other important agents in the star-making process – studio executives, producers, directors, cameramen, costume designers, make-up artists, talent scouts, publicists, PR specialists, gossip columnists, talent agents, managers, lawyers etc. One only needs to have a look at the two most popular book series within star studies, the ten-volume *Star Decades* published by Rutgers University Press¹¹ and *Film*

⁵ SHINGLER, M. *Star Studies: A Critical Guide*. London : British Film Institute, 2012, p. 23.

⁶ MCDONALD, P. *The Star System: Hollywood’s Production of Popular Identities*. London : Wallflower Press, 2000.

⁷ MCDONALD, P. Reconceptualising Stardom (Supplementary Chapter). In DYER, R. *Stars*. Second Revised Edition. London : British Film Institute, 1998, p. 200.

⁸ MCDONALD, P. *Hollywood Stardom*. Malden, MA : Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁰ MCDONALD, P. *The Star System: Hollywood’s Production of Popular Identities*. London : Wallflower Press, 2000, p. 2.

¹¹ What follows is a description of the series from the publisher’s website: “Each volume presents original essays analyzing the movie star against the background of American cultural history. As icon, as mediated personality, and as object of audience fascination and desire, the Hollywood star remains the model for celebrity in modern culture and represents a paradoxical combination of achievement, talent, ability, luck, authenticity, superficiality, and even ordinariness. In all of the volumes, stardom is studied as an effect of, and influence on, the particular historical and industrial contexts that enable a star to be ‘discovered,’ to be featured in films, to be promoted and publicized, and ultimately to become a recognizable and admired – even notorious – feature of the cultural landscape. Understanding when, how, and why a star ‘makes it,’ dazzling for a brief moment or enduring across decades, allows readers to assess the importance of medi-

Stars from the British Film Institute and Bloomsbury¹²: both projects are highly informative and enlightening but at the same time they seem to present individual stars as the only viable subjects for framing a research project in star studies. As a result, a profound imbalance has been produced.

In fact, the issue of agency – according to James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper one of the “buzzwords” of the new film history¹³ – is taken up by only a handful of books and articles that fall within the area of star studies. To move on to discuss the literature on Hollywood, which will be the primary focus of my essay, there are indeed several general surveys of how the Hollywood “star machine” functioned¹⁴ but only a few in-depth case studies – as opposed to a plethora of books and journal articles on individual stars. This historical gap is especially apparent and crucial when it comes to studio-era Hollywood: contemporary stars (especially those at the top of the hierarchy whom McDonald calls A-list stars¹⁵) enjoy great autonomy and are heavily involved in navigating their careers (often being simultaneously producers or movie entrepreneurs¹⁶), but in the period between the 1920s and 1940s, stars were mostly contractual employees (however privileged) and most creative and business decisions were made for them by the studios. It seems reasonable, then, to situate their position in a meaningful historical and industrial context and discuss their role in relation to other participants in the star-making process.

Among the few publications that attempt to do so – in addition to books by McDonald that have been already mentioned – are Emily Carman and Philip Drake’s discussion of talent contracts from the edited volume *Hollywood and the Law*;¹⁷ Jane

ated celebrity in an increasingly visualized world.” *Star Decades Complete 10 Volume Set*. In *Rutgers University Press* [online]. [cit. 17 May 2021]. Available at: <https://www.rutgersuniversitypress.org/star-decades-complete-10-volume-set/9780813554433>. The eleventh volume, titled *Stellar Transformations: Movie Stars of the 2010s*, is currently in the making.

¹² The objective of the series, comprising almost 20 entries to date, is described as follows: “Stars are an integral part of the global film industry. This is as true today, in the age of celebrity culture, as in the studio era. Each book in this major new BFI series focuses on an international film star, tracing the development of their star persona, their career trajectory and their acting and performance style. Some also examine the cultural significance of a star’s work, as well as their lasting influence and legacy. The series ranges across a wide historical and geographical spectrum, from silent to contemporary cinema and from Hollywood to Asian cinemas, and addresses both child and adult stardom.” *Film Stars*. *Bloomsbury.com* [online]. [cit. 17 May 2021]. Available at: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/series/film-stars/>.

¹³ CHAPMAN, J. – GLANCY, M. – HARPER, S. Introduction. In CHAPMAN, J. – GLANCY, M. – HARPER, S. (eds.). *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 6.

¹⁴ Especially MCDONALD, P. *The Star System: Hollywood’s Production of Popular Identities*. London: Wallflower Press, 2000; BASINGER, J. *The Star Machine*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007; BALIO, T. *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930–1939*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995, pp. 143–177 (chapter “Selling Stars”); DAVIS, R. L. *The Glamour Factory: Inside Hollywood’s Big Studio System*. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993, pp. 79–95.

¹⁵ MCDONALD, P. *Hollywood Stardom*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 23.

¹⁶ See for instance KING, B. *Embodying the Elastic Self: The Parametrics of Contemporary Stardom*. In AUSTIN, T. – BAKER, M. (eds.). *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom*. London: Arnold, 2003, pp. 45–61.

¹⁷ CARMAN, E. – DRAKE, P. *Doing the Deal: Talent Contracts in Hollywood*. In MCDONALD, P. – CARMAN, E. – HOYT, E. – DRAKE, P. (eds.). *Hollywood and the Law*. London: Palgrave, British Film Institute, 2015, pp. 209–234. Carman is also the author of the book *Independent Stardom* which deals with freelance women stars, including Irene Dunne and Carole Lombard, in the studio-era Hollywood. CARMAN, E. *Independent Stardom: Freelance Women in the Hollywood Studio System*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016.

M. Gaines' examination of the same topic in *Contested Culture*;¹⁸ accounts of Bette Davis and her role at Warner Bros. from Cathy Klaprat and Thomas Schatz;¹⁹ Robert S. Sennett's *Hollywood Hoopla*, a non-academic exploration of promotional strategies used by major Hollywood studios;²⁰ and, perhaps most importantly, Tom Kemper's *Hidden Talent*, a revelatory account tracing the emergence of Hollywood talent agents such as Myron Selznick and Charles Feldman.²¹ The title of Kemper's book is very fitting, indeed: the work of talent agents, producers, publicists and the like was, by definition, relegated mostly to behind-the-scenes. Their mission was to make their clients or employees visible while their own operations remained obscured from the public view. In this way, the studio system perpetuated the myth that stars were born when in fact it is more accurate to say that they were made or developed.

What I propose, then, is to look much more closely at the "hidden" work of those individuals who were responsible for systematically manufacturing, developing, controlling and disseminating star identities in the Hollywood studio era (and possibly in other temporal and geographical contexts, too, even though my focus here – as well as in my work as a film historian – is classical Hollywood cinema). The production of stars in Hollywood was a collaborative process and, in that aspect, it was not unlike the making of films: both processes relied on division of labor and specialization. As stipulated in the talent contracts, the resulting star image was the property of the studio, not the actor or actress who provided the "raw material" (body, face and voice), so to speak, and many individuals from various ranks of a studio hierarchy and sometimes even outside of it were involved. In other words, the performer was merely one among many agents responsible for the result. As neatly summarized by McDonald, "film stardom is therefore never an individual, innate or inevitable effect. It requires the organized collective actions of multiple participants."²²

This raises numerous questions that – to my knowledge – remain mostly unanswered. For instance, which individuals and studio departments were involved in discovering and developing stars? Which specific strategies were used at the different levels of the process? How was the work between multiple departments coordinated? Were there significant differences between individual studios or between majors (MGM, Paramount, Warner Bros. etc.) and independents (Samuel Goldwyn, David O. Selznick, Walter Wanger)? What was the decision-making process when it came to casting (typecasting vs. off-casting)? Under what terms were stars loaned out to other studios or producers and how was the control over the star subsequently divided among the two parties? What was the significance of coupling stars with directors, cameramen, costume designers etc., both for the star images and the economic per-

¹⁸ GAINES, J. M. *Contested Culture: The Image, the Voice, and the Law*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991, in particular chapter 5 "Reading Star Contracts".

¹⁹ KLAPRAT, C. The Star as Market Strategy: Bette Davis in Another Light. In BALIO, T. (ed.). *The American Film Industry*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, pp. 351 – 376. SCHATZ, T. "A Triumph of Bitchery": Warner Bros., Bette Davis, and Jezebel. In STAIGER, J. (ed.). *The Studio System*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995, pp. 74 – 92.

²⁰ SENNETT, R. S. *Hollywood Hoopla: Creating Stars and Selling Movies in the Golden Age of Hollywood*. New York: Billboard Books, 1998.

²¹ KEMPER, T. *Hidden Talent: The Emergence of Hollywood Agents*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2010.

²² MCDONALD, P. *Hollywood Stardom*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 14.

formance of a studio? Still other areas ripe for exploration include screen tests and commercial tie-ins.

To start answering these queries, it is necessary to expand the range of materials defined by Richard Dyer as essential for the construction of stars' images, namely films, promotion, publicity and criticism and commentaries.²³ In addition to these, one needs to look at talent contracts, financial reports, inter-studio correspondence, press releases, screen tests, preview questionnaires, fan mail, etc. The problem is, however, that many of these documents might not be always readily available. For example, MGM prided itself that it had "more stars than there are in heaven"²⁴ so it seems that it would be a particularly appropriate subject for such research, but, as remarked by Emily Carman, "there is no fully centralized or comprehensive archive available for MGM."²⁵ Unfortunately, we face a similar situation when it comes to other members of the so-called Big Five – RKO, Paramount and Twentieth Century-Fox.

Yet, there are places to start, including the vast collections housed by the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the University of Southern California, the University of California, Los Angeles (esp. the Performing Arts Special Collections), the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research in Madison or the Cinema Archives at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. Moreover, online tools such as *Media History Digital Library*²⁶ and *Internet Archive*²⁷ are responsible for making available whole volumes of trade journals such as *Variety* and *The Film Daily* as well as yearbooks, pressbooks and other valuable materials that provide essential entry points into the historical context of studio-era Hollywood.

In my recent project, I have focused on the star-making operations of David O. Selznick whose comprehensive archive, consisting of more than 5,000 boxes, is open to the public at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas.²⁸ Selznick is primarily known as the producer of such classics as *King Kong* (1933), *Anna Karenina* (1935), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Rebecca* (1940) and *Spellbound* (1945) but my research has demonstrated that "star business" (i.e., discovering, developing and selling of stars) was an important – and after 1940 even central – aspect of his activities, not merely an addition to his more widely-known achievements in making of popular and celebrated films. Curiously, though, not much research has been produced in this area.

After forming his own independent production company Selznick International Pictures in 1935, David O. Selznick mostly collaborated with prominent freelance actors and actresses, for example Ronald Colman (*The Prisoner of Zenda*, 1937), Carole Lombard (*Nothing Sacred*, 1937, and *Made for Each Other*, 1939) and Janet Gaynor

²³ DYER, R. *Stars*. London : British Film Institute, 1998, pp. 60 – 63.

²⁴ FINLER, J. W. *The Hollywood Story*. London and New York : Wallflower Press, 2003, p. 156.

²⁵ CARMAN, E. *Independent Stardom: Freelance Women in the Hollywood Studio System*. Austin : University of Texas Press, 2016, p. 167.

²⁶ Available online at <https://mediahistoryproject.org/>.

²⁷ Available online at <https://archive.org/>.

²⁸ See David O. Selznick: An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center. *Harry Ransom Center* [online]. [cit. 18 May 2021]. Available at: <https://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/fasearch/findingAid.cfm?eadid=00671>.

(*A Star Is Born*, 1937, and *The Young in Heart*, 1938).²⁹ Starting in the late 1930s, though, he revised his priorities and began forming his own star stable which, in short time, included actors Joseph Cotten and Gregory Peck and actresses Ingrid Bergman, Vivien Leigh, Joan Fontaine, Jennifer Jones and Dorothy McGuire. These stellar personalities were essential for Selznick since they helped to differentiate his films on the market, provided substantial income (especially through loan-outs to other producers) and contributed to his company's distinctive brand based on the concepts of quality and prestige. Because there is not enough space to cover Selznick's extensive activities in the field of star development in one article, let me focus on a single case study that will hopefully illuminate what kind of knowledge can be gained by investigating Selznick's papers and particularly those materials (memoranda, contracts, financial reports, press releases etc.) related to his star roster.

The following text that reconstructs the beginnings of David O. Selznick's professional alliance with Ingrid Bergman is a partial result of my much more extensive research on the producer's star stable. It is based on a study of a large part of the Selznick collection at the Harry Ransom Center as well as materials in other archives (here, in particular, the Ingrid Bergman collection, which is housed at the Cinema Archives at Wesleyan University). I also draw information from the contemporary press, both daily newspapers and magazines with wide circulation such as the *New York Times* and specialized trade journals like *Variety*.³⁰ By emphasizing Selznick as a producer of popular star identities, my project is methodologically close to the emerging discipline of producer studies, which focuses on the role of producers and their interactions with other prominent agents in the film industry.³¹ It is precisely the mutual cross-fertilization of star studies and producer studies that could represent one direction in which the study of stars and star systems could evolve.

Constructing Naturalness: David O. Selznick, Ingrid Bergman and *Intermezzo* (A Case Study)³²

Ingrid Bergman counts among Hollywood's most highly regarded screen icons because of her remarkable performances in *Casablanca* (1943), *Gaslight* (1944) and *Nocturne* (1946), to name just a few of her legendary films. As a three-time Academy Award winner, she is often celebrated as an exceptionally gifted and versatile performer. Moreover, it is often assumed that she became a top leading woman in Hollywood by challenging many industry norms of what a star should be or how she should look like, remaining on all occasions wholly authentic and autonomous. For example, Ethan Mordden, author of a book on female stars in Hollywood, described

²⁹ See CARMAN, E. Going Independent in 1930s Hollywood: Freelance Star and Independent Producer Collaborations at United Artists. In KRÄMER, P. – NEEDHAM, G. – TZIOUMAKIS, Y. – BALIO, T. (eds.). *United Artists*. London and New York : Routledge, 2020, pp. 57 – 74.

³⁰ For more comprehensive results of my research on Selznick and his stars, see my upcoming book HAIN, M. *V tradici kvality a prestiže: David O. Selznick a výroba hvězd v Hollywoodu 40. a 50. let*. Praha : Casablanca, 2021 (forthcoming).

³¹ See SPICER, A. – MCKENNA, A. T. – MEIR, Ch. (eds.). *Beyond the Bottom Line: The Producer in Film and Television Studies*. London and New York : Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

³² I discuss David O. Selznick and his professional relationship with Bergman in HAIN, M. *V tradici kvality a prestiže: David O. Selznick a výroba hvězd v Hollywoodu 40. a 50. let*. Praha : Casablanca, 2021 (forthcoming). What follows is an abbreviated and heavily edited version of the book's first chapter.

her entry into the American film industry in the following way: "Into the strait maze of studio stardom came Ingrid Bergman, on a direct path, saying no. No, she would not change her name. No, she would not change her looks; she would not play the same character in every film. And no, she would not let her employer tell her how to run her personal affairs. This is the behavior of an individual, not a star."³³ The archival materials in the Selznick collection and elsewhere, however, show a different picture – one that demonstrates that even Bergman was not exempt from the workings of the Hollywood star machine.

She first came to the attention of David Selznick in late 1938, after his close collaborators from the New York office Katharine Brown and Elsa Neuberger saw the Swedish film *Intermezzo* (1936) showcasing the actress in the role of a young woman, Anita Hoffman, who falls in love with a married violinist, Holger Brandt (played by Gösta Ekman). At that time, Selznick – preoccupied with the pre-production work on his monumental Civil War epic *Gone with the Wind* – was "on the lookout for foreign pictures which we might purchase for either remake by ourselves, or as an investment for resale for remake purposes."³⁴ *Intermezzo* directed by Gustaf Molander became a suitable material for such an enterprise because it was a low-key romance and it could be made cheaply and quickly by duplicating camera positions and editing decisions. In addition to closing the deal for the remake rights of *Intermezzo*, Selznick also advised his East Coast representatives to sign a contract with Bergman. As the producer confessed several years later, "I have never seen a quality such as hers, a quality of spirituality and nobility and purity, plus a sensitive and restrained talent."³⁵ After several weeks of considerations, it was decided that Bergman would indeed make her Hollywood debut in Selznick's version of *Intermezzo*, winning over other potential candidates for the role of Anita, especially Loretta Young.

By the late 1930s, Ingrid Bergman was one of the most popular actresses in her native Sweden, but her stardom was of strictly local nature. She did make one film in Germany, *Die vier Gesellen* [The Four Companions] (1938) directed by Carl Froelich, but her other engagements there came to nil after the political developments of 1938 and 1939. Significantly, her star image had quite different contours when compared to her career in Hollywood which, as I will demonstrate shortly, emphasized her naturalness and authenticity. In most of her Swedish films, Bergman was presented as an attractive young woman surrounded by an aura of glamour and luxury. She usually wears heavy make-up and lipstick, her eyebrows are plucked, her hair is carefully coiffed and polished, and she is often seen in formal dresses adorned with jewellery. Similarly, the camera and lighting in films such as *Swedenhielms* (1935), *Valborgsmässoafton* [Walpurgis Night] (1935) and the original *Intermezzo* glamorize the actress by showing her in close-ups in soft focus.³⁶

It wasn't until her arrival in Hollywood as a Selznick contract player that it was decided that she would be presented to the American and international public as

³³ MORDDEN, E. *Movie Star: A Look at the Women Who Made Hollywood*. New York : St. Martin's Press, 1983, p. 260.

³⁴ Qtd. in BEHLMER, R. (ed.). *Memo from David O. Selznick*. New York : The Viking Press, 1972, p. 98.

³⁵ Letter from David O. Selznick, 10 July 1943, For Whom the Bell Tolls – Campaign, b. 3336, f. 1, Selznick Collection, Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas (hereafter Selznick Collection).

³⁶ The most prominent exception is arguably Bergman's best Swedish film – *En kvinnas ansikte* [A Woman's Face] (1938) where she played the leader of a criminal gang with a disfigured face.

a completely natural actress, far removed from the exotic and goddess-like types often associated with female personalities imported from Europe (Hedy Lamarr or Marlene Dietrich being prime examples). As aptly described by critic Robin Wood, though, “clearly, the ‘natural’ is as much a construction as the ‘glamorous,’ the difference being that the latter foregrounds the notion of construction where the former suppresses it.”³⁷ The fabrication of Bergman’s naturalness in Selznick’s remake of *Intermezzo* was accomplished on two main levels; specifically, it involved the actress’ visual presentation in the film and the promotion and publicity that accompanied its release in cinemas.

As fittingly summed up by David Smit, “Selznick was almost fanatical about what he considered the ‘natural’ beauty of Bergman’s face, but he also thought her naturalness needed to be made up and photographed a certain way in order for the camera to capture it adequately.”³⁸ First of all, Bergman underwent a series of internal tests and evaluations with the aim of determining the most appropriate make-up, hairstyle and costumes. One of the persons involved in this process was her co-star and associate producer on *Intermezzo* Leslie Howard who, upon seeing her initial screen tests, opined that “without make-up (Bergman) looks much more natural and much more attractive and much less Hollywood. Her skin has a natural sheen and apparently she has a perfect complexion. Also the lips, instead of looking absolutely fakey and made up, seem to be very natural and attractive in the test without grease paint.”³⁹ The truth was that Bergman’s extremely fair skin – exposed to the bright lights needed to set the scene properly – did require a certain layer of greasepaint.⁴⁰ It was, however, cleverly masked so as not to attract any undue attention. Additionally, it was decided that her eyebrows would not be plucked or drawn in and that her hairdress would remain simple, without any artificial curls or other enhancements. Selznick and his collaborators, including the celebrated designer Irene, also monitored Bergman’s costumes which were supposed to conceal her above-average height – especially when compared to Leslie Howard who was not particularly tall – and wide shoulders, and some of the pieces of furniture were adapted in such a way so as to minimize the difference in height between Bergman and Edna Best who played Holger’s wife Margit.⁴¹

The most important aspect of the film, though, was how Bergman was lit and photographed through the lens of the camera. From the beginning, Selznick pressured the experienced DOP Harry Stradling to get the best results possible, explaining that “the difference in (the) photography (of Bergman) is the difference between great beauty and a complete lack of beauty. And unless we can bring off our photography so that she really looks divine, the whole picture can fall apart from a standpoint

³⁷ WOOD, R. Star and Auteur: Hitchcock’s Films with Bergman. In WOOD, R. *Hitchcock’s Films Revisited*. New York : Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 312.

³⁸ SMIT, D. Marketing Ingrid Bergman. In *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 2005, Vol. 22, Issue 3, p. 240.

³⁹ Memo from Leslie Howard, 18 May 1939, *Intermezzo* Casting, b. 174, f. 11, Selznick Collection.

⁴⁰ A handwritten note stating “they are using makeup” was added to the memorandum from Leslie Howard. Undated memo from David O. Selznick, *Intermezzo* Casting, b. 174, f. 11, Selznick Collection (underlined in the original). See also LUNDE, A. *Nordic Exposures: Scandinavian Identities in Classical Hollywood Cinema*. Seattle : University of Washington Press, 2010, p. 162.

⁴¹ See, for example, memo from David O. Selznick, 17 October 1939, *Intermezzo* Production, b. 176, f. 1, Selznick Collection.

of audience effectiveness."⁴² The producer felt that conventional lighting techniques were not suitable for Bergman's type. Instead, he urged Stradling to make use of all the available "lighting effects – whether it be shadows across part of her face, or unique angles, or rim lighting." According to Selznick, "it would be infinitely preferable for the picture to be photographed in the most conventional and ordinary manner, and have gorgeous photography of Miss Bergman, than the reverse."⁴³

When it became obvious that it was not within Stradling's abilities to satisfy the producer's demands, he was replaced by Gregg Toland, one of the most innovative cameramen active in Hollywood of the late 1930s.⁴⁴ The decision came only a few days after the original director William Wyler was replaced by Gregory Ratoff. This time, the reasons for the change are not so clear, but I believe that it is not far-fetched to assume that once again, it might have had something to do with the visual presentation of Bergman. Not even Toland and Ratoff could, however, avoid Selznick's close supervision. On the contrary, the producer compiled a detailed manual on how to photograph his contract actress. He was absolutely confident that the desired outcome depended on: "avoiding the bad side of her face; keeping her head down as much as possible; giving her the proper hairdress; giving her the proper mouth makeup; avoiding long shots so as not to make her look too big and, more importantly, but for the same reason, avoiding low camera on her, as well as being careful to build people who work with her, such as Leslie Howard and Edna Best (as well, of course, the children, beside whom she looks titanic if the camera work isn't carefully studied); but most important of all, on shading her face and in invariably going for effect lightings on her."⁴⁵

Special care was dedicated to Bergman's introductory scene in the film because it would mark the occasion that American and most international audiences would see Selznick's fresh discovery for the first time. In fact, the producer ordered three different versions of her entrée until he was completely satisfied. He also asked Toland to pay particular attention to Bergman's close-ups because "every beautiful shot we get of her is a great deal of money added to the returns on the picture"⁴⁶ and he even entrusted his editor Hal Kern with the task of studying in detail the rough cut of the film in order to identify more scenes where close-ups of Bergman might be inserted without disturbing the narrative. In the end, then, Bergman's face became perhaps the most prominent attraction of the film. In the words of David Smit, " (...) in most of the crucial scenes between Anita Hoffman (Bergman) and her lover Holler Brand [sic!, Holger Brandt] (Leslie Howard), Bergman is photographed with a high-angle shot of the left side of her face, usually with a great deal of high contrast that puts part of her face in shadow and gives her eyes her signature dewy look. (...) What we might call the 'Selznick shot' of Bergman is (...) a major reason for her image as wholesome and spiritual. The shot literally highlights Bergman's beauty: the soft focus bathes

⁴² Memo from David O. Selznick, 9 June 1939, *Intermezzo Casting*, b. 174, f. 11, Selznick Collection.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See SALT, B. *Film Style & Technology: History & Analysis*. London : Starword, 1992, pp. 232 – 234; BORDWELL, D. *Deep-focus Cinematography*. In BORDWELL, D. – STAIGER, J. – THOMPSON, K. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 345 – 349.

⁴⁵ Memo from David O. Selznick, 22 June 1939, *Intermezzo Cameraman*, b. 174, f. 10, Selznick Collection.

⁴⁶ Memo from David O. Selznick, 11 July 1939, *Intermezzo Cameraman*, b. 174, f. 10, Selznick Collection.

her in light and shadow and captures the light in her eyes. Her look of longing and devotion, her posture of submission, all suggest something beyond the mere physical, something similar to the scenes of saints in medieval painting and in the work of El Greco."⁴⁷

It was specifically because of Selznick's attention to – and perhaps even obsession with – the quality of Bergman's photography in *Intermezzo* that the film was in production for 45 days instead of 30 as was originally planned and went more than \$300,000 over budget.⁴⁸ Thus, a relatively modest picture was transformed into an ambitious star vehicle whose primary goal was to introduce Selznick's Swedish discovery to the general public in the most effective way imaginable.

Publicity was also essential in creating an attractive identity for Bergman and provoking audience interest. After the contract was signed, Selznick decided that "the best thing to do would be to import her quietly into the studio (and) go about our business of making the picture with only such publicity attendant upon her casting as would be the case with any unimportant leading woman."⁴⁹ In one of her first interviews in Hollywood, Bergman made several unfortunate comments regarding her "sexiness" and unusual height that were inconsistent with the objectives of the studio.⁵⁰ Following this incident, Selznick agreed with his head of publicity William Hebert that Bergman would avoid further contacts with the press altogether until the film was finished.⁵¹ This was later transformed into a significant advantage because the absence of typical ballyhoo gave the impression that the public itself was responsible for discovering Bergman and turning her into a star.

The publicity machine began working in full swing after *Intermezzo's* premiere in September 1939. The pressbook for the film clearly defined the main principles for the campaign on Bergman who was to be prominently represented in all advertising materials: "A gorgeous new star to enchant them... Fresh, lovely and unaffected as her native seas and skies and winds... playing with a forthright simplicity and directness that brush aside all artifice... Beautiful of feature, lithe and springlike of figure... and with a dramatic power to feel and portray the profoundest passions... Ingrid Bergman will mean to your audiences a new, exciting departure in cinema heroines, and to your box-office the vitality that comes of a new, glamorous screen discovery with clear intimations of greatness!"⁵²

The pressbook encouraged the exhibitors to emphasize Bergman's authenticity and unaffected personality: "She still bears the name she was born with. Her own complexion photographs so well that she uses no make-up before the cameras. (...)

⁴⁷ SMIT, D. Marketing Ingrid Bergman. In *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 2005, Vol. 22, Issue 3, p. 243.

⁴⁸ In the end, it cost more than \$1,000,000. See budget for *Intermezzo* from 22 December 1939, *Intermezzo Daily Budget Reconciliation*, b. 175, f. 2, Selznick Collection.

⁴⁹ Memo from David O. Selznick, 27 February 1939, *Intermezzo Publicity Cont.*, b. 176, f. 4, Selznick Collection.

⁵⁰ See FRIEDMAN, H. Meet New Star from Sweden. *Los Angeles Examiner*, ca. June 1939; the article is part of a collection of excerpts in the Series X Scrapbooks, 1938–1939, 1939–1940, b. 50, Ingrid Bergman Collection, Cinema Archives, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut (hereafter Ingrid Bergman Collection).

⁵¹ See memo from David O. Selznick, 28 July 1939, *Intermezzo Publicity Cont.*, b. 176, f. 4, Selznick Collection.

⁵² Pressbook for *Intermezzo: A Love Story*, The Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.

Ingrid's tastes are simple and reflected in her clothes. White is her favorite color and predominates in her wardrobe. Corn on the cob, unknown in Sweden, has become her favorite edible."⁵³

The publicity strategy was devised in such a way as to differentiate Bergman's constructed identity on the market where dozens of actresses with contracts at various studios were vying for audience support. Selznick wanted Bergman to be "glamorous, (but) not in the usual Hollywood way."⁵⁴ If Margaret Farrand Thorp, writing in 1939, defined Hollywood glamour as the combination of sex appeal, luxury, elegance and romance,⁵⁵ then Bergman under Selznick's tutelage lacked most of these ingredients and was instead promoted as an anti-star of sorts and certainly the antithesis of the exotic, mysterious, dazzling type associated with many foreign-born female stars including her compatriot Greta Garbo or Marlene Dietrich. Bergman was supposed to come across as natural, carefree, easy going and open. Selznick's publicity department was responsible for sending out numerous press releases with the aim of making "her natural sweetness and consideration and conscientiousness (...) something of a legend."⁵⁶ Gossip columnists reproduced stories on how the actress easily bonded with the film crew; how she never complained about working overtime; how she herself wanted to repair a damaged costume that was designated to be discarded; or how she felt truly sorry for cameraman Harry Stradling who had to be replaced in the middle of the shoot.⁵⁷ As one article from January 1940 made abundantly clear, Ingrid Bergman "fits exactly your idea of what a star isn't like."⁵⁸

Other articles in the press validated Selznick's strategy by commenting on Bergman's unusual qualities which were strikingly at odds with the widespread conception of a glamorous female star. A review of *Intermezzo* written by Frank S. Nugent for the *New York Times* is worth quoting at length because it clearly demonstrates how the press – and ultimately the general public – accepted the rhetoric of Selznick's studio and welcomed Bergman as a wholly fresh phenomenon, with no equivalent in Hollywood's recent history: "Sweden's Ingrid Bergman is so lovely a person and so gracious an actress that we are rather glad David Selznick selected the quiet "Intermezzo, a Love Story," for her Hollywood debut instead of some more bravura drama which, while it might not have overwhelmed its star, might have overwhelmed us and made us less conscious of the freshness, the simplicity and the natural dignity that are Miss Bergman's pleasant gift to our screen. The reticent, gentle, frequently poignant qualities of the (...) new film are safely entrusted to Miss Bergman's hands—and to those of Leslie Howard and Edna Best, who have assisted at her debut. (...) Miss Bergman's share in it is, of course, the nicest part of it. She is beautiful, and not at all pretty. Her acting is surprisingly mature, yet singularly free from the stylistic traits—the mannerisms, postures, precise inflections—that become the stock in trade of the matured actress. Our impression of her Anita, who is pallid one moment, vivacious

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Memo from David O. Selznick, 2 January 1940, *Intermezzo* Publicity, b. 176, f. 3, Selznick Collection.

⁵⁵ THORP, M. F. *America at the Movies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939, p. 65.

⁵⁶ Memo from David O. Selznick, 22 June 1939, *Intermezzo* Publicity Cont., b. 176, f. 4, Selznick Collection.

⁵⁷ See *ibid.* and other documents in the same file.

⁵⁸ STINNETT, J. One-Word Sketch of Ingrid Bergman: Different. *New York World Telegram*, 24 January 1940, Series X Scrapbooks, 1938–1939, 1939–1940, b. 50, Ingrid Bergman Collection.

the next, yet always consistent, is that of a lamp whose wick burns bright or dull, but always burns. There is that incandescence about Miss Bergman, that spiritual spark which makes us believe that Selznick has found another great lady of the screen."⁵⁹

Despite such enthusiasm directed at Selznick's discovery, the film did not end up a commercial triumph. In what many consider the best year in Hollywood's history,⁶⁰ *Intermezzo* (eventually released as *Intermezzo: A Love Story*) was simply too modest in scale to directly compete with films such as *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Women*, *Beau Geste*, *Babes in Arms*, *Stagecoach*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* or Selznick's own *Gone with the Wind*, which was released in December. By the time the picture was finished, though, the producer's aims had considerably changed: originally, *Intermezzo* was supposed to generate easy profits by keeping the costs low; after casting Bergman and discovering her star potential, the film was tailor-made for her with the single purpose of introducing her to audiences as a new star on the rise.⁶¹ In this way, Selznick gave preference to long-term benefits related to developing an attractive and commercially desirable acting personality over short-term interests associated with producing one isolated box-office hit. Ironically, then, the success of Bergman in her first Hollywood role was in a way dependent on the commercial failure of *Intermezzo* in its original theatrical run: by investing more than he initially planned, Selznick sacrificed instant profits in favor of a more lasting value. The process of transforming Bergman from a newcomer into a top Hollywood personality was completed in the following years when she was loaned out to lucrative roles in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1941, MGM), *Casablanca* (1943, Warner Bros.), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943, Paramount), *Gaslight* (1944, MGM) and *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945, Rainbow Productions/RKO), all of which became big money-makers and brought Selznick hefty profits.

Another paradox associated with her role in *Intermezzo* is that all the technical and personal resources at the disposal of Selznick's studio were mobilized in order to construct an identity for the actress that would appear natural and authentic, without any trace of intervention or manipulation. Simply put, she was assumed to project her true self in the role of Anita and, likewise, the publicity generated by Selznick's studio, which took the form of a number of articles and notices in the press, was believed to report on her authentic personality. All of this had far-reaching consequences for the actress. It helps to explain, for instance, the public outrage Bergman caused at the end of the decade by starting an adulterous affair with Italian director Roberto Rossellini. The public simply could not accept that the saintly Ingrid was capable of such a transgression of social norms.⁶²

Though heavily abbreviated, I hope that my account – consisting of a parallel production history of Bergman's Hollywood debut and her emerging star identity –

⁵⁹ NUGENT, F. S. The Screen: Four Films in Review, *New York Times*, 6 October 1939, p. 31.

⁶⁰ See, for example, HISCHAK, T. S. 1939: *Hollywood's Greatest Year*. Lanham, MS: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017.

⁶¹ In a personal letter to Ingrid Bergman, the producer wrote that "the principal purpose of the picture was to introduce you to American and English audiences." See a letter from David O. Selznick, 16 October 1939, *Intermezzo* Comment, b. 174, f. 13, Selznick Collection.

⁶² For more on her affair with Rossellini and its public reception, see MCLEAN, A. L. The Cinderella Princess and the Instrument of Evil: Revisiting Two Postwar Hollywood Star Scandals. In MCLEAN, A. L. – COOK, D. A. (eds.). *Headline Hollywood: A Century of Film Scandal*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001, pp. 163 – 189.

proves that it was not luck, coincidence or her resistance to established Hollywood practices that turned her into a top leading woman in the industry. Instead, it was the result of a calculated and expertly executed campaign overseen by Selznick and his collaborators at the studio. Even though the result may have been unique – the accent on Bergman’s naturalness and authenticity in many ways contrasted with the accepted norms of what a female star in Hollywood should be like – the process was pretty much standard as it relied on a combination of manufacture and concealment. It is yet another paradox that Selznick, the chief orchestrator of Bergman’s Hollywood success, was also the creator of *A Star Is Born*, a mythmaking, Cinderella-inspired narrative that tried to convince the public that the only thing that really matters when it comes to “making it in Hollywood” is getting a lucky break. His prolific career as a producer of stars attests to the exact opposite.

In *The Life of the Author*, published in 2014, Sarah Kozloff called for the return of intentionality into our discussion of authorship in cinema.⁶³ My purpose here was to propose introducing intentionality, along with the related concepts of agency and collaboration, into the study of stars. Treating the production of film stars as a complex and collaborative process and redirecting our focus from stars per se to starmakers can bring more nuance to our understanding of the origin and meaning of these highly visible, seemingly autonomous personalities as well as the film industry as a whole.

Translated by the author

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⁶³ KOZLOFF, S. *The Life of the Author*. Montreal : caboose, 2014.

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