

Dancing Dreams:
Performing American Identities in Postwar Hollywood Musicals, 1944-1958

Pamella R. Lach

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History

Chapel Hill
2007

Approved by:

Peter G. Filene

John F. Kasson

Robert C. Allen

Jerma Jackson

William Ferris

©2007
Pamella R. Lach
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Abstract

Pamella R. Lach

Dancing Dreams:
Performing American Identities in Postwar Hollywood Musicals, 1944-1958
(Under the direction of Peter G. Filene)

With the pressures of the dawning Cold War, postwar Americans struggled to find a balance between conformity and authentic individualism. Although musical motion pictures appeared conservative, seemingly touting traditional gender roles and championing American democratic values, song-and-dance numbers (spectacles) actually functioned as sites of release for filmmakers, actors, and moviegoers. Spectacles, which film censors and red-baiting politicians considered little more than harmless entertainment and indirect forms of expression, were the least regulated aspects of musicals. These scenes provided relatively safe spaces for actors to play with and defy, but also reify, social expectations. Spectacles were also sites of resistance for performers, who relied on their voices and bodies—sometimes at odds with each other—to reclaim power that was denied them either by social strictures or an oppressive studio system. *Dancing Dreams* is a series of case studies about the role of spectacle—literal dances but also spectacles of discourse, nostalgia, stardom, and race—in inspiring Americans to find forms of individual self-expression with the potential to challenge prevailing norms. It explores how Gene Kelly tried to broaden definitions of dance and art to make a case for the heterosexual male dancer; how Judy Garland used her performances to strike back at studio executives who tried to mold her femininity; how racial

stereotypes and the Hollywood politics of race limited Oscar Hammerstein's liberal messages of racial inclusion and cooperation; and how fantasy dances could remold nationality and gender. Musical motion pictures thus expand the definition of rebellion to include the sort of private, and often, quiet forms of personal resistance that occurred throughout the 1950s, and helps us to understand better the radical potential of postwar America.

Dedication

To my mother, who gave me my love of dance—

And in memory of my father, who gave me my love of song

Acknowledgements

In the summer of 2004, as a newly minted Ph.D. Candidate, I sat in the reading room of the Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University on my first major research trip. I was gingerly sifting through the personal papers of Gene Kelly, uncertain of what I was looking for. I noticed a sweet-looking older woman sitting at a nearby table. She had just flown into town from Europe, and would only be in Boston for a few hours, en route to see her daughter in the mid-West. She had chosen to spend her limited time in the archive, filling in some gaps in whatever research she was conducting. She kept glancing my way, until finally she approached. The pile of boxes labeled “Gene Kelly Collection” had caught her eye, and she wanted to know what I was researching. After I explained that I was working on my dissertation, she paused, and with a half-smile told me, “You know, I was his first wife.”

I was stunned to be face-to-face with Betsy Blair. Regrettably, I was far too shy and nervous to hold a meaningful conversation with her. By the time I had built up enough courage, she was long gone, probably already nestled in an airplane seat flying somewhere over the Great Lakes. Though we never really spoke, the encounter remains as vivid today as I complete my dissertation as it was when I was only just starting. It is one of the many moments I experienced over the last three years when things clicked, connections suddenly became visible, and everything seemed to fall into place. True, the process of researching and writing has been far from smooth. There were times when I could not face getting out of

bed to work on this project. But throughout, I have returned to these satisfactory moments, which have buoyed my spirits and inspired me to keep pushing forward.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of countless individuals and institutions. The financial assistance provided from UNC's Graduate Student Opportunity Fund and the UNC History Department's Mowry Dissertation Research Grant made my trips to Boston, New York, and Los Angeles possible, while the Doris G. Quinn Dissertation Completion Fellowship ensured my timely finish. Sean Noel, Assistant Director for Public Service at the Gotlieb Center in Boston, always had a smile for me when I arrived each morning. Boston Archivist Maria Morelli proved invaluable in uncovering sources I did not even realize existed. In Los Angeles, Barbara Hall and the countless other assistants at the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences expertly guided me in my search for material. And at the Cinema-Television Library at the University of Southern California, Ned Comstock once again proved indispensable. He has followed my progress since I began working on postwar musicals during my first year of graduate school. He has patiently answered my questions, sifted through dusty material, and mailed me vital documents I somehow managed to misplace. Without his knowledge and support I could never have completed this project.

I am equally grateful to my colleagues at UNC and Duke University, who have been an ideal sounding board over the years. I have consistently received thoughtful and constructive feedback, most notably when I have given talks for the Working Group in Feminism and History, the UNC Music In Context Group, and the UNC History Department Research Colloquium. Likewise, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's "Creative Action: Gender and Arts" Conference was an excellent testing ground for my third chapter.

But beyond these formal academic avenues, I have enjoyed countless conversations with peers and professors about my work. I have never ceased to be impressed by the outpouring of support my department has offered for a topic that many in the field might consider to be on the fringe.

I am especially thankful to Bobby Allen and Jerma Jackson, who have devoted significant time to productive brainstorming sessions. I have thoroughly enjoyed my many conversations about musicals and Broadway shows with John Kasson. I have always left his office feeling rejuvenated, ready to plunge once more into my work. And Charlene Register in African and Afro-American Studies gave up her time and her files to aid in my writing of Chapter Five. Without her assistance, I would still be adrift.

My two writing groups have provided me with critical feedback over the years. My “ladies group”—Nancy Schoonmaker, Tomoko Yagyu, Katie Otis, Kim Hill, and Montgomery Wolf—has kept me on-track and in good spirits since the Spring of 2005, while Patrick O’Neil, Greg Kaliss, and Maren Wood have in more recent months offered me with insightful feedback on my final chapters. I am particularly grateful to Laura Micheletti Puaca, my partner in crime since our days at Douglass. She has not only been the ideal writing partner over the years, she has been an immense source of commiseration and support. Her undying confidence has constantly inspired and encouraged me.

I am, of course, eternally grateful to my advisor, Peter G. Filene, who has been an unwavering source of guidance in all matters of my graduate education. He has kept me focused, and has constantly helped to renew my faith in my ability to complete my dissertation. Most importantly, he made sure that I did not lose my way over the years. He taught me to always remember what it was that drew me to this topic, and instructed me in

how to maintain (or rekindle) my love not just for this project but for 1950s musicals in general. And, he gently nudged me over the finish line.

Finally, I could never have completed *Dancing Dreams* without the loving support of my closest friends. I cherish the long conversations—over Los Pos margaritas or over the phone—with Barb, who always believed in me. Her Velvet Elvis hangs over my desk, where I gaze at it daily and am reminded of how far I have come, and how much more I will accomplish. Rose’s countless words of wisdom, kitschy little gifts, and frequent trips back always boosted my morale. Her generosity in sharing Yama, as much as her goofy messages, have kept me invigorated over the years. And though Harveen is in a different world many miles away, she has always been there for me, cheering me up when necessary. Her patience and understanding, as well as her cherished visits to North Carolina, nearly made up for the distance between us. There are so many others, too many to name here, who have listened to me rant, given me a shoulder on which to cry, or just provided me with necessary distractions.

Lastly to Big O, who has managed to keep me grounded. During the hardest phase of this dissertation, you have made sure I am smiling and in good spirits. It is as if our lives are a musical—time has ceased to matter and music is everywhere around us.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations	xii
Introduction: “I’ll make a plot with song and dance and music”: The Hollywood Musical Re-imagined	1
Hollywood at the Dawn of the Cold War	10
The Golden Age of the Musical	17
<i>Dancing Dreams</i> : The Postwar Musical as Historical Artifact	25
Chapter	
I. Real Men Don’t Dance: Gene Kelly and the Aesthetics of Postwar Masculinity	30
Real Men Don’t Dance: The Male Dancer and the Stigma of Effeminacy	33
“The Prettiest Legs”	42
Dancing is a Man’s Game	54
Language as Spectacle	70
II. “You can’t run away from yourself”: Unleashing the Possibilities of Kelly’s Cine-Dance	73
The Technology of the Cine-Dance	79
The (American) Art of the Cine-Dance	85
The Social Possibilities of the Cine-Dance	91
Kelly Unbounded: The Cine-Dance in Action	95
III. “In-Between”: Judy Garland and the Nostalgia of Failed Femininity	115
In-Between Child Actor and Adult Star	119

	“Too much bloom:” The Spectacle of Failed Femininity	131
	The Spectacle of Nostalgia	149
IV.	“And the history of my life is in my songs”: The Spectacle of Authenticity in <i>A Star is Born</i>	166
	Back on the Stage: Recycling and Reinventing Stardom	169
	<i>A Star is Born</i> : Authenticity as Spectacle	173
	“Born in a Trunk”: Authenticity as Nostalgia	188
V.	Whiteface, Blackface, Yellowface: Voicing Race in Oscar Hammerstein’s Musicals	210
	Blacks in Hollywood	216
	An “American Idiom”: Vocalizing Race in <i>Carmen Jones</i>	224
	The Strange Career of Dorothy Dandridge: De-Vocalizing Race in <i>Carmen Jones</i>	237
	“The Small House of Uncle Thomas”: “Hollywood Siamese” in <i>The King and I</i>	253
VI.	An Invitation to Dream: The Artistic Possibilities and Commercial Limits of Fantasy Dances	266
	Prelude to a Dream: The “American in Paris Ballet”	268
	Realizing a Dream: The Making of <i>Invitation to the Dance</i>	275
	Waking from the Dream: The Artistic and Commercial Limits of <i>Invitation to the Dance</i>	292
	The Dancing Dream: The Fantastical Possibilities in “Sinbad the Sailor”	312
	Conclusion: The Social Function of (Artistic) Fantasy	328
	Epilogue: Beyond the Fifties	331
	Filmography	334
	Bibliography	337

Abbreviations

AAC	Adele Astaire Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts.
AFC	Arthur Freed Collection, Special Collections, Cinema-Television Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California.
CRC	Charlene Regester Collection, Department of Afro- and African-American Studies, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
CWC	Charles Walters Collection, Special Collections, Cinema-Television Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California.
GKC	Gene Kelly Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts.
HOHP	Oral History Program, Core Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills.
HRC	Helen Rayburn Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts.
JPC	Joe Pasternak Collection, Special Collections, Cinema-Television Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California.
JRDD	Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Culman Center, New York, New York.
MGMC	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Collection, Special Collections, Cinema-Television Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California.
MRC	Media Resources Center, House Undergraduate Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
MTR	Museum of Television and Radio, Beverly Hills, California.
PBC	Press Book Collection, Special Collections, Cinema-Television Library, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California.
PCAR	Motion Picture Association of America [MPAA] Production Code Administration [PCA] Records, Special Collections, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.

VMP

Vincente Minnelli Papers, Special Collections, Margaret Herrick Library,
Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California.

Introduction

“I’ll make a plot with song and dance and music”: The Hollywood Musical Re-imagined

In September of 1950, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) took out a full-page advertisement in *Weekly Variety* to promote its seven latest Technicolor musicals. Each film was represented by a picture of its leading lady—Betty Hutton, Esther Williams, Vera-Ellen, Judy Garland, Kathryn Grayson, Jane Powell—and all but one image emphasized the women’s sexualized dancing (or, in the case of Williams, swimming) legs. A box inset at the bottom, with MGM’s trademark cartoon version of Leo the Lion, read “Love notes from a noted showman!” in which Si Fabian, a film exhibitor and owner of Fabian Theatres, offered this glowing testimonial: “I’m glad that M-G-M makes the musicals. Today with so much grief, the patron tries to escape from the world for a few hours. They thank us for it when they leave the theatre. It’s a wonderful thing to be able to bring happiness into people’s lives.”¹

Fabian’s comment spoke to a larger question floating about Hollywood in the years immediately following the Second World War. The film industry’s wartime collaboration with the Office of War Information, coupled with rising concerns about racial prejudice and

¹ The films listed: *Annie Get Your Gun*, *The Duchess of Idaho*, *Three Little Words*, *Summer Stock*, *The Toast of New Orleans*, *Two Weeks with Love*, and *Pagan Love Song*. *Variety* (Weekly), 27 September 1950, 12. On escapism in the Hollywood musical see Timothy E. Scheurer, “The Aesthetics of Form and Convention in the Movie Musical,” *Journal of Popular Film* 3, no. 4 (Fall 1974): 307-324; and Jim Collins, “Toward Defining a Matrix of the Musical Comedy: The Place of the Spectator Within the Textual Mechanisms,” in *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman (London: Routledge/British Film Institute, 1981), 134-146.

anti-Semitism sparked by the Holocaust, led to the postwar production of “social pictures,” films that tackled prevailing problems of the day.² As Fabian’s endorsement suggested, musicals, one of the most popular genres of the 1950s, remained outside this trend, relegated to providing only escapist entertainment. But to deny musicals’ social relevance, as Si Fabian and countless other Americans did, fails to place these pictures in their appropriate cultural and historical contexts, and thus limits our own understanding of the genre’s importance in the postwar period.³

Dancing Dreams started with a very simple question: if musicals were so popular in the postwar period, why have so few cultural historians studied the genre, and why do genre theorists not consider fifties musicals apart from musicals of other eras?⁴ It was from this

² For more on wartime Hollywood see Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, “What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945,” in *Hollywood’s America: United States History Through Its Films*, eds. Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts (St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1993), 157-168; and Randy Roberts, “You Must Remember This: The Case of Hall Wallis’ *Casablanca*,” in *Hollywood’s America*, eds. Mintz and Roberts, 169-177. For a discussion of World War II musicals, see Allen L. Woll, *The Hollywood Musical Goes to War* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1983). For more on immediate postwar social pictures, see “Truman ‘Rewrites’ Hollywood Scripting as Pix Lean to Social Significance,” *Variety* (Weekly), 19 January 1949, 52.

³ The “postwar period” most commonly refers to the fifteen years following the end of WWII: 1945-1960. This is roughly the period in which I am interested, though I have chosen to start my study in 1944 when Vincente Minnelli made his first Technicolor musical, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, and end in 1958, when his *Gigi* won the Academy Award for Best Picture. The movies in this timeframe, particularly those produced by Arthur Freed’s musical unit at MGM, might be considered unified in form and content. With only a few notable exceptions, musicals after 1958 avoided the sort of fantasy-laden production numbers so popular and common throughout the 1950s—scenes such as “Laurey’s Dream” from *Oklahoma!* (1955) or Gene Kelly’s artistic fantasy, “The American in Paris Ballet” from the award-winning musical of the same name (1951). The musicals I examine, by and large, share a common aesthetic—bold Technicolors, over-the-top dance routines, integrated plots, and a synergistic reliance on popular billboard hits. Many of these films, too, were adaptations of postwar Broadway shows, and often featured crossover talent. Moreover, these films shared critical and popular acclaim, making this era the Golden Age of the Hollywood musical. For all of these artistic similarities, and for shorthand purposes, I interchangeably refer to all of the films in this study, even those produced in the late 1940s, as *fifties musicals* or *postwar musicals*.

⁴ Film theorists are only beginning to appreciate the historical value of musical motion pictures, though most historicization tends to focus on Depression-era musicals. Theorists who study the genre rarely consider 1950s musicals as a distinct category of film. See Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987);

point of origin that I set out to determine what it was about musicals that was so appealing to postwar Americans. What needs did the genre fulfill, what social functions did these films provide? How could a study of a seemingly conservative genre not only reveal the radical potential of the era, but help redefine the way we think about rebellion in the Twentieth Century? In essence, how would an examination of musicals change what we know about the 1950s, and vice versa?

To answer these questions, I explore the ways in which postwar musical motion pictures used indirect communication—song and dance, rather than spoken language—to advance agendas that often ran counter to prevailing conventions, particularly gender and racial norms. Though on the surface musicals were fairly conservative mouthpieces for American democracy and the sanctity of heterosexual marriage, their spectacles (musical numbers) afforded performers, filmmakers, and audiences the opportunity to step out of customary roles, if only fleetingly. Musical numbers, as extra-lingual moments less strictly bound to the Production Code that policed celluloid behavior, functioned as relatively safe spaces for actors to play around with their identities; they could stretch, abandon, but also celebrate mainstream social norms. In an era with so few public avenues for personal expression, musicals provided a necessary release for performers. American audiences,

Rick Altman, ed., *Genre: The Musical*; Steven Cohan, ed., *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002); Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell, eds., *Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond* (Portland, OR: Intellect, 2000); John Kobal, *Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance: The History of Movie Musicals* (London: Hamlyn, 1971); and Mast, *Can't Help Singin'*. See also Patricia Mellencamp, "Spectacle and Spectator: Looking Through the American Musical Comedy," *Ciné-Tracts* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 27-35; Richard Barrios, *A Song in the Dark: The Birth of the Musical Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Bruce Babington Peter William Evans, *Blue Skies and Silver Linings: Aspects of the Hollywood Musical* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), Part IV: "From the fifties to the present," 165-204; Ethan Mordden, *The Hollywood Musical* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); and Roy Hemming, *The Melody Lingers On: The Great Songwriters and Their Movie Musicals* (New York: Newmarket Press, 1986).

many of whom likewise felt stifled or constricted, might have shared that sense of release while watching in darkened theaters.

A song-and-dance man could reject the boundaries of appropriate masculine heterosexuality by playfully dancing with other men, or draping a tablecloth over his head to transform himself into a woman. A female singer could buck the prevailing tenets of femininity by throwing men's clothing on and lustily singing with a voice as powerful as a man's. And non-white actors could use the tricks of filmmaking—grease paint, vocal dubbing—to completely transform their ethnic and racial composition. Song and dance, then, could be used as a tool for rebelling against society, a way to express an individual and unique identity in an otherwise conformist culture.⁵

When we think about postwar rebellion, it is most often associated with the burgeoning civil rights movement born out of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.⁶ The immediate postwar period saw few mass movements, save for instances such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and early protests against civil defense.⁷ But that does not mean

⁵ Of course, markers of identity, such as race, class, and gender, are inextricably intertwined, though for analytical purposes I try to separate them. Gisela Bock, "Equality and Difference in National Socialist Racism," in *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 267-290. I further borrow from Caroline Bynam's concept of identity-positions in "Why All the Fuss about the Body?" in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, eds. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 262-265.

⁶ There is a rich body of literature on the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, including Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975); Howell Raines, *My Soul is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1977; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1983); Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality 1954-1992*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); and Richard Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States since 1938* (New York: Penguin, 1980).

⁷ Dee Garrison, "'Our Skirts Gave Them Courage': The Civil Defense Protest Movement in New York City, 1955-1961," in *NOT June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 201-226. See also Amy Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace versus HUAC," *Feminist Studies* 8 (1982): 493-520 reprinted in *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, 4th ed., eds., Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 493-506.

that rebellions did not occur in this decade. True, the fifties would not see the mass youth movements or large-scale debates about identity politics so prevalent in the sixties and the seventies. But rebellions were occurring throughout the country in the 1950s, typically in quieter ways in people's homes, hearts, and dreams. Hollywood musicals were a part of this by encouraging people to shuck social demands at least temporarily and imagine other possibilities for themselves. Studying the genre therefore alters the chronology of radical rebellion in the twentieth century, removing it from the domain of the thirties and sixties. An examination of postwar Hollywood musicals helps us recast the period as a time rife with its own set of social upheavals and redefine rebellion on a smaller, more private, and individualized scale.

Of all the places where one might expect to see resistance and rebellion occurring in the 1950s, musicals might seem the least likely. On the surface, musical motion pictures were conventional, if not wholly conservative, pieces of popular culture, especially in contrast to abstract expressionism in the art world and the new, more realistic and gritty work of filmmakers such as Elia Kazan. Musicals were completely formulaic through the 1950s; they revolved around the formation of the happy heterosexual couple, using song and dance as the common ground to bridge initial differences. Thus, music brought people together, it was the means for falling in love, overcoming problems, and learning to live together. This was the blueprint until the introduction of far more tragic, less fantasy-driven musicals such as *West Side Story*.⁸ In essence, Hollywood musicals were central to American identity

⁸ Several postwar musicals contained notable elements of tragedy, beginning with Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Carousel*, which premiered on Broadway in 1945 and was adapted to film in 1956. Indeed, many Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals touched on the tragic, as with the deaths of King Mongkut in *The King and I* (1956) and Lieutenant Joe Cable in *South Pacific* (1957). But, though these musicals contained elements of tragedy, they ultimately adhered to the patterns of the musical comedy. Both *Carmen Jones* (1954) and *A Star is Born* (1954) featured tragic endings, however *Carmen Jones*, as an adaptation of an opera, was in a unique category, despite its adherence to predominant 1950s stylizations. In contrast, *A Star is Born*, shot by

formation, reflecting traditional values and instructing audiences on the ways of building communities where individual differences were subsumed in the interests of the group—metaphors for American democracy.⁹ Hollywood musicals drew upon and added to the long tradition of American popular music, recycling nostalgic Tin Pan Alley favorites, or crafting new hits by American composers—Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, the Gershwins, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II—to create a musical character to match the American character. Similarly, American dance styles—from folksy square dancing to jazzy tap—were central to the projection of the qualities of the American persona. On the surface, then, Hollywood musicals’ songs and dances paralleled postwar consensus politics.¹⁰

While this was an undeniable element to postwar musicals, I would like to offer an alternative approach. Following Stacy Wolf’s lead, I propose that musicals should also be read against the grain, rendering visible the possibilities for individuality and difference. Even as musicals seemed to celebrate characters’ sameness, as represented by the squelching of differences and the forging of a common ground, there was still room for alternatives. While non-conforming characters who could or would not be reformed were typically eliminated from the narrative by the end of the film, their original presence and ultimate exclusion were noteworthy and frequently problematic.¹¹

the non-musical director George Cukor, had a much more realistic feel to it, perhaps helping to usher in a new style of musicals that would come to prevail in the sixties and beyond.

⁹ J. P. Telotte explores the tensions between individual self-expression and the affirmation of communal belonging in the musicals of Vincente Minnelli. “Self and Society: Vincente Minnelli and Musical Formula,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 181-193.

¹⁰ On the role of the musical in the formation of a national identity, see Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) and Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹¹ Stacy Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2002). For a discussion of the narrative elimination of non-conforming characters see Most,

Masking itself in an outward celebration of conservative values and American exceptionalism, the Hollywood musical was capable of delivering alternate and perhaps far more subversive messages to those willing to listen. On-screen dialogue might fit perfectly with prevailing gender and racial norms of the day, but extra-diegetic moments spoke to something far more complex and fluid. Spectacles offered the possibilities for difference and individuality, even as the overall film celebrated and rewarded sameness and conformity. As a formulaic, mass-produced, mass-consumed, standardized cultural product, musicals nevertheless engendered unique self-expression, or at least a space of fantasy—a half waking dream world—where Americans could try on and play around with different aspects of themselves. And in an era when self-expression that deviated too far from the norm was demonized and punishable, musicals provided an important avenue for private change.

Like scenes of straight dialogue that evaded the Production Code through visual innuendo—a lit cigarette, a seductive glance, a fade-out—spectacles also relied on nonverbal communication to maneuver around moral strictures. But where diegetic scenes expressed the forbidden through the forging of a gap between the visual- and soundscape, song-and-dance routines were not limited to this tactic. There were plenty of musical instances in which image and sound diverged to produce multiple and sometimes contradictory notions. With one sardonic glance or subtle vocal inflection, for instance, Judy Garland could disrupt a song to insinuate her own rebellious voice, thereby undermining the performative designs of those who had arranged and choreographed the number for her. But spectacles could also merge sound and image to produce the same effect, fusing lyrics, music, and bodily movements into a single seamless and covertly subversive idea, an idea that censors and

Making Americans, Chapter 4: “‘We Know We Belong to the Land’: The Theatricality of Assimilation in *Oklahoma!*”; and Mellencamp, “Spectacle and Spectator,” 27-35.

politicians often discounted. Spectacles, in short, were where the real, more meaningful ideological work of the filmmakers occurred, for it was only through song-and-dance that filmmakers and performers felt free to express themselves fully.

Spectacles were also sites of behind-the-scenes power struggles, which were in turn mapped onto cinematic performances. Individual actors grappled to control the means of their performances—how they would move their bodies and use their voices, if they were allowed to use their voices at all. On another level, performers and filmmakers (the creative and artistic side of production) fought with studio executives, often on the opposite side of the country, who controlled the finances and thereby exercised ultimate authority over production, marketing, and exhibition/distribution. And, on a more metaphorical level, spectacles offered glimpses of the sort of private power-wrangling Americans faced on a daily basis in trying to be individuals while still fitting into an increasingly paranoid society. Musical performers used their singing-and-dancing as ways to claim power over their identities. The performer's voice and body were not simply tools of musical expression; they were sites of personal resistance, battlegrounds for control. Voices and bodies did not always converge in these power struggles; singers could be silenced through dubbing practices, celluloid dancing might not always match a hooper's public voice, a man's voice could displace that of a woman. The gaps between sound and image revealed a lot about the nature of postwar identity and rebellion.

This work, then, reads spectacles against their grain, focusing less on their placement in the overall film than on the work occurring within their borders. Though it is certainly not my intention to dismember musical films and discard their plots, I am less interested in approaching musicals as “integrated” products than in focusing on musical spectacles on

their own merits. By the postwar period, Hollywood had perfected the integrated musical in which narrative scenes and musical numbers were seamlessly interwoven, such that song and dance advanced rather than disrupted the story—the plot, in essence, provided the justification for a sudden burst of song. The interplay between speech and song is important; I nonetheless choose to privilege spectacles, particularly because the Production Code Administration less heavily regulated these scenes (excepting lyrics), and despite threats by national, local, and foreign censor boards to excise dances (such as the Can-Can) for the sake of morality. By and large, musical numbers escaped censor's and the PCA's red pens relatively unscathed.¹² Spectacles should be taken as seriously as the rest of the musical picture (if not more so) precisely because musical numbers were reasonably protected and studios disproportionately invested in the production of song and dance.

While spectacles were enormously pleasurable, Americans did not simply go see musicals to be entertained, or to “escape from the world for a few hours.” They flocked to movie houses because musicals gave them something they craved—the chance to reimagine themselves, to step out of their prescribed roles and contemplate different alternatives. The fantasy spectacle was so prominent in the 1950s because it offered a rare but necessary alternative form of expression. In an era of censorship and Red Baiting, it was one of the few

¹² For background on practices of censorship and industry self-regulation via the Production Code, see Francis G. Couvares, ed., *Movie Censorship and American Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Richard Maltby, *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983); Ruth A. Inglis, “Self-Regulation in Operation,” in *The American Film Industry*, rev. ed., ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 377-400; Stephen Vaughn, “Morality and Entertainment: The Origins of the Motion Picture Production Code,” *Journal of American History* 77, no. 1 (June 1990): 39-65; Francis G. Couvares, “Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church: Trying to Censor the Movies Before the Production Code,” *American Quarterly* 44, no. 4, Special Issue: Hollywood, Censorship, and American Culture (December 1992): 584-616; James M. Skinner, *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, 1933-1970* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993); Gerald Gardner, *The Censorship Papers: Movie Censorship Letters from the Hays Office, 1934-1968* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co, 1987); Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

ways to safely explore issues of gender, sexuality, and race. While we may never know the exact ways in which audiences interpreted and used the images that danced before their eyes, we can still read those messages today, and imagine for ourselves the possibilities they opened in postwar America.

Hollywood at the Dawn of the Cold War

We cannot fully appreciate postwar musicals without understanding the dawning Cold War's impact on American culture and society, from Hollywood to the family. The ideological war waged against Communism did not simply occur beyond America's borders, as Elaine Tyler May has convincingly shown. The Cold War came home, so to speak, affecting interpersonal relationships, politics, and even filmmaking. The preoccupation with containment abroad was mirrored with a similar urge to restrain dangerous behavior here, from espionage to homosexuality. In fact, sex and politics were conflated; sexual deviance, for instance, became a threat to national security while motherhood, and women's sexuality in general, were to be kept in check. Thus, the Cold War waged on the home front policed the boundaries of behavior for American citizens, constricting social roles and options available to individuals.¹³

¹³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999). On the conflation of politics and sexuality, particularly homosexuality, see Michael Paul Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie, and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), Chapter 8, "Kiss Me Deadly: Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies," 236-271; Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); and Richard J. Corber, *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993). For more general works on homosexuality in postwar America see John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

At first glance, the postwar period appeared abundant with possibilities. With its nexus of economic, marriage, baby, and suburban booms, the fifties were undeniably a welcome respite from the dark days of Depression and war. But, along with these bursts came a media- and government-driven push for a neo-Victorian revival of separate spheres, in which men held jobs in corporate America and women maintained the home—that bastion of American democracy, the nation’s first and last defense against Communism. Gender roles, which had been blurred out of economic necessity since the 1930s, became rigidly bifurcated, with little outward tolerance for deviation.¹⁴ Of course, the reality was that more women, particularly married women and young mothers, entered the workforce *after* the war—largely to maintain patriotic consumption—but the media nonetheless persistently reminded women that their proper place was in the home.¹⁵ Motherhood was exalted, but it was also suspect, as overbearing women were thought to raise weak, sissified sons who the Communists could easily brainwash or blackmail. Near-absent fathers were charged with the responsibility of protecting and providing for their families. Nowhere was the collapse of gender, politics, economics, and ideology more apparent than in Vice President Nixon’s Kitchen Debates with Nikita Khrushchev, in which Nixon argued that American democratic

¹⁴ Movies such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and *Tea and Sympathy* (1956) explore the dire consequences of deviance.

¹⁵ Historians now challenge Betty Friedan’s once ubiquitously accepted 1963 thesis, from *The Feminine Mystique*, that rigid gender roles stultified women’s potential by forcing them to remain confined to the kitchen. See Eugenia Kaledin, *Mothers and More: American Women in the 1950s* (Boston: Twayne, 1984); Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958,” *Journal of American History* 79, no. 4 (March 1993): 1455-1482; and Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *NOT June Cleaver*. Recent feminist revisions have also helped open up the now-rich study of postwar masculinity, including Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1983); Kathleen Gerson, *No Man’s Land: Men’s Changing Commitments to Family and Work* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996); and Anthony E. Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

and capitalist superiority rested on a clear division of sexual labor, symbolized by the vast array of modern household gadgets meant to ease the American housewife's life.¹⁶

The immediate postwar period was also marked by a palpable tension between individualism and consensus. The period witnessed one of the greatest challenges to civil liberties in American history at a time when the totalitarian Soviet state seemed to cast an ever-growing shadow over the globe. Americans genuinely feared the loss of individuality, one of the critical characteristics that separated them from the so-called godless and genderless Soviet automatons.¹⁷ But, as President Truman's Federal Loyalty Oath Program and Senator McCarthy's politics of fear reminded citizens, straying too far from the vital center was equally risky. Citizens gambled being labeled *un-American* if they resisted the political consensus as much as the social and cultural norms of heterosexual marriage, suburbanization, corporate participation, and virtuous consumption.¹⁸ Thus, despite all of the

¹⁶ On postwar family life and gender roles, see Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992, 2000); Arlene Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise: The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jessica Weiss, *To Have and To Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Lori Rotskoff, *Love on the Rocks: Men, Women, and Alcohol in Post-World War II America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Peter G. Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America*, 3d ed., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (book 1955, film 1956) ominously forewarned of the loss of individual identity. Though initially intended as a critique of postwar corporate conformity, the story can equally be interpreted as a Cold War cautionary tale. For an excellent catalog of Cold War pictures, see Michael Barson and Steven Heller, *Red Scared! The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001). See also Cyndy Hendershot, *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2003).

¹⁸ On early Cold War politics and culture, see Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Paul S. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and American Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Joel Foreman, ed., *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2d ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Paul A. Carter, *Another Part of the Fifties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso Books, 1996); Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television,*

talk of individuality and all of the anxiety about being authentic, what sociologist David Riesman in 1950 labeled *inner-directed*, conformity was nonetheless the prevailing order of the day.¹⁹

This tension was clearly visible in the world of art, where rebel artists such as William de Kooning and Jackson Pollock led the way in new forms of abstract expressionism. But as the cases of Pollock and the Beats demonstrate, even those artists who abandoned what they felt to be sanitized artistic forms could not escape the probing eyes of the masses, as mainstream publications such as *LIFE* Magazine spotlighted these rebel artists.²⁰ Commercialism complicated longstanding tensions between the historically constructed and ever-shifting categories of high-, middle-, and lowbrow culture.²¹ Postwar culture emphasized conformity and consumption; art could be transformed from a critique of American society into a mass-produced champion of everyday life. Nowhere was this more visible than in the forging of a middlebrow aesthetic, which sought to satisfy the aspirations of upwardly mobile Americans while pandering to mass tastes. Middlebrow culture was a

McCarthyism, and American Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), and K. A. Cuordileone, “‘Politics in an Age of Anxiety’: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960,” *Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (Sept 2000): 515-545.

¹⁹ As compared to the prevailing postwar type, the “other-directed,” “middle-class urban American” who “is, by contrast, in a characterological sense more the product of his peers” typified by “overt conformity.” David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), v.

²⁰ Erika Doss, “The Art of Cultural Politics: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism,” in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 195-, 220; and Andrew Perchuk, “Pollock and Postwar Masculinity,” in *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation*, eds. Andrew Perchuk and Helaine Posner (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 31-42.

²¹ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/ Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); and Dickran Tashjian, “The Artlessness of American Culture,” in *Making America: The Society and Culture of the United States*, ed. Luther S. Luedtke (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 162-175.

less elite and a more democratic style, but it was also an over-dilution of artistic traditions. The mass consumption of new middlebrow art forms, while making art more accessible, resulted in the muting of possibilities for social protest.²²

The American film industry likewise found itself caught between competing artistic, commercial, and political interests. Since the inception of the Production Code in 1934, Hollywood struggled with self-imposed censorship. Filmmakers risked losing exhibition licenses, or still worse incurring direct censorship, if they did not uphold the moral strictures demanding the preservation of the sanctity of marriage and prohibiting illicit sex (including extra-marital and miscegenation), crime, substance abuse, religious irreverence, and general lasciviousness. The U.S. Supreme Court extended First Amendment rights to motion pictures in 1952, yet the Production Code Administration, the self-regulating arm of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), managed to maintain a great deal of influence through the 1950s. From drafted script to final print, every motion picture was scrutinized and regulated, thereby limiting the range of options available to filmmakers, who sought creative ways to get around the Code. Censorship practices extended beyond Hollywood, from state censor boards, several of which were still quite active in the 1950s, to local and foreign censors who exercised the right to refuse exhibition or make cuts to prints at their own discretion.

Even more constricting than longstanding practices of censorship and industry self-regulation were the postwar politics of production, which the early Cold War greatly influenced. Fears of Communist influence and infiltration in the Federal government spilled

²² W. T. Lhamon Jr., however, maintains that postmodern “vernacular culture” was not born in the 1960s but, rather, in the fifties. *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990, reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

over into Hollywood, inciting two Red Scares, in 1947 and again, and far more perniciously, in 1951-52. Left-leaning screenwriters, producers, directors, actors, and even studio executives were equally at risk of being imprisoned or blacklisted for not cooperating with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Those who did not find themselves called before the Committee nevertheless were forced to be cautious about the types of films they made; many eschewed social issues for fear of calling undue attention to themselves.²³ Even musicals were not safe, as when the American Legion accused Gene Kelly's 1952 classic *Singin' in the Rain* of being a piece of Communist propaganda.²⁴ Contributing to this cultural chaos were major changes within the entertainment industry, including Supreme Court-ordered studio divorcement, the rise of television as a competing mass amusement, rising production costs unmatched by box office receipts, and a splintering moviegoing audience. All told, Hollywood felt besieged from multiple sides.

In reaction to many of these tectonic shifts, the film industry experimented with new technologies and aesthetics in the hopes of distinguishing its products from other entertainments, particularly the burgeoning television industry. With the introduction of technical innovations such as CinemaScope, 3-D, and Smell-o-Vision, to the birth of the drive-in and the transplantation of Stanislavsky-inspired Method acting, Hollywood tried to

²³ The production of social problem films declined from 28 percent in 1947 to just 9.2 percent in 1954 according to Jackie Byars, *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 113.

²⁴ J. B. Matthews, "Did the Movies Really Clean House? Communist Infiltration of Hollywood Motion-Picture Industry—Part I," *American Legion Magazine* (December 1951): 52. For more on the Hollywood Red Scares and Blacklist, see Peter Roffman and Jim Purdy, "The Red Scare in Hollywood: HUAC and the End of an Era," in *Hollywood's America*, ed. Mintz and Roberts, 195-202; John Cogley, *Report on Blacklisting: Movies* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1972); Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Chapter 5: "Movie Star Politics: Hollywood and the Making of Cold War Americanism," 175-213; and Steven J. Ross, ed., *Movies and American Society* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), Chapter 7: "Seeing Red: Cold War Hollywood," 192-219.

entice American audiences with movies that were bigger, bolder, and more star-packed than ever before.²⁵ Musicals were an ideal genre for this era. With their stereophonic sound and brilliant colors, they were unmatched by anything television or Broadway could offer. More and more money was channeled into musical production, though, ironically, when costs became too high in the later 1950s, musicals were the first to be slashed, both in terms of production budgets and in total pictures made. The prolific production of musicals, in addition to their unequivocal box office success, makes them an ideal film genre for studying the postwar period.

²⁵ Tino Balio provides an excellent and succinct overview of postwar Hollywood, from studio divorcement to censorship and technological innovations in *The American Film Industry*, Part IV, "Retrenchment, Reappraisal, and Reorganization, 1948-." Historical and cultural analyses of 1950s films include Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983; reprint, New York: First Owl Books, 2000); Jonathan Freedman and Richard Millington, eds., *Hitchcock's America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Margot A. Henriksen, *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Nina C. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); Byars, *All That Hollywood Allows*; Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s.*, rev ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Lost in the Fifties: Recovering Phantom Hollywood* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005); Brian Neve, *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1992); Ross, ed., *Movies and American Society*, Chapter 8: "Eisenhower's America: Prosperity and Problems in the 1950s," 220-248; and John Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1994). On new aesthetics in Hollywood, particularly the transplanted Method Acting from Broadway to Hollywood see Foster Hirsch, *A Method to Their Madness: The History of the Actors Studio* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984) and Graham McCann, *Rebel Males: Clift, Brando, and Dean* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

For background on the classic studio system, which began crumbling in the postwar period as a result of the 1948 Paramount Decrees, see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2005); Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage, 1975); Daniel Bernardi, ed., *Classic Hollywood: Classic Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); and Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

The Golden Age of the Musical

While musicals had been prominent since Hollywood first learned to talk with *The Jazz Singer* in 1927, the genre skyrocketed in importance and popularity after WWII.²⁶ But the genre's golden age was not simply marked by increasing box office success. Fifties musicals brought the genre to its aesthetic pinnacle, achieving new heights in filmmaking techniques, plot and character development, and song-and-dance innovation. As early as the Busby Berkeley musicals of the 1930s, filmmakers had been experimenting with celluloid dancing. Where Berkeley had segmented dancing bodies, famously turning them into objects as varied as flowers to water fountains, Fred Astaire contemporaneously introduced a more fluid approach, in which the dancer's body was shot in whole and which employed minimal editing, though he experimented with special effects such as slow motion. But it was not until Gene Kelly's work of the late 1940s and 1950s, along with the collaborative efforts of his frequent director Vincente Minnelli, that this style of filming was perfected and came to dominate the genre, distinguishing it from its predecessors. Kelly's signature approach to filming dance perfectly fused the camera's eye to the dancing body, transforming the camera into a partner in the dance.²⁷ Nearly all postwar musicals, but particularly those produced at MGM, adopted this filmmaking approach while adhering to an informal set of stylistic and narrative practices—the musical formula. Audiences accepted as perfectly natural the genre's conventions, never questioning the frequent diegetic breaks into song and dance. In

²⁶ On the musical's heyday, see Adrian Turner, *Hollywood 1950s* (New York: Gallery Books, 1986), 95; Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 111; and Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1981), Chapter 7, "The Musical."

²⁷ John F. Kasson, "Dances of the Machine in Early Twentieth-Century America," in *A Modern Mosaic: Art and Modernism in the United States*, ed. Townsend Ludington (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 153-174. For more on Fred Astaire's contributions, see John Mueller, *Astaire Dancing: The Musical Films* (New York: Knopf, 1985). On Gene Kelly's contribution to this approach to filming dance see David Anthony Gerstner, "Dancer from the Dance: Gene Kelly, Television, and the Beauty of Movement," *The Velvet Light Trap* 49 (Spring 2002): 48-66.

fact, in its month-long tribute to the genre in October 2004, Turner Classic Movies pointed out the importance of these conventions to musicals' overall success and popularity, lightly jesting, "Why is it unusual to sing every little thought you have ... backed up by a full orchestra and then suddenly a chorus comes out of nowhere?"²⁸ Of course, suddenly bursting into a perfectly-choreographed song and dance routine was anything but natural, but postwar musical-lovers never seemed to notice or care.

By the postwar period, the genre had fully matured, attracting high budgets, employing huge stars, many of whom neither sang nor danced, and earning countless Academy Awards. Each of the major studios (except RKO, whose musical heyday had already passed when dancing team Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers broke up in 1939) had their own stock company of players who appeared together in multiple films. Many musicals were based on Broadway hits, which were also said to be reaching a point of maturation with Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* (1943), considered the first completely narratively integrated show.²⁹ Indeed, Broadway and Hollywood were intricately connected in those days, sharing plot material, music, and talent, from composers and lyricists to choreographers and actors.

²⁸ "Mad About Musicals" Promo, Turner Classic Movies, October 2004, Videocassette, Author's Collection.

²⁹ Ethan Mordden, *Beautiful Mornin': The Broadway Musical in the 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 72-79. While Andrea Most acknowledges the traditional narrative of the musical's evolution towards integration, she simultaneously questions *Oklahoma!*'s place in it. Most, *Making Americans*, 102-104. While *Show Boat* (1927) might be considered an early example of integration, some consider it an operetta more than a full-fledged musical. Most, for instance, sees it as an operetta (28, 29) while Gerald Mast calls it "the first fully 'mature' American musical. Gerald Mast, *Can't Help Singin': The American Musical on Stage and Screen* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1987), 7. Raymond Knapp similarly identifies it "the breakthrough in the history of the American musical" that introduced the integrated book musical. Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity*, 183. Relying too heavily on a progressive narrative of integration leads to a nostalgia trap in which many scholars tend to romanticize and mourn the end of the "Golden Age" of (integrated) musicals, as did the 2004 PBS documentary, *Broadway: The American Musical*, Directed by Michael Kantor, Color, 360 min., Ghost Light Films, 2004, Videocassette, Author's Collection. While I indeed treat this era as a golden age, I tend to categorize this period as much for the box office successes as the production values of fifties musicals.

But more than pure aesthetic sensibilities, fifties musicals also tended to share structural commonalities. Most musicals of this time period were musical comedies, derived from a long history of music hall and vaudevillian forms. Even the rare films which gestured toward the tragic, such as *A Star is Born* (1954) and *Carousel* (1956), contained elements of the musical comedy—lighthearted song and dances, witty if not caustic dialogue, and actors with a genius sense of comic timing. Rare was the musical comedy that directly commented on America’s social ills, though the Hollywood adaptations of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s so-called “Chopstick” musicals—*South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *Flower Drum Song*—were notable exceptions.³⁰

Backstage musicals, stories about showmaking, constituted a significant sub-genre of fifties musicals. These films, typified by *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950), *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), *The Bandwagon* (1953), and *Kiss Me Kate* (1953), centered around the successful creation of a Broadway show or film. These musicals were highly self-reflexive, often self-consciously and very purposefully borrowing from actors’ real lives, as in the case of most of Astaire’s postwar pictures.³¹ Beyond their self-referential qualities, backstage musicals exposed the illusions of showmaking by letting audiences see what happened behind the scenes, though of course, such moments were as contrived and rehearsed as any polished show. The backstage musical, which offered commentary on the value of entertainment, used showmaking as a metaphor for the formation of democratic communities. In essence, cast members needed to overcome their petty differences, whether personal or artistic, in order for a show to be a success. In the postwar period, such a concept

³⁰ Sheng-mei Ma, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s ‘Chopsticks’ Musical,” *Literature Film Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2003): 17-26.

³¹ This was something of an inside joke for fans and musical devotees. Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 113-122.

provided a powerful message to a nation struggling to allow for differences, as was the American tradition, while trying to squash extreme differences perceived as dangerous.³²

Like the backstage musical, the genre as a whole revolved around the forging of common ground between oppositional forces. Musicals, which Thomas Schatz has called “peculiarly American,” were almost always marked by the “dual focus narrative.”³³ Driven by the creation of a romantic couple, this structure relied on a series of parallel song and dance numbers. Roughly, the male lead sang or danced alone, which the leading woman would match with her own solo. Then they performed alternatively with others, and eventually with each other. This series of alternating numbers, frequently matched with a similar pattern for secondary characters, symbolized the main couple’s happy union. Often the couple began the film improperly paired with an unsuitable mate, or in complete opposition to the other romantic lead, as is the case for nearly all of the Astaire-Rogers musicals. Song and dance was the vehicle for bringing the couple together, hence the dual narrative. More often than not, the couple’s initial opposition was symbolized by different cultural tastes: she is an opera singer, he a jazz singer; or she is a ballerina and he a lowly hooper. Not until these cultural differences can be overcome, through the forging of a middle ground or middlebrow culture, could the couple express their love for each other, thus signaling the film’s final and happy *dénouement*.³⁴ This happy compromise, in turn,

³² For more about the sub-genre of the backstage musical, see Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Chapter Seven: “The Show Musical;” Dennis Giles, “Show-making,” in *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Altman, 85-101.

³³ Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, 186.

³⁴ The concept of the dual focus narrative, popularized by Rick Altman, is one of the foundational concepts in musical film theory. Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 16-58. For more on the role of the couple in non-musical films, see Virginia Wright Wexman, *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

signified a utopian promise of a better world.³⁵ In the context of postwar America, this was a world without the threat of nuclear annihilation, a world where gender lines were clear-cut and cheerfully maintained, a world of abundance where anything was possible.

The standard musical formula, which was repeated in virtually every postwar musical, is important to recognize and understand, but it serves as little more than a jumping-off point in two important ways. First, relying too heavily on a dual-focus analysis limits any discussion about gender. Since the dual-focus is based on the creation of a romantic couple, the temptation is to see particular companion scenes as gendered, as clearly delineated male and female spaces, which implies that the very structure of the genre is, in itself, gendered. At first glance, such an approach is in line with classic feminist film theory, which contends that women's bodies are segmented and objectified by a male-oriented camera lens for the viewing pleasure of a presumed-male audience—in essence women are objects “*to-be-looked-at*.” But musicals complicated this structure because performers tended to cross gender lines, as when song-and-dance men offered their bodies up to the (male) gaze or when women cross-dressed. So, for instance, Steven Cohan has suggested that Fred Astaire's dancing body became feminized because he engaged in behavior clearly marked as “feminine.”³⁶ The danger of such an approach is that it forces us to view gender in considerably narrow terms: male/active, female/passive. My work, instead, tries to reformulate these gendered boundaries, or at the very least to suggest how fifties performers,

³⁵ Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, 220.

³⁶ Steven Cohan, “‘Feminizing’ the Song-and-Dance Man: Fred Astaire and the Spectacle of Masculinity in the Hollywood Musical,” in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993), 46-69. Miriam Hansen has explored similar issues of male film objects in “Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship,” *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1986): 6-32. Both base their analyses on Laura Mulvey, the founding mother of feminist film theory, who introduced the concept of female “*to-be-looked-at-ness*” in her now classic “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” originally published in *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18, reprinted in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham, (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1999).

particularly Gene Kelly and Judy Garland, struggled to expand or undermine existing gender categories. Additionally, the unique filming techniques reserved for dancing in the postwar period transformed the camera from a passive eye to an active dancing partner. The audience, adopting the camera's point of view, thus became active participants in the dance, thereby disrupting the classic feminist position of passive spectatorship.

Second, the dual-focus narrative is historically and theoretically limiting because it sacrifices its analysis of song-and-dance to the narrative. Using this formula, and nothing else, to assess spectacle forces the critic to privilege the narrative at all times; music is little more than a vehicle for advancing the plot, as would be expected in an integrated musical. But I adopt an approach that, while acknowledging the importance of the narrative, treats spectacles on their own ground, as stand-alone moments in which filmmakers and performers felt less constrained to play. The overall narrative is still relevant, particularly because it frames song and dance routines. Overcoming the integrated, dual-focus approach enables an exploration of the gaps that opened up when films transitioned between dialogue and song.

One of the best ways of moving beyond the dual-focus narrative is to study the Arthur Freed Unit, the most famous and notable of the three musical production units at MGM. Freed's approach to spectacle was certainly unique; for him song and dance constituted the meat of the film. As he insisted to then studio head Louis B. Mayer, who worried that *Meet Me in St. Louis* lacked a substantial plot, "I'll make a plot with song and dance and music. That's the way my characters will come to life—that will be my plot!"³⁷ Though his films by the late 1940s were models of integration, his favoring of song and dance permeated the over

³⁷ Quoted in Hugh Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals: The Arthur Freed Unit*, originally published: *The World of Entertainment! Hollywood's Greatest Musicals* (New York: Doubleday, 1975; reprint n.p.: Da Capo Press, 1996), 94.

forty musicals he spearheaded between 1939 and 1960. Freed's Unit helped raise MGM to the top of musical production within the industry. The Golden Age of the Hollywood Musical, in short, was synonymous with MGM.

The Freed Unit, in contrast to the other MGM musical units of Joe Pasternak and Jack Cummings, was virtually autonomous. Originating out of a close relationship to Mayer, Freed earned near *carte blanche* at the studio by 1939. He was able to recruit the finest talent, and was trusted with high budgets. He developed a coterie of performers, screenwriters, and musicians who collaborated to make some of the most well-renowned musicals of the period. His unit behaved as a summer stock company with a unified *auteur* and a shared aesthetic eye. Additionally, the Freed Unit, sometimes referred to as the "Fairy Unit," was gay-friendly, employing numerous homosexuals and allowing them the freedom to explore camp aesthetics.³⁸ Ultimately, the Freed Unit operated as if it were its own mini studio, though Freed always had to answer to executives in Culver City and New York. He worked hard for his unit, protecting them from the ire of New York executives at MGM's parent company, Loew's. But, Freed's power began to wane when Dore Schary replaced L. B. Mayer as the head of the studio in 1951. While Schary was relatively supportive of Freed's projects, the new head of production largely disliked musicals, and when the studio began to suffer financially, he was more than willing to begin slashing musical production, thereby ushering the gradual end of this golden age.³⁹

³⁸ On the so-called "Fairy Unit," see Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 140 and David Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend* (New York: Hyperion, 1992), 137.

³⁹ Beyond Fordin's comprehensive study of the Freed Unit, Matthew Tinkcom focuses his first chapter on Vincente Minnelli and the Freed Unit in his *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital, Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002). Thomas Schatz has referred to the Freed Unit as a unified *auteur* in *Hollywood Genres*, 202-204. For background on MGM, see Peter Hay, *MGM: When the Lion Roars* (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, Inc., 1991); Scott Eyman, *Lion of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005); Bosley Crowther, *The Lion's Share: The Story of an Entertainment Empire*

While this dissertation does not look exclusively at Freed pictures, it nevertheless focuses a majority of its attention on his films. In part, this is because of the widely-accepted superior quality of these musicals. But, on a more practical level, the Freed Unit is an ideal focal point because of the wealth of primary sources available. Unlike most producers, Freed maintained an abundant collection of papers: daily production reports and production memos, legal memos, newspaper clippings, scripts, trailers, audience polling reports, reviews, and fan mail. These sources are a window into the production processes at work, hinting at the various power struggles—racial, gendered, sexual—the camera’s lens obscured but never fully erased. These sources, particularly fan correspondences and audience polling reports, also provide a rare glimpse into the minds of the spectators.

Reconstituting the audience is one of the biggest challenges film historians face, particularly since Hollywood did not even begin to track its audiences in any sort of meaningful way until the 1950s. Before WWII, studio executives on both coasts assumed their audience to be undifferentiated, that people of all ages went to all movies. But with the rise of television, Hollywood began tracking moviegoers, only to find that the market was significantly split, with a sizable youth segment, much like it is today.⁴⁰ The limited data

(New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1957); Gary Carey, *All the Stars in Heaven: Louis B. Mayer’s M-G-M* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981); Charles Higham, *Merchant of Dreams: Louis B. Mayer, M.G.M., and the Secret Hollywood* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1993); and E. J. Fleming, *The Fixers, Eddie Mannix, Howard Strickling and the MGM Publicity Machine* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2005).

⁴⁰ Leo Handel, *Hollywood Looks at its Audience: A Report of Film Audience Research* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950); Robert Sklar, “‘The Lost Audience’: 1950s Spectatorship and Historical Reception Studies,” in *Identifying Hollywood’s Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movie*, eds. Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 81-92. See also recent historical and theoretical treatments of the audience and audience reception, including Bruce A. Austin, *Immediate Seating: A Look at Movie Audiences* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1988); Tom Stempel, *American Audiences on Movies and Moviegoing* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001); Sklar, *Movie-Made America*; Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979; reprint 1998); Christine Gledhill, ed., *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1991); Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1993); Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994); Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); and Janet

available suggest that Hollywood musicals remained quite popular across all age groups, even young audiences, at least according to preview audiences. Test audience data provide a sense of who was seeing musicals, and where those spectators were clustered. However we can never fully recreate the moviegoing experience. Musical were standardized products shown uniformly throughout the country (despite local censor boards' editing scissors), but audiences did not view these films in the same way. Much guesswork must be employed when trying to determine how factors such as race, region, and gender impacted moviegoing, particularly in the Jim Crow South. Scholars such as Richard Dyer and Jane Feuer have provided excellent models for theorizing, for instance, how musicals opened up the possibility of closeted queer re-readings of musicals. Following their leads, I can do little more than suggest how Americans might have received and used dancing images.⁴¹

Dancing Dreams: The Postwar Musical as Historical Artifact

This project is undoubtedly multidisciplinary, but the sources and methodology are nonetheless securely grounded in the historical discipline. Primary documents—enhanced with film, gender, dance, body, and sexuality theories—provide the critical window into processes of production and reception, as well as help frame the content analysis. Thus my dissertation approaches postwar musicals from the top-down (production) and the bottom-up (performers and audience members, where possible). At the heart of this project are the individual stories of the filmmakers and performers who struggled, whether against studio

Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁴¹ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), Chapter 3, "Judy Garland and Gay Men," 137-191, Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 139-143. Jane Gaines provides a model for alternative reception along racial lines: "'Green Like Me,'" in *Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 24-51.

executives or cultural stereotypes, to express themselves freely and honestly in front of the camera. *Dancing Dreams* thus offers a series of case studies that explore the intersection of production processes and individual identity to root out the limits and possibilities available to American performers in the fifties. Even though musicals afforded filmmakers and performers greater expressive latitude given the strict regulation of dialogue, musicals were still bound by the Production Code as well as the prevailing norms of the day. And musical motion pictures, like all other cultural goods, were a product of their time, and could only move so far beyond customs. But they nonetheless suggested ways for Americans to break out of their respective molds.

Chapter One, “Real Men Don’t Dance: Gene Kelly and the Aesthetics of Postwar Masculinity,” focuses on Kelly’s public discourse, as it culminated in his 1958 Omnibus television special, “Dancing: A Man’s Game.” In this hour-long program, Kelly sought to recast dance as manly by linking it to athletics. Similarly he attempted to redefine masculinity as graceful by wresting art away from its feminine associations. But, as Chapter Two, “‘You can’t run away from yourself’: Unleashing the Possibilities of the Cine-Dance,” suggests, when Kelly leaped in front of a camera, his discursively staunch defense of rigid gender roles melted away. He fused middlebrow art and technology together to create a safe space where he could dance unfettered—he could be playful, boyish, asexual, and macho all at the same time. In short, Kelly’s off-screen voice and on-screen body were often at odds with each other.

From Gene Kelly I move to Judy Garland, who appeared in three MGM musicals with Kelly—*For Me and My Gal* (1942), *The Pirate* (1948), and *Summer Stock* (1950). Unlike her co-star, who enjoyed unprecedented creative freedom in the Freed Unit and

MGM, Garland's story is one of powerlessness and limited resistance. Chapter Three, " 'In-Between': Judy Garland and the Nostalgia of Failed Femininity" considers how Garland, as a child actress who successfully transitioned into an adult star, resisted the control male studio executives exacted over her voice, body, and femininity. Combining press coverage, production notes, and studio-generated publicity with close readings of postwar performances, this chapter contends that Garland ultimately fell short as a "proper" woman both on and off the screen. Swathed in the accoutrements of nostalgic, nineteenth-century gender ideals, Garland's postwar characters *appeared* to be women. But ironic and self-parodying fissures within her musical performances revealed her refusal and failure to conform to MGM's feminine standard. Her on-screen resistance was matched by her notoriously bad behavior off-screen, for which she was fired from the studio in 1950.

Chapter Four, " 'And the history of my life is in my songs': The Spectacle of Authenticity in *A Star is Born*," picks up with Garland after 1950 to consider the ways in which she reinvented her public persona and, most notably, her voice. Focusing on her 1954 film, *A Star is Born*, this chapter explores the construction of her star image. In an era in which Americans were anxious about being true to themselves, Garland's stage performances and film appearance raised questions about what it meant to be authentic. Garland's concert work after 1950 recycled her earlier MGM repertoire, linking her music to her life in ways that were incredibly personal. Yet her role in *A Star is Born*, like her concerts, relied as much on artifice as anything she had done in her MGM days. At MGM her femininity had been the source of her spectacle. After 1950 her MGM star image, as well as the entire history of popular entertainment, became the spectacle.

Garland made a name for herself performing in what we might think of as “vocal blackface” (as well as literal blackface). In *A Star is Born* she performs an *homage* to blackface singer Al Jolson, making reference to the complicated place African-Americans and black culture have played both on the American stage and in Hollywood. Chapter Five picks up on this theme, exploring the ways in which Hollywood approached race and discriminated against non-white actors. In “Whiteface, Blackface, Yellowface: Voicing Race in Oscar Hammerstein’s Musicals,” I examine two of the lyricist’s musicals, *Carmen Jones* (1954) and *The King and I* (1956). This chapter interrogates the possibilities and limits of liberal filmmakers’ attempts to depict racial others in a post-*Brown v. Board of Education* context. Specifically, I consider the politics of race in musicals, most visible in Hammerstein’s problematic lyrics and in the dubbing of the light-skinned African-American actress, Dorothy Dandridge, with a white singer. Ultimately, the reliance on racial archetypes and stereotypes undercut the filmmakers’ vision of racial tolerance and cultural cooperation. But Hollywood’s complicated approach to non-white characters also hinted at the ways in which race was something that could be molded, changed, and overcome.

The concluding chapter, “An Invitation to Dream: The Artistic Possibilities and Commercial Limits of Fantasy Dances,” brings the dissertation full circle by returning to Gene Kelly. I center my analysis on fantasy dance numbers in *Invitation to the Dance* (1952/1956). For Kelly, this film was the fulfillment of his longstanding artistic dream to expose the masses of Americans to dance. MGM granted him *carte blanche* to film his all-dance picture, yet the studio did not believe in the film’s commercial potential, and thus delayed and limited its domestic release. In the end, Kelly fell short in his attempts to make dance more accessible by forging it into a middlebrow art form. Instead, he produced an “in-

between” picture, one which perhaps still occupies a very liminal place in the world of musicals. But despite the limits to the film’s potential, it was nonetheless an important exploration of what dance, as indirect communication, offered postwar Americans. His fantasy dances defied the laws of gender and nature and thus functioned as moments of abandon for Kelly. It is possible that audiences, in turn, thereby found inspiration in this form of mass art to at least dream about breaking conventions and dare to be themselves.

In short, *Dancing Dreams* uses fifties musicals to shed light on postwar America, and uses the postwar climate of Cold War domesticity and a changing entertainment industry to cast a more historically-nuanced gaze on the genre. Despite all of the constraints of postwar life—rigid gender roles, consumer-driven conformity, Cold War anxiety, censorship and self-regulation, the dying but stubborn grasp of Jim Crow—there were avenues of release for Americans seeking to be authentic individuals. Musical motion pictures, particularly spectacles, were the means by which filmmakers, performers, and audiences could re-imagine possibilities, where they could play around with their bodies, their voices, even their skins. Yet these performers could only go so far in their transformations; along the way they met with harsh political or cultural climates, racial stereotypes, or artistic assumptions that stymied their endeavors. In the final analysis, Gene Kelly, Judy Garland, Dorothy Dandridge, as much as their musicals, all stood as “in-between” figures, but their messages did not go unnoticed. They showed the way to finding release in a stifling postwar climate, and their small rebellions—whether artistic, gendered, or racial—served as uncensored examples of the kinds of private but very radical rebellions that were possible in the 1950s.

Chapter 1

Real Men Don't Dance: Gene Kelly and the Aesthetics of Postwar Masculinity

In June of 1946, the thirty-four-year-old rising film star and recently discharged naval officer, Gene Kelly (1912-1996), was spotted dining in a New York hamburger joint. According to fan magazine *Modern Screen*, when a shy waitress asked if he was “Gene Kelly, the dancer” he responded, somewhat surprisingly, “What? A sissy dancer? I should say not! *I’m a sailor!*”¹ Appearing as the caption under a photograph of the uniformed actor, this brief account encapsulated the conflict with which Kelly consistently grappled, a conflict between his desire to dance and his desire to prove his heterosexual masculinity. Repudiating the very profession that had brought him fame, first on Broadway and then in Hollywood, Kelly distanced himself from the enduring nineteenth-century image of the effete male dancer. Instead, he crafted his public persona around more macho images, including that of the soldier returned from battle. While Kelly never actually saw action in the Second World War, indeed he never even left California, he nonetheless presented himself as the ever-humble war hero whose masculine strength, courage, and resolve could not be

A version of this chapter was presented at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill History Department Research Colloquium on 6 April 2005. I am grateful to the faculty and my colleagues who asked important questions and offered insightful new approaches, especially Jerma A. Jackson, who provided formal comments.

¹ Quoted from George Frazier, “Flying Irishman,” *Modern Screen* 33, no. 1 (June 1946): 43, GKC, Box 12, no folder.

questioned. He frequently returned to this soldier image, appearing as a sailor, marine, or ex-G.I. in five postwar musical films: *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), *On the Town* (1949), *An American in Paris* (1951), *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955), and *Invitation to the Dance* (1952/1956). Homosexual imagery of the sailor notwithstanding, Kelly's desire to be seen as strong and brave rather than a "sissy" was part of a larger pathology to prove his manliness, a pathology that stemmed from his early childhood days in Pittsburgh and was subsequently reinforced by postwar American culture.²

By the end of the postwar era, however, his attitude had shifted markedly. Rather than deny that he was a sissy dancer as he had in 1946, he rejected the claim that male dancers were sissies at all. On Sunday, 21 December 1958, he starred in "Dancing: A Man's Game," which he wrote and directed for Omnibus, NBC's cultural and educational program for "eggheads."³ The central premise of this show, for which Kelly received an Emmy nomination, was that dancing was manly.⁴ As proof of this manliness, Kelly enlisted top athletes of the day, including Mickey Mantle and Sugar Ray Robinson, to help him

² On dancing and sailors see Steven Cohan, "Dancing with Balls in the 1940s: Sissies, Sailors and the Camp Masculinity of Gene Kelly," in *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Phil Powrie, Ann Davies and Bruce Babington (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 18-33; and Beth Genné, "'Freedom Incarnate': Jerome Robbins, Gene Kelly, and the Dancing Sailor as an Icon of American Values in World War II," *Dance Chronicle* 24, no. 1 (2001): 83-103. For a discussion of sailor imagery, see George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994).

³ Jack O'Brian, "Best Brainy TV Show: 'Omnibus,'" *The New York Journal American* (8 May 1959): n.p. "Omnibus," produced by Robert Saudek in the 1950s, boasted such guest lecturers as composer Leonard Bernstein and choreographer Agnes DeMille according to reviewer Leo Mishkin, "Sight and Sound: Gene Kelly, 'Aides' In Dance Discourse, Effective Program on 'Omnibus' Sun," unidentifiable clipping (n.d.): 2. Both articles from GKC, Box 1, Folder 5: "'Dancing is a Man's Game' 1958, Working Script." Thomas Doherty provides additional background on Omnibus, as well as other cultural affairs television programs, in *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), Chapter 5, and 237-238. See also Lynn Spigel, "High Culture in Low Places: Television and Modern Art, 1950-1970," in *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 265-309.

⁴ Invitation from the Board of Trustees of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences to Gene Kelly, [1959], GKC, Box 1, Folder 5: "'Dancing is a Man's Game' 1958, Working Script."

demonstrate the common bonds between athleticism and dance. Seeking to wrestle dance away from women, whose presence Kelly blamed for the feminization of dance up through the nineteenth century, Kelly and his collaborators envisioned this show as “an effort to reclaim it [dance] for its rightful owners – men ... Dancing was, is and always will be basically a man’s job.”⁵ Asserting that it was perfectly natural for men to dance, Kelly argued that men were in greater control of their bodies and were therefore more skilled and powerful dancers than women. Coming at the crossroads of his career, Kelly hoped to use his Omnibus special to rescue male dancers from the suspicion of effeminacy while implicitly defending his own image.

Even though Kelly was well on his way to stardom before the war, and remained a star into the 1980s, it was in the postwar years that he truly established himself as the era’s king of song-and-dance.⁶ Under contract at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Kelly quickly proved himself, gaining choreographic and often directorial control over his pictures. But the height of his career coincided with a virulent Red Scare that infected the film industry. Kelly’s leftist leanings, along with his then wife Betsy Blair’s former and very public espousal of Soviet Communism, made the actor particularly vulnerable to suspicion. Compounding the risk for Kelly was the Cold War politicization of sexual deviance, in which effeminacy was but one variation on a slippery slope leading to homosexuality. While the specter of the male-dancer-as-homosexual had haunted him since his earliest days as a dancer, it was in the postwar era that he most staunchly strove to refashion this image. As a hooper fighting

⁵ John Martin, Outline for “Dancing: A Man’s Game,” 20 July 1958, p 1, GKC, Box 13, Folder: “OMNIBUS PROGRAM – Dec. 21, 1958.” While in production, Kelly explicitly acknowledged that dance has “been for many years too effeminate and effete.” Gene Kelly, handwritten notes, n.d., GKC, Box 1, Folder 5: “ ‘Dancing is a Man’s Game’ 1958, Working Script.”

⁶ A front-page headline in *The Daily Tribune*, c. 1951, screamed: “GENE KELLY TAKES CROWN FROM FRED ASTAIRE!” Unidentifiable clipping, GKC, Box 18, no folder.

against the prevailing belief that male dancers were effete, the well-known liberal had to strip the male dancer of his deviant appearance if he wanted to continue working in Hollywood.

To buffer himself from accusations and blacklisting, he attempted to redefine both masculinity and art. Publicly, Kelly repeatedly and consistently contended that dancing was manly. But his films suggest a fundamental tension between his language and his art. While his cinematic dancing was athletic and macho, Kelly frequently used his body to play around with gender conventions. Without deviating too far from mainstream postwar gender norms, Kelly used both his cinematic dancing and the way he talked about his dancing, at times in contradictory ways, to expand the boundaries of normative masculinity. This chapter explores the limits of the performative nature of Kelly's public discourses about manly dance. For even as he tried to prove that real men *did* dance, he could never fully escape the gender binary that shaped most postwar American attitudes about manliness.⁷ Chapter Two picks up this argument by exploring how Kelly was able to break out of this binary norms—albeit temporarily—while dancing on the screen, enabling a far more profound yet less explicit gender redefinition.

Real Men Don't Dance: The Male Dancer and the Stigma of Effeminacy

Certainly Kelly was not the first male dancer cornered into defending his masculinity. The popular image of the effete male dancer, so ubiquitous in the nineteenth century, still abounded in postwar America, despite the best efforts of a cohort of male dancers in the first half of the twentieth century to change popular opinions. These persistent negative views of male dancers collided with the dawning Cold War's politicization of gender and sexuality,

⁷ Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1995), 101-2. See also Ted Shawn, "Open Letter: Reprint of 'Dancing for Men' (July 1917), *Dance Magazine* (July 1966): 16-7, 76.

creating a dangerous environment for anyone—male or female—who strayed too far from acceptable behavior, particularly those who explored “deviant” sexual behavior such as homosexuality. This suspicious climate necessarily shaped many of the ways in which postwar Americans understood male dancers such as Gene Kelly.

Studying masculinity has, until very recently, proven quite an elusive task; nowhere is this more apparent than in the study of male dancers. White masculinity, as the historical basis of patriarchal power, was the assumed norm by which everyone else—women, blacks—were judged. Because all others were categorized against white men, it seemed unnecessary to classify masculinity, which was seen as natural rather than socially fashioned, thus rendering men as a gender group “invisible.”⁸ Studying male dancers was even more challenging not simply because masculinity as a category of analysis was imperceptible, but because the male body itself was supposed to be invisible, as Ramsay Burt laments.⁹ Recently, scholars have begun to interrogate the cultural constructions of manhood to expose how forces such as race, class, religion, and sexuality have shaped historically specific

⁸ Simone de Beauvoir commented, albeit briefly, on the invisibility and indefinability of masculinity, in the introduction to *The Second Sex*, translated and edited by H.M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953). For more current scholarship on the invisibility of masculinity see Ava Baron, “On Looking at Men: Masculinity and the Making of a Gendered Working-Class History,” in *Feminists Revision History*, ed. Ann-Louise Shapiro (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 148-9 and Michael S. Kimmel, “Invisible Masculinity: Examining Masculinity in Relation to History and the Social Sciences,” *Society* 30, no. 6 (Sept-Oct 1993): 28-36. Recent interest in studying the historical and cultural construction of masculinity parallels similar work that exposes the construction of whiteness as a previously-invisible category of analysis. See, e.g., Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998) and Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). Objects-relations theory, based on Freud and Lacan, has contributed to the naturalization of masculinity by rooting it in biological universality rather than historical specificity. While popular in film studies, psychoanalytical approaches to gender prove limiting for cultural historians and thus does not play a large part in my work. Examples of objects-relations approaches to gender include Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978) and Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (NY: Pantheon, 1988).

⁹ Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 12-3.

variations of masculinity.¹⁰ But unlike femininity, masculinity has proven a far slipperier concept, far harder to identify. Indeed, Hofstra College sociologist Helen Mayer Hacker, in her 1957 article assessing the “new burdens of masculinity,” bemoaned, “Everyone thinks he knows what is masculine, and how to recognize a ‘real man,’ but no one can give an adequate definition.”¹¹

Of course, there was never a single, definitive form of masculinity in the postwar period. But there was an undeniable ideal—the white, middle-class, heterosexual, married, breadwinning organization man in the “gray flannel suit.” This was the hegemonic apex on a “hierarchy of competing masculinities,” and though not all men could or would fit this mold, popular culture made postwar men acutely aware of how they measured up. Competing images of men who were soft and impotent, androgynous and sensitive, rugged and brutish flooded popular culture, particularly television and film, contributing to men’s confusion and anxiety.¹² In his work on 1950s celluloid masculinity, Steven Cohan describes how the ideal,

¹⁰ Daniel Wickberg offers an insightful historiography and analysis of current trends in masculinity and sexuality studies, “Heterosexual White Male: Some Recent Inversions in American Cultural History,” *Journal of American History* 92, no. 1 (June 2005): 136-157. For general works on American masculinity see Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Peter G. Filene, *Him/ Her/ Self: Gender Identities in Modern America*, 3d ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996); and Anthony E. Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

¹¹ Helen Mayer Hacker, “The New Burdens of Masculinity,” *Quarterly Journal of the National Council on Family Relations* 19, no. 3 (August 1957): 233.

¹² For additional accounts of postwar masculinity see Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1983); Kathleen Gerson, *No Man’s Land: Men’s Changing Commitments to Family and Work* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); and Jessica Weiss, *To Have and To Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), Chapters 3 and 4. For more on the depiction of masculinity in postwar culture, see Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983; reprint, New York: First Owl Books, 2000); Robert J. Corber, *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Nina C. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); and Graham McCann, *Rebel Males: Clift, Brando and Dean* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

along with alternate gender positions, contributed to a larger “masculinity crisis” in which men struggled to be individuals in an emasculating corporate and conformist society.¹³ This crisis, driven by political anxiety sparked by the Cold War, took on, in the words of K. A. Cuordileone, a “recognizable refrain: American males had become the victims of a smothering, overpowering, suspiciously collectivist mass society—a society that had smashed the once-autonomous male self, elevated women to a position of power in the home, and doomed men to a slavish conformity not wholly unlike that experienced by men living under Communist rule.”¹⁴

Thus the politics of the early Cold War compounded masculine anxiety. The postwar politicization of gender and sexuality constricted the boundaries of masculine possibilities and forced homosexuality underground despite the relative tolerance gay men and women had experienced during WWII. The Red Scare conflated masculinity, heterosexuality, and patriotism; fear of appearing “soft” on Communism was directly linked to masculine deviance. To prove one’s loyalty, a man could not just deny his involvement with the Communist Party, “naming names” to renounce and repent for any former ties to the CP. American men used the language of their gender to demonstrate their patriotism; having a wife, three children, and all the trappings of a consumerist lifestyle, made possible by democratic capitalism, formed the symbols of a man’s devotion to his nation. The prevailing fear was that homosexual males, believed to be weak or feeble-minded, would be especially vulnerable to political blackmail by the Communists, or, worse still, be susceptible to

¹³ Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), Introduction, *passim*.

¹⁴ K. A. Cuordileone, “Politics in an Age of Anxiety: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960,” *Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (Sept 2000): 522-523.

Communist brainwashing, as *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) suggested.¹⁵ This despite or perhaps in reaction to the rather shocking findings of Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) that more than one third of American men studied had experienced a homosexual encounter at one point in their lives.¹⁶

It is within the context of this postwar anxiety about proper gender roles and homosexuality that we can begin to understand negative attitudes about male dancers. Since the nineteenth century, dance was considered a feminine art form, and thus male dancers in America were seen as effete, if not homosexual. Before Vaslav Nijinsky re-introduced the male ballet dancer at his Paris premiere with the Russian Ballet in 1909, women such as Ruth St. Denis dominated American theatrical dance. A year later, Ted Shawn (1891-1972) premiered on the American stage. Both Nijinsky and Shawn devoted themselves to revitalizing the image of the male dancer.¹⁷ Their efforts can be viewed as part of a larger movement to rescue American masculinity. In the opening years of the twentieth century, politicians such as Teddy Roosevelt and writers such as Edgar Rice Burroughs espoused fears that industrialization, the demands of modern city life, and an overall feminization of

¹⁵ Allen Drury's Pulitzer prize-winning novel, *Advise and Consent* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), illuminates the links between closeted homosexuality and national security. For more on the politicization of sexuality in the Red Scare, see Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999). Jessica Weiss notes the average birthrate in the 50s was 3.4 in *To Have and To Hold*, 18.

¹⁶ Alfred Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948). For a distilled discussion of homosexuality in the Kinsey Report, see Donald Porter Geddes, ed., *Analysis of the Kinsey Reports on Sexual Behavior in the Human Male and Female* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1954), 21-22, 266.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Kendall, *Where She Danced* (New York: Knopf, 1979); 104-113; Burt, *The Male Dancer*, Chapters 1, 4, 5.

American culture had weakened American men. Roosevelt offered his own brand of strenuous masculinity, a model Shawn embodied in his choreography.¹⁸

When Ted Shawn burst forth on the American stage, he stepped into a long-standing tradition of male artists and dancers' sexual defensiveness.¹⁹ Considered the "father of American dance," Shawn, a former Methodist seminarian, devoted his life's work to changing the nature of American dance, particularly for men. He also toiled to transform audiences' perceptions of dance from a feminine art to that of an innately masculine endeavor.²⁰ Setting out to prove that dancing men were not sissies but, in fact, "real" men, Shawn developed a hypermasculine, animalistic form of male dance that was rooted both in classical Greek mythology and in the movements of an everyday life that rejected modern industrial existence in favor of the agrarian tradition of the yeoman farmer. Eschewing the formal forms of European ballet, where the male dancer made minimal movements in order to show off his female partner, Shawn infused male dance with rugged, muscular movements that challenged the audience to look at his own body in motion rather than gaze at the ballerina. Forming the Denishawn Dance Company with his wife, Ruth St. Denis in the summer of 1915, Shawn later went on in 1933 to create a national touring company of male

¹⁸ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*; John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Michael S. Kimmel, "Consuming Manhood: The Feminization of American Culture and the Recreation of the Male Body, 1832-1920," in *The Male Body: Features, Destinies, Exposures*, ed. Laurence Goldstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 12-41; and Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1977).

¹⁹ David Anthony Gerstner, "Dancer from the Dance: Gene Kelly, Television, and the Beauty of Movement," *Velvet Light Trap* 49 (Spring 2002): 53.

²⁰ Walter Terry, *Ted Shawn: Father of American Dance: A Biography* (New York: The Dial Press, 1976). For more on Shawn's attitudes towards dance, see Burt, *The Male Dancer*, Chapter 5: Men, Modernism and Modern American Dance and Shawn, "Open Letter," 16-7, 76. See also Julia L. Foulkes, "Dance Is for American Men: Ted Shawn and the Intersection of Gender, Sexuality, and Nationalism in the 1930s," in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 113-146.

dancers.²¹ His choreography, executed through their bodies, did much to improve the status of the male dancer in the public's eye.

Numerous dance and film theorists have explored the problematic position of the male dancer who calls direct attention to his body. They build on Laura Mulvey's now-classic argument of the gendered dichotomy of viewing in which celluloid women were constructed as erotic objects *to-be-looked-at* by a universal male gaze.²² For a man to be placed (or to place himself) in this traditionally-female position was to call erotic attention to the body by a still-male positioned gaze, resulting in both the actor/dancer's emasculation and the encouragement of a homosexual viewing experience for male spectators.²³ But Mulvey's approach is not easily extended to Ted Shawn and other male dancers. Shawn danced in a culture obsessed with male bodies. Harvard doctors took the measurements of all undergraduates, advertisements shaming puny men abounded in magazines, and writers such as Burroughs valorized (indeed, lovingly caressed) the male body with their pens.²⁴

Gazing at dancing male bodies such as Shawn's forced spectators to recognize the body not as natural but as a social construct. This was far more threatening than a potentially effeminate or homosexual viewing experience. Dance, it would seem, operated in a marginal

²¹ For more on Denishawn, see Kendall, *Where She Danced*, Chapter 7; Jane Sherman, *The Drama of Denishawn Dance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1979); and Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 138-145.

²² Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" originally published in *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18, reprinted in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham, (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1999).

²³ Steven Cohan, "'Feminizing' the Song-and-Dance Man: Fred Astaire and the Spectacle of Masculinity in the Hollywood Musical," in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993), 46-69; Miriam Hansen, "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship," *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1986): 6-32; and David R. Shumway, "Watching Elvis: The Male Rock Star as Object of the Gaze," in *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons*, ed. Joel Foreman (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 124-143.

²⁴ Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*, 41, 169-179.

space where masculinity, as a construct, could be more easily detected.²⁵ A male dancer's performance, even when displaying a "primitive" movement, exposed the fiction of biology and pressed spectators to think about the myriad of ways that masculinity could be molded to fit a particular performative need. This had a potentially destabilizing effect on male viewers, who might have applied a homosexual label to dancers in reaction to this process of denaturalization.²⁶ True, Nijinsky, Shawn and other members of Shawn's troupe *were* gay, but they strove to keep their sexuality out of any discussion about their dancing.²⁷ The heterosexual members of Shawn's male company likewise worked hard to distance themselves from that image, relying on hypermasculinity to defend their "normal" sexuality, further exposing the construction of both masculinity and homosexuality.

Ted Shawn was acutely sensitive to attacks on male dancers, despite his own sexuality, and, like Kelly, set out to reclaim dance for men. He rejected the "prejudice against dancing as a serious life work for men" and the widely-held belief that "dancing is effeminate ... that dancing for men is 'sissy.'" Instead, Shawn asserted that dance in its most primitive state was masculine, performed by men for the purposes of war, labor, or religious expression. It was only in European courts in "the dark ages of asceticism" that dance became a feminine, artificial art, culminating in nineteenth-century ballet forms. In order to recover dance for men, Shawn linked it to athleticism. Indeed, the two had been

²⁵ Judith Halberstam argues that masculinity is most visible at its margins, so that it is best read through the bodies of black and lower-class men, and women trying to pass as men. *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 2.

²⁶ Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 13, 23-28, 76-79. For more on the implications of viewing (gay) male dancers, see Ramsay Burt, "Dissolving in Pleasure: The Threat of the Queer Male Dancing Body," in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 209-241.

²⁷ Susan Leigh Foster offers an insightful discussion of closeted gay male dancers in "Closets Full of Dances: Modern Dance's Performance of Masculinity and Sexuality," in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 147-207.

inextricably bound for him ever since he began dancing to build up his physical strength after suffering from diphtheria. In 1917, he positioned dance as the ideal way to cultivate body and soul. “For the dance,” he wrote, “is the training which results in perfection of the ‘whole’ man, and aims at no less a result.” He called for a redefinition of the notion of “beauty,” contending that beauty “is a thing without sex and belongs equally to men and to women. But a man’s beauty is masculine and the women’s beauty is feminine.” It was this sense of beauty, which Shawn saw as interconnected to grace and efficiency, that drove men to train and improve their bodies. As he understood it, beauty was the root of positive masculinity; thus values such as hard work and self-control could be read on a man’s body. In essence, Shawn believed that a male dancer displayed “remarkable conquest of his own body.”²⁸ When Gene Kelly stepped in front of the television camera in 1958, he echoed these sentiments, making the same plea for masculine grace and beauty.²⁹

Thus, in trying to carve out a legitimate social space for male dancers, Shawn was forced to rely upon the definitions of masculinity of his day, building his choreography and performances on the conventional images of hegemonic (heterosexual), heroic masculinity. In doing so, he remained within conservative, socially acceptable bounds, which Ramsay Burt contends limited the radical potential of his attempts to improve the social status of male dancers. While Shawn tried to refashion the male dancer, he was nonetheless trapped by the very conventions he wished to overturn. His ministerial training, coupled with prevailing

²⁸ Shawn, “Open Letter,” 16, 17, 76.

²⁹ I have found no direct link between Shawn and Kelly, though Kelly acknowledged the influence of dancers such as Nijinsky as well as modernists Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. See Gene Kelly, “The People’s Almanac presents The Book of Lists: Gene Kelly’s 10 Greatest Dancers of All Time,” (holograph note), n.d., GKC, Box 18, no folder.

gender norms, were channeled into a dancing image that very much conformed to white muscular Christianity.³⁰

Dancing therefore occupied a liminal gendered space for men. While it drew upon artistic traditions historically associated with women it also developed, thanks to Nijinsky and Shawn, a powerful strength typically associated with masculinity. It was precisely in this “twilight” world of half-formed shadows that the fictive gendering of art became visible.³¹ But male dancers, from Nijinsky onward, ultimately reified that false distinction when they argued that dancing could be manly since such a claim presupposed that dance, by its very nature, was *not* masculine.³² The only way to avoid this trap would be to deny the very gendered distinctions of dance in the first place. Kelly, like his predecessors, was unable to disregard this dichotomy because his entire world-view was built on gendered notions shaped by Cold War anxieties.

“The Prettiest Legs”

From his first days at dancing school, as a child of seven in 1920s Pittsburgh, Kelly frequently felt pushed to prove his manhood.³³ As he recalled to gossip columnist Hedda

³⁰ Burt explores Shawn’s fascination with non-Western themes in his dance even as he deplored the influence of African styles on American dance. *The Male Dancer*, 108-9. For more on muscular Christianity, see Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

³¹ I borrow the concept of “twilight” as a liminal space from Gerald Figal, *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

³² This process is similar to one that Andrea Most describes with respect to Jews’ participation on Broadway. She takes issue with the way other scholars draw attention to Jews’ “disproportionate” involvement. This term implies that somehow Jews “exist outside popular culture,” that it is somehow unnatural for them to be involved in musical theater. I work from a similar premise that suggests that when men like Shawn and Kelly tried to normalize male dancers they were actually setting men apart as outside dance and art. See Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7.

³³ Clive Hirschhorn, *Gene Kelly: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), 16.

Hooper in 1954, when he and his younger brother Fred “put on our Buster Brown collars and white gloves, we were considered sissies, so we had to fight every kid in the neighborhood. I might add the Kelly’s came out with flying fists and colors.”³⁴ Kelly never lost his youthful sensitivity to verbal insults. He recalled an incident when he was 20, performing with his brother Fred in a club in Chicago in 1932: “One night a guy called me a fag, and I jumped off the stage and hit him. But I had to make a run for it, because the owner of the place and his brother took after me with a couple of baseball bats.”³⁵ Little had changed by 1959, as journalist Ben Gross observed: “The husky 170-pounder indicated thereby his willingness even today to answer with a hefty left hook anyone who should be so unwise as to dispute the manliness of male dancers in his presence.”³⁶ Ever willing to resort to violence to prove his manhood, Gene drew upon his athleticism as well. At an early age he turned to gymnastics, football, and ice hockey to build strength for these attacks and to assert his own boyhood normalcy. This athletic, energetic, powerful, macho style would become his dancing signature.

To distance himself from slurs of effeminacy, Kelly also cultivated a sexy star persona, relying on female fans’ desire to demonstrate his masculinity. From the 1940s through the 1980s, he was seen as a heartthrob—an unmistakable object of desire for female fans of all ages. A 1946 feature in the fan magazine *Modern Screen* noted his inter-generational popularity among young and old women: “As a man who does not view himself as the sort of person whom teen-agers get crushes on, he is still a little startled when the

³⁴ Hedda Hopper, “Gene Kelly Would Rather Teach: Dancer Confesses Acting Is His Secondary Choice,” *Los Angeles Times* (25 July 1954): IV-12, GKC, Box 10, Scrapbook 9 (1952-1955).

³⁵ Quoted in Hirschhorn, *Gene Kelly*, 43.

³⁶ Ben Gross, “‘Dancing Isn’t Sissy’ – Gene Kelly: Famous Dancer-Director Resents Slurs; And Tells Why It Is a Truly Manly Art,” *Sunday News* (1 February 1959): 9, GKC, Box 18, no folder.

bobby-soxers approach and ask for his autograph ... 'See?' he said. 'The bobby-soxers go for me. Please believe me, they don't know what they're doing. I'm a grown man!'"³⁷ Kelly's female fan base remained strong throughout his life, and he repeatedly claimed that he received more fan mail in the late 1970s and 1980s than in the 1950s due to television rebroadcasts of his films. "A lot of the mail is from kids who seem to think we made those musicals only a couple of years ago," he mused. "And I'm surprised at the romantic notes I'm getting from girls who weren't even born when I made those pictures."³⁸ Romantic notes such as the near-obsessive handwritten one he received in 1979 from a North Hollywood woman claiming to be one of his "greatest fans." She closed her letter: "My whole life is centered around Gene Kelly, my thoughts, dreams and my collection of anything on your life."³⁹ Despite his frequent and perhaps disingenuous claims of surprise at his female following, he nonetheless used his sex appeal to prove his manliness, relishing his position as a sex object. In the late 1970s, long after his film career had ended, he admitted, "I especially like the people who don't want my soul but want my body."⁴⁰

³⁷ Frazier, "Flying Irishman," 66, 68, GKC, Box 12, no folder.

³⁸ Vernon Scott, "'That's Entertainment' revives career: Gene Kelly rediscovered through films," *Valley News* (Van Nuys, CA) (28 July 1976): Section 3, p 5, GKC, Box 18, no folder.

³⁹ Katherine Livitchell, North Hollywood, to Gene Kelly, Holograph note, 7 October 1979, GKC, Box 12, no folder, Inserted in *Hollywood Studio Magazine* 13, no. 5, (Sept 1979).

⁴⁰ Holly Bridges, "Gene Kelly: Sweatshirt & Jeans," *Hollywood Studio Magazine* 13, no. 5 (September 1979): 13, GKC, Box 12, no folder. See also Sheryl Flatow, "Through a Lens Brightly," *Ballet News* 6, no. 10 (April 1985): 14, GKC, Box 12, no folder. Such positioning as a sexual object as a way to establish an actor's manhood was not wholly uncommon in the 1950s. Rock Hudson, for instance, was forced by his studio into a fabricated marriage to cover up his homosexuality, which was well known in Hollywood but kept a secret from the general public. Likewise, Montgomery Clift's numerous heterosexual relationships were hyped in fan magazines to hide his bisexuality. By making these comparisons I am in no way suggesting that Kelly used his sex appeal to cover up his sexuality, whatever that might have been. I simply mean to illuminate some of the practices of Hollywood at crafting public personae for actors. See Cohan, *Masked Men*, Chapter 7: "The Bachelor in the Bedroom," 264-303 and McCann, *Rebel Males*, Chapter 2: "Montgomery Clift," 31-78.

The very fact that many people have asked me over the years whether Kelly was gay or not reveals something of the attitudes and assumptions about homosexuality, both in the postwar period and today. Most notably, asking whether he was gay presupposes a direct link between desire and behavior, i.e. that we can

Kelly's appeal, at least to female audience members, rested firmly on his body as an object of desire, an object *to-be-looked-at*. A 1953 issue of *Hollywood Men*, a short-lived publication of the Maco Magazine Corp, featured a two-page spread on Gene Kelly, describing him in a succinctly Hemingway style. The unsigned piece focused on Kelly's ruggedly masculine traits, noting his strong work ethic, dislike of shaving, and how he "puts salt in his beer."⁴¹ Curiously, though, he was also objectified, when the author revealed that director George Sidney professed Kelly to have the "prettiest legs of any actor."⁴² Such a comment about his legs unsettlingly relied on a feminized adjective ("pretty"). Female dancers were frequently described not in terms of the functionality but the aesthetics of their legs (length and shapeliness), a phenomenon dating back to the turn-of-the-century Burlesque craze and Ziegfeld's famous chorines, who were selected based on their physical measurements.⁴³ In the fifties, one is reminded of Cyd Charisse, who danced with Kelly in

actually presume to know what it meant to be gay in the 1950s. I am grateful to Matt Harper for pushing my thinking along these lines. Additionally, Alice Kessler-Harris's interrogation of why we ask whether playwright Lillian Hellman was a Communist or not has raised these same issues for me. Alice Kessler-Harris, "Lillian Hellman: The Rebel, The Radical, and the Left," Talk delivered at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 22 February 2007.

⁴¹ Maco's list of publications was vast and wide ranging, with topics on professional football and baseball, male leisure activities, homemaking, cookbooks, beauty books, and photography. For more on Maco, see the Library of Congress online catalog: <http://catalog.loc.gov/> and the online library catalog for the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences: <http://www.mhlcatalog.org/catalog.htm>.

⁴² "Gene Kelly," *Hollywood Men* (1953): 83, GKC, Box 10, Scrapbook 9 (1952-1955). Sidney directed Kelly in three pictures by 1953: *Thousands Cheer* (1943), *anchors Aweigh* (1944), and the non-musical *Three Musketeers* (1948). Sidney also directed *The Harvey Girls* (1946), *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950), *Show Boat* (1951), *Kiss Me Kate* (1953), and *Pal Joey* (1957). He was a regular member of Arthur Freed's production team at MGM. For more on Sidney's work on musicals, see Hugh Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals: The Arthur Freed Unit*, originally published: *The World of Entertainment! Hollywood's Greatest Musicals* (New York: Doubleday, 1975; reprint n.p.: Da Capo Press, 1996); and Eric Monder, *George Sidney: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

⁴³ Ziegfeld girls were divided by height and proportion into such groups as "A-team," and the lesser "ponies" and "chickens." See Linda Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 94-95; Susan A. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), Chapter 6: "'Nationally Advertised Legs': How Broadway Invented 'The Girls,'" 155-187; John F. Kasson, "Dances of the Machine in Early Twentieth-Century America," in *A Modern Mosaic: Art and Modernism in the United States*, ed. Townsend Ludington

two pictures. She was known exclusively for her legginess; audiences commented specifically on that noteworthy feature.⁴⁴ The leg as disembodied sexual object, then, was undeniably associated with women.⁴⁵ For Kelly's legs to be mentioned—and described as “pretty” rather than “thick,” “strong,” or “muscular”—represented a destabilizing fetishization of the actor which ultimately pointed to the liminal and dangerous gendered space the male dancer occupied.

And what about male audience members who sat in darkened theaters watching Kelly display his bodily prowess?⁴⁶ Certainly, gay audiences might have been drawn to Kelly for the same reasons heterosexual women were, though there is little evidence to prove that. Gay and camp theoretical interpretations of musicals, while providing a potential framework for a queer reading of Kelly's work, do not typically focus on Kelly.⁴⁷ A 1950 article from *The Saturday Evening Post*, however, points the way to one possible answer. Discussing Kelly's box office popularity, reporter Pete Martin suggested that, to be a star, an actor

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 168; and Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), Chapter 8: “Burlesque in the Twentieth Century,” 241-289.

⁴⁴ Howard Strickling, First Report of First Preview for *Singin' in the Rain*, 21 December 1951, 3, AFC, Box 21, Folder: “‘Singing in the Rain’ #1546.”

⁴⁵ Busby Berkeley was especially notorious for the ways he used the camera and editing to segment and objectify chorines. See Lucy Fischer, “The Image of Woman as Image: The Optical Politics of *Dames*,” in *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman (London: Routledge/British Film Institute, 1981), 70-84; Patricia Mellencamp, “Sexual Economics: *Gold Diggers of 1933*,” in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan, (London: Routledge, 2002), 65-76; and Kasson, “Dances of the Machine in Early Twentieth-Century America,” 153-174.

⁴⁶ Kenneth MacKinnon offers astute synthesis of theoretical approaches to male spectatorship in the 1950s in *Love, Tears, and the Male Spectator* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Judy Garland is a more common focal point for such discussions. See, for instance, Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), Chapter 3: “Judy Garland and Gay Men,” Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 139-43; Cohan, ed., *Hollywood Musicals*, Part 3: “Camp Interventions;” and Brian Currid, “Judy Garland's American Drag,” *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 46, no. 1 (2001): 123-33. See also Blake Stimson, “Andy Warhol's Red Beard,” *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 3 (Sept 2001): 527-547.

needed to appeal to men and women equally.⁴⁸ Martin contended that Kelly's "men fans are inclined to think of him primarily as a dancer given to leaping, leg twinkling and undulation of the body instead of the simple hoofing they can easily understand." Here Martin associated Kelly's dancing not with the unequivocally-marked male hooper but with the prima ballerina, the less-than-manly twinkling of a fairy, and the undulation of a female kooch dancer.⁴⁹ In so doing he also drew a gendered distinction between non-musical and musical acting; the former being more serious and thereby associated with men. Thus Martin implied that Kelly, as a dancer, was not fully a man and the only way the actor could build a male fan base was through non-musical dramatic roles, such as his portrayal of D'Artagnan in George Sidney's *The Three Musketeers* (1948).

Additionally, many male spectators probably perceived Kelly as romantic competition for their own dates, whose hearts beat a little faster when the dancer dashed across the screen. Other men might have indulged in disparaging slurs to emasculate Kelly and neutralize the threat of the larger-than-life heartthrob. "Kelly's voice is gravelly enough, but when a fellow who sits through a Kelly flick with his girl sneaks a look at her, nobody has to tell him that she's picking up that gravelly voice on her emotional radar, and that it's coming through to her warm and smooth, and disturbing her plenty," Martin pointedly noted. "You can't expect Joe Average to enjoy getting up the money for tickets so Kelly can make his date sprout goose pimples."⁵⁰ Talking about male spectators through their relationships to women allowed Martin to skirt the issue of male scopophilia and discuss male

⁴⁸ Hollywood still made movies for general audiences of mixed ages and genders at this time.

⁴⁹ The pairing of the hooper with the ballerina was a common element to many backstage musical comedies such as *The Band Wagon* (1953). Kelly, along with Frank Sinatra and Jules Munshin, briefly appeared as a kooch dancer at the end of *On the Town* (1949), though this was a gag intended for comic effect.

⁵⁰ Pete Martin, *The Saturday Evening Post* 223, no. 2 (8 July 1950): 25, GKC, Box 12, no folder.

spectatorship in non-threatening terms. He thus denied that male audiences could (sexually) enjoy Kelly's performances, even though he conceded that men could appreciate the loud, brassy, basic movements of the athletic hooper.

Though Kelly's star persona was largely constructed around his sex appeal for women, and though he and others denied his male audience's viewing pleasure, he undoubtedly did have male fans. A landscape architect from San Francisco, for instance, wrote Kelly in October 1954 to express his admiration for the dancer, who had spoken at the San Francisco Museum about his art.⁵¹ And in 1980, long after he had retired, Kelly received a request for a photograph to add to the collection of stars lining the office of Peter Bankers, head publicist at Paramount. Bankers, who had immigrated to the United States as a small child, relied on musicals not simply for education but for acculturation, as he gushingly revealed to Kelly. He concluded, "Thank you for your time and your graciousness, and for hundreds of the most magnificent hours of my life viewing your incredible gallery of achievements."⁵² While Bankers first watched his dancing idol as a child, the publicist never outgrew his fascination with Kelly, and this rather lengthy note to the actor suggests the extent of the dancer's popularity with some male moviegoers.

While most discussions of male fans tended to evade questions of objectification, one publicity shot of Kelly from 1946 danced rather close to male objectification. Featured on the cover of *Pipe Lovers* ("The Magazine for Men Who Enjoy a Pipe") but without an accompanying article, Kelly appeared holding a pipe and looking off in the distance, head turned down slightly in a casual pose. While the pipe masculinized the image, there was

⁵¹ Robert Cornwall, San Francisco, to Gene Kelly, Typed signed letter, 2 October 1954, GKC, Box 2, Folder 10: "Thank You Letters (General)."

⁵² Peter Bankers, Paramount, to Gene Kelly, Typed signed note, 14 July 1980, Box 18, no folder.

nonetheless something ambiguous about the cover. Here was a picture of Kelly clearly being marketed to other men, but it was a disembodied image—an image without a narrative to explain or legitimize it.⁵³ Though this picture appeared in a male domain, the lack of text opened up the possibility for multiple and possibly homoerotic readings. Thus, Kelly’s body, whether dancing or frozen in a snapshot, was a contested object for male viewers. If Kelly’s physical appearance could be consumed in divergent ways, then his language had to be all the more definitive if he was to protect himself against slurs on his masculinity. Whenever he spoke publicly about male dancers, he adopted and performed a discourse that upheld a strict gender divide, even as he sought to expand the allowances for men.

Ever quick to defend himself and the male dancer from slurs, it seems he could never quite escape the stigma. As one writer put it in 1945, “Lt. (J.G.) Eugene Curran Kelly ... spent a considerable portion of his youth regarding dancing as an effeminate practice. Later, after he had detached the first syllable of his first name and discarded the Curran entirely it began—sissy or not—to pay off rather well.”⁵⁴ And yet, Kelly was reticent to talk openly about the sissy stigma in his 1958 television show, a far change from the early days of his career. He thought it “dangerous ground” to acknowledge how male dancing had once been “namby-pamby, and very prissy.”⁵⁵ As he conceded, dance operated at the margins of what R.W. Connell has since labeled “hegemonic” masculinity.⁵⁶ While more acceptable than in

⁵³ Cover of *Pipe Lovers* (March 1946), GKC, Box 7, Scrapbook 4 (1945-1948).

⁵⁴ John Maynard, “This Is About Gene Kelly And That’s All It’s About,” unidentifiable clipping (c. Oct-Nov 1945), n.p., GKC, Box 7, Scrapbook 4 (1945-1948). See also, Earl Wilson, “Gene Kelly Resents Sissy Idea,” *Lawrence Daily Journal-World* (Lawrence, Kansas), 8 January 1957, 6. I am grateful to Greg Kaliss for bringing this article to my attention.

⁵⁵ Harold P. Hogstrom, Dictated notes for Omnibus Gene Kelly Show, 25 August 1958, 12, GKC, Box 13, Folder: “OMNIBUS PROGRAM – Dec. 21, 1958.”

⁵⁶ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

Shawn's time, the male dancer nonetheless still needed to defend his masculinity, which was conflated with his (hetero)sexuality. Calling undue attention to the problem would only reinforce the very marginality Kelly was trying to correct. Considering the climate of suspicion and fear of blacklisting, only five years behind him, he indeed was treading on "dangerous ground" in his attempts to expand the boundaries of proper masculinity.

Given the intersection of Cold War fears and mass spectatorship, it was critical for Kelly to preserve his respectability. He was an outspoken leftist who supported labor during the strikes in Hollywood in the early 1940s. He was also a highly visible member of the Committee for the First Amendment (CFA), a group of actors who supported the Hollywood Ten, screenwriters held in contempt and subsequently blacklisted for their refusal to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) during the first postwar Red Scare in 1947. And Kelly's then wife, actress Betsy Blair, as a former member of the Communist Party back in New York, was nearly blacklisted for refusing to name names to the American Legion in the early 1950s.⁵⁷ Kelly's personal politics undeniably bled over into his professional position; indeed, in June of 1949, while he was filming *On the Town*, the California Senate Committee on Un-American Activities listed Kelly as one of "several hundred" communist supporters in Hollywood, a charge he vehemently denied.⁵⁸ And in 1951, at the height of the second and far more virulent communist witch-hunt in Hollywood, Gene Kelly was named several times as a communist sympathizer whose work in Hollywood "put the touch of glamor [*sic*] upon the ugly face of communist sedition."⁵⁹ He could not

⁵⁷ Alvin Yudkoff, *Gene Kelly: A Life of Dance and Dreams* (New York: Back Stage Books, 1999), 170-175, 222; and Hirschhorn, *Gene Kelly*, 132-135.

⁵⁸ "Hundreds Named as Red Appeasers," *New York Times* (9 June 1949): 5.

afford for his masculinity to be questioned on top of such accusations. Kelly's "heterosexuality had to be asserted;" Jane Feuer reminds us, "it could not be assumed."⁶⁰

Even beyond the Red Scare, the stakes were higher for Kelly than for preceding male dancers. Unlike Ted Shawn, who toured nationally, Kelly's stage—motion pictures—stretched farther than any theater circuit. Dancing before the camera exposed Kelly to far more fame, but also far more scrutiny. And unlike the debonair and sophisticated Fred Astaire, who had achieved movie stardom by 1934, Kelly was still establishing himself in Hollywood when HUAC began investigating the film industry. Astaire's sexuality was rarely questioned despite his usual role, cultivated as much on the screen as off it, as a sophisticated, aristocratic-like dandy, and he seemed far less preoccupied than Kelly in defending his manhood. While some of his private letters from the 1930s exposed a general dislike or distrust of homosexuals, Astaire rarely seemed concerned with being thought a sissy, even though he was slighter in build than the macho Gene Kelly.⁶¹ In large part, Astaire did not have to worry about slurs against his manhood because he launched his career as part of a dancing team—first with his sister Adele on the Vaudeville stage through the 1920s and then with Ginger Rogers at RKO in the 1930s. In contrast, Kelly never had a regular dancing partner, and in fact rarely danced with the same woman. He seemed equally

⁵⁹ J. B. Matthews, "Did the Movies Really Clean House: Community Infiltration of Hollywood Motion-Picture Industry – Part I," *American Legion Magazine* (December 1951): 13, 49, 50, 52-53. Matthews listed eight MGM films that he believed to involve communist sympathizers who would allow propaganda to seep in. Interestingly, two of these eight titles were MGM musicals: *Show Boat* (1951) and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952).

⁶⁰ Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 141.

⁶¹ After his first movie, Astaire confessed he thought he looked like a "big fagat [*sic*]." Fred Astaire, Beverly Hills, California, to Adele Astaire, Lismore Castle, Ireland, 9 August 1933, handwritten signed letter, AAC, Box 1, Folder 1/3: "Correspondence: Fred Astaire through Cavendish." Interestingly, Kelly echoed these sentiments while reflecting on his 1935 screen test for RKO. As he told his biographer: "I remember thinking that I looked like a raving fag by the time they put the cameras on me." Quoted in Hirschhorn, *Gene Kelly*, 49.

content dancing with children, props, other men, or by himself.⁶² Even a cursory look at his film career reveals that Kelly danced with men twice as much as he did with women.⁶³ Kelly consistently evaded the question of who his favorite dancing partner was, sometimes cheekily responding it was Jerry the cartoon Mouse from *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), or even Fred Astaire in “The Babbitt and the Bromide” in *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946). He even joked how he would “change my name to Ginger if we could do it again.”⁶⁴ In truth, Kelly claimed that “your favorite dancing partner happens to be the one you’re playing with, acting with, and dancing with at that particular time.”⁶⁵ And that dancing partner could just as easily be a man as a woman. Because he seemed to take such great pleasure from his homosocial dancing, Kelly had to work far harder than his predecessors to craft an unmistakably masculine image.

Kelly used his body to assert his masculinity and distinguish himself from Astaire. Distancing himself from his more elite predecessor, Kelly insisted that his dancing be accessible to a mass audience, adopting the appearance and movements of the working class to suit his stocky 5-foot 9-inch frame. He would repeatedly laugh when compared to Astaire, sheepishly pointing out how, “Fred Astaire was always so sophisticated and elegant. If I wore tails, I looked like a truck driver going out to dinner. I wore jeans and sneakers and I

⁶² Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 54. Kelly appeared opposite Judy Garland in three films (*Easter Parade* would have made four had Kelly not broken his ankle and been replaced by Astaire), danced with Vera-Ellen twice, and while he acted with Cyd Charisse in three movies, they only danced together two times.

⁶³ This estimate excludes mixed dances performed with women and men, which amount to approximately the same rate as his performance of the traditional *pas de deux*.

⁶⁴ *That's Entertainment!* Produced and directed by Jack Haley, Jr., Color, 131 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1974, Videocassette, Author's Collection.

⁶⁵ “The American Film Institute Salute to Gene Kelly,” Broadcast Script (sent to him by George Stevens, Jr. on 19 May 1985), GKC, Box 11, no folder.

made the steps athletic, masculine, contemporary. I always wanted my dancing to be the common man's dance."⁶⁶ Denying the artsy, more feminine side of his profession, Kelly cultivated a dancing style that was broad, bold, and athletic. "Fred Astaire danced during a Depression period in white tie and tails. And the American public needed that then," he once mused. "I wanted to dance for the working-class guy. Those were the parts I was fitted for—the sailor, the truck driver, those repairmen."⁶⁷ Kelly adopted the trappings of a rich historical tradition of working-class leisure amusements, such as baseball, severing any possible link between his celluloid dances and elite dandies.⁶⁸ His was a cultural tradition of homosocial bonding, and he employed manly athleticism in his choreography to keep from blurring the boundaries between acceptable homosocial behavior and deviant homosexual conduct.⁶⁹

Such efforts were matched by other male choreographers at the time, most notably George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins. Both dance directors infused their routines with bold, powerful movement intended to showcase male athletic prowess, strength, and agility. Though the Russian-born Balanchine purportedly believed the male dancer was secondary to the ballerina, Deborah Jowitt argues that "some of his greatest roles have been for men." Balanchine's male dancers were known for their speed, flexibility, and broad torsos. Taking as his inspiration the scale and pace of American life, his dancers used the stage's expansive

⁶⁶ David Castell, "Gene Kelly song and dance man," *Films Illustrated* (November 1974): 99, GKC, Box 14, no folder.

⁶⁷ Cleveland Amory, "Gene Kelly's Tennis Strictly Soft Shoe," *Pittsburgh Press* (6 December 1976): n.p., GKC, Box 18, no folder.

⁶⁸ Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁶⁹ Ramsay Burt explores the historical slippage between homosociality and homosexuality in *The Male Dancer*, 22-24. See also D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, Chapter 2.

space rather than remain in a more enclosed area.⁷⁰ Similarly, Robbins's work was marked by an uncontainable energy—a fusion of athleticism with classical ballet, as is visible in *West Side Story* (stage production 1957, film adaptation 1961). His dancing combined *pirouettes* with the type of leaping associated with sports as a way to express masculinity through the still feminine domain of art.⁷¹ Like them, Kelly relied on strenuous, athletic movements to reform the male dancer's image.

Dancing is a Man's Game

“Dancing: A Man's Game” ultimately provides as fascinating a glimpse into Gene Kelly's attitudes as into the larger postwar mindset about masculinity and art. While Kelly relied on a team of researchers as well as the creative energy of his producer, Robert Saudek, the Omnibus program represented Kelly's vision of manly dance. For an hour on that Sunday night in December 1958, Kelly informed American audiences, aided by top athletes and dancers of the day, about the common links between dance and athleticism. Set in a gymnasium, he drew comparisons between athletic movements, such as hitting a baseball or throwing a football, and leaping through the air. Interspersed among the discussion were demonstrations of sports and dance, including a soft-shoe tap routine with welter- and middleweight champion boxer Sugar Ray Robinson and a concluding dance routine with six male dancers. The culminating ballet incorporated the various athletic moves previously

⁷⁰ Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image*, 253-274. For more on George Balanchine, see Richard Buckle in collaboration with John Taras, *George Balanchine: Ballet Master, A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1988) and George Balanchine, *Choreography: A Catalogue of Works* (New York: Viking, 1984).

⁷¹ Robbins, as a gay man and former member of the Communist Party, felt doubly besieged in the Red Scare. To protect himself, he recanted and agreed to name names. On Robbins, see Deborah Jowitt, *Jerome Robbins: His Life, His Theater, His Dance* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004); Greg Lawrence, *Dance with Demons: The Life of Jerome Robbins* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2001); and Genné, “‘Freedom Incarnate’,” 83-103.

demonstrated throughout the hour, on a set designed to look like a “street corner in any American city” that had the feel of “A Day in New York” from *On the Town* or even one of the numerous group dances from *West Side Story*. Throughout the program, Kelly spoke with dancers and athletes, offering extemporaneous commentaries about the beauty of male movement to explain his thesis of the superiority and naturalness of male dance.⁷²

While it is unclear where and when the inspiration for this television special originated, the ideas expressed in the program fundamentally represented those of Gene Kelly.⁷³ Drawing upon research from *The New York Times*' dance critic John Martin and the brainpower of Saudek's office, the final script undeniably embodied a culmination of the many forces that had driven Kelly's dancing career for decades, even though he rarely appeared in musicals by the late 1950s. But long after he stopped dancing in Hollywood, the star remained unflaggingly self-conscious, contemplating and explaining his craft, whether in newspaper interviews, guest lectures, or articles he penned. His Omnibus special, then, was born out of the decades he spent toiling as a dancer and choreographer, both on Broadway and in Hollywood.

Critical reception of “Dancing: A Man's Game” was positive and tended to emphasize the quality and entertainment value of the show. Some reviewers were skeptical of Kelly's argument that dance belonged solely to men. Harry Harris of *The Philadelphia*

⁷² “Dancing: A Man's Game,” Produced by Robert Saudek, Directed by Gene Kelly, Black and white, 55 min., WNBC-TV Omnibus, 21 December 1958, 16 mm digital reel, MTR. For more description see Gerstner, “Dancer from the Dance” and “Dancing is a Man's Game,” Working Script (typescript with holographic notes), 16 December 1958, GKC, Box 1, Folder 5: “‘Dancing is a Man's Game’ 1958 Working Script.”

⁷³ In 1955, the MGM Publicity Department noted that Omnibus' producer “has expressed an interest in having Gene Kelly come on the show to discuss the whole matter of preparing a ballet picture for the screen [to promote *Invitation to the Dance*] ... This is in process of discussion with no decision at this writing.” Of course, Kelly's 1958 program was not about cinematic dancing. Outline of Publicity and Exploitation Ideas for *Invitation to the Dance*, Typed outline, n.d, 1. While the outline was unsigned and undated, it was identifiable through the memo to which it was attached: Howard Herty to Howard Strickling, Typed memo, 20 September 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

Inquirer complained that the lecture “didn’t disprove the widespread notion that male ballet dancers are apt to be sissy,” while Walter Hawver confessed, “I’d like to agree with everything you said, Gene. But you know how it is. I’ve got a wife and two left feet.” Of the near-dozen reviews Gene Kelly clipped and saved, none were written by women. Further, few journalists cared to explore the implications Kelly’s thesis posed for women, though Hawver did admit, “Kelly’s topic wasn’t provocative enough ... If the gals look back in anger at this show, who’s to blame them. But while Kelly was at it, it was a great day for us males. And even the unbelievable and dissident female must have gotten a charge out of the virile collection of athletes Kelly assembled in his version of Stillman’s gymnasium to help prove his point.”⁷⁴ Hawver undermined any possible objections female viewers might have raised against Kelly by reducing their spectatorship to an emotional and sexual response. But in so doing, he also gestured toward the problematic objectification of the male body in motion.

The few viewers, mostly friends and colleagues, who wrote to Kelly after the show’s airing hailed its entertainment and educational value, but typically evaded the battle-of-the-sexes question. Max Gordon gushed, “I never saw anything better or more artistic; it was sheer joy to watch you and the wonderful dancers” while the Supervisor of Physical Education for the San Diego City School District, Darrell J. Smith, applauded Kelly’s efforts. A few weeks after the show he sent a note on behalf of the California Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation’s Board of Directors “to commend you for your purpose in presenting the program and certainly for the achievements you realized in our community.

⁷⁴ Harry Harris, “Gene Kelly Proves Dancing IS a Man’s Game in TV Debut” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (22 December 1958): 22, GKC, Box 1, Folder 5: “ ‘Dancing is a Man’s Game’ 1958 Working Script.” Walter Hawver, “Men ARE Supreme; Kelly Proves It,” unidentifiable clipping, GKC, Box 1, Folder 5 “ ‘Dancing is a Man’s Game’ 1958, Working Script.”

We believe that it is having a most beneficial result in the fields of physical education and recreation.”⁷⁵

Kelly used his television show to expand the definitions of art, athletics, and masculinity in order to carve out a normative space for manly grace. He applied to dance the acceptable elements of athletics—bodily conditioning, physical strength, and the execution of well-controlled movements. And, in turn, to sports he applied certain fundamentals of dance—rhythm, choreography, bodily expression, and graceful movement. Restoring the image of male artists thus required blurring the line between dance and sports. In the process of borrowing and blending, he became confused about the distinctions between the two. During production he mused: “I know the foundation of my dancing style is a 50-50 mixture of ballet and athletic training, and where one leaves off and the other begins I am never quite sure.”⁷⁶ This confusion overshadowed the way he constantly tinkered with his ideas on dance and sports. Indeed, he seemed always to be searching for the perfect formula that would allow him to argue simultaneously that dance was athletic *and* artistic. “Dancing: A Man’s Game” came right at the middle of all of this—after his musical film career had ended—but in the midst of directing musicals in Hollywood and on Broadway.

This blurring of lines between dance and sport served as the fundamental premise for his Omnibus special, and was reflected in the opening sequence. Kelly envisioned dancers and athletes intermingling on the stage—throwing balls around, performing gymnastic feats—in a “beehive of activity” that would “represent utter confusion.” Viewers would be

⁷⁵ Max Gordon, New York, to Gene Kelly, Beverly Hills, 23 December 1958, typed letter signed; Darrell J. Smith, San Diego, to Gene Kelly, Beverly Hills, 13 January 1959, typed letter signed, both from GKC, Box 13, Folder: “OMNIBUS PROGRAM – Dec. 21, 1958.”

⁷⁶ Gene Kelly, autograph note, n.d., GKC, Box 1, Folder 5: “ ‘Dancing is a Man’s Game’ 1958, Working Script.”

unable to distinguish athlete from dancer, per se, since all of the men would be engaged in the same sort of activities. Further smudging such divisions, Kelly requested that each man be dressed in a uniform: “Dancers will be dressed in uniforms to denote their three groups, ballet, modern, and tap. Each athlete will be in the uniform of his trade.” While each individual uniform would be distinct, the idea that each member of the “cast” would be in the garb of his profession underscored the notion that dancers were, indeed, just as much athletes as the baseball player or ice skater (or soldiers for that matter). The only difference between the hooper and the boxer, then, was the *type* of uniform he wore.⁷⁷

The visual and physical comparisons between athletes and dancers extended well beyond superficial uniforms. Kelly maintained that the athlete and dancer each wielded his well-conditioned, disciplined, and powerful body to perform choreographed, perfectly-timed, rhythmic movements. Ultimately, he held that a man should not dance, much less play football, if his body was not up to the task. “There’s dancing you can do till your [*sic*] 150,” he conceded twenty years later, “but it’s not exciting ... There’s a time when you have to quit being a shortstop and start managing.”⁷⁸ If dancing represented a liminal space between masculinity and femininity, a man could only safely dance if he could assert his vitality. The male body, as Michael Kimmel describes it, was undeniably “a gendered testing ground, a site of demonstration of masculinity.”⁷⁹ It could not be a contested arena, but must clearly

⁷⁷ Working script, p 1, GKC, Box 1, Folder 5: “ ‘Dancing is a Man’s Game’ 1958 Working Script.”

⁷⁸ Louise Sweeney, “Gene Kelly: dancer/ dad/ legend,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (5 December 1977): 34, GKC, Box 18, no folder. Michael Kernan, “Gene Kelly, Turning Over a New Leap,” *The Washington Post* (1 April 1982): B3, GKC, Box 11, no folder.

⁷⁹ Kimmel, “Consuming Manhood: The Feminization of American Culture and the Recreation of the Male Body, 1832-1920,” 13. For more on reading the male body, see Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999); Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*; Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*; and Nancy Tuana, ed., et al, *Revealing Male Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). George L. Mosse’s *Nationalism and Sexuality*:

communicate strength, vigor, and physical prowess. To Kelly, the dancer's body should be clearly and unequivocally marked as masculine.

Male athletes and dancers did not simply look alike or condition their bodies in similar ways. Kelly asserted that their movements were inextricably linked, thereby proving that dancing was not only athletic, like fencing or boxing, but it was perfectly natural an activity in which men should engage. "All these men, dancers and athletes alike," he pointed out at the beginning of the show, "possess something very much in common—skill in physical movement, and more important than that, physical movement in rhythm." Every movement, he contended, had its own rhythms, whether planned in advance or extemporaneous. These rhythms required timing, practice, fluidity, and, in the case of athletics, the flexibility to "change his rhythms to met the spontaneous requirements of the instant."⁸⁰ Ultimately, all men, regardless of their particular craft, were bound by a shared love of movement. In a production meeting, Kelly suggested that this love of movement was a primal drive of man: "Men dance for the same reason they play games. Why does a man become a baseball player, football player? Why does every boy love to throw a ball? Because he loves physical movement. This is very strong, it is inherent in man to love movement, and before man could speak he expressed himself in movement."

Even in terms of expressive movement, then, Kelly blurred the boundaries between sports and dance. "... [A] dancer has something to say to an audience, he wants to express himself in some way," he explained to producer Robert Saudek. "It is just the sheer exhibition of beauty, prowess, or technical skill, telling a story or overcoming the laws of

Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985) offers insightful analysis of the political implications posed by the male body that can be applied to the American context.

⁸⁰ Working script, 2, GKC, Box 1, Folder 5: "'Dancing is a Man's Game' 1958 Working Script."

gravity seemingly; he has something to say.”⁸¹ But the athlete’s body could be just as artistic and emotional in its communication with the audience. As he purported, “some sports achieve this [same] emotional rapport.” He continued, “As for ‘conveying’ to an audience, what could be more eloquent than a Babe Ruth pointing to the part of the field where he was going to knock the ball? Or—if you have you ever seen the old-time newsreels—an exultant Jack Dempsey doing that savage little dance every time he knocked Willard down at Toledo? As for conveying emotion to an audience, who could be more emotional than a Brooklyn Dodger Fan?”⁸² Dancer and athlete alike, he contended, drew from a natural drive to communicate through movement.

Here Kelly was not simply falling back on gender essentialism. He rooted athletic action in men’s evolutionary biology as a way to normalize male dancing. He extended this line of argument a step further by reclaiming art and the aesthetics of dance for men. In so doing he needed to redefine art, which he attempted by not only redrawing the permissible operating boundaries for masculinity, but by redefining the very nature of the concept of *grace*. In short, he was attempting to recast the contours of art to include manly expressions of beauty.

David Anthony Gerstner argues that Kelly sought to recast art as manly and “functional” rather than feminine and ornamental to rescue the organizational man from “the postwar intensification, anxiety, and uncertainty of masculine domestication and

⁸¹ Hogstrom, Dictated Notes for Omnibus Gene Kelly Show, 5, 7-8, GKC, Box 13, Folder: “OMNIBUS PROGRAM – Dec. 21, 1958.”

⁸² Gene Kelly, untitled manuscript for *Sports Illustrated* (n.d.): 2, GKC, Box 3, Folder 13: “Articles by GK.” University of Missouri-St. Louis scholar Richard Pisarkiewicz made a similar argument twenty years later when he claimed that both dance and sports were an aesthetic experience to be shared with spectators. Richard Pisarkiewicz, “The Aesthetic Athlete,” *Missouri Journal of Health, Physical Education and Recreation* (1978): 12-15, GKC, Box 12, no folder.

corporatization.”⁸³ Certainly, Kelly wanted to infuse art and beauty with masculine power and prowess, as Shawn and contemporaries such as Jackson Pollock had attempted.⁸⁴ But Kelly also wholly rejected the feminization of art in his claim that male athletes could move beautifully. He maintained that art, or at least dance, was beautiful *and* masculine in nature. To make his point, he linked notions of art and aesthetic beauty to athletics. However, he could only extend this argument as far as the postwar political climate allowed him. He had to remain within acceptable boundaries of “normal” heterosexuality if he was to succeed in convincing the American public that male dancers were not sissies and that male athletes were, in fact, artists.

By expanding his definition of art to include athletics, Kelly suggested that a sport such as baseball could be as aesthetically pleasing as ballet. In a meeting with Saudek, Kelly explored the beauty of movement. Recalling a recent baseball game he had seen on television, he contemplated his surprise when the announcer extemporaneously observed Mickey Mantle’s manly beauty:

You could see all the muscles on his back move as he brought the bat back and it was just a beautiful sweeping motion of that bat ... Red Barber had to say, ‘Isn’t that beautiful, look at the way he moves.’ It was spontaneous. There must have been thousands of people watching the game who felt the same thing. Here it came from the man announcing. It was rare to hear him use the term. Then he quickly went into ‘very strong, very husky fellow’ ... It was wonderful to watch.⁸⁵

⁸³ Gerstner, “Dancer from the Dance,” 51.

⁸⁴ Andrew Perchuk, “Pollock and Postwar Masculinity,” in *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation*, eds. Andrew Perchuk and Helanie Posner (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 31-42.

⁸⁵ Hogstrom, Dictated notes for Omnibus Gene Kelly Show, 12-13, GKC, Box 13, Folder: “OMNIBUS PROGRAM – Dec. 21, 1958.”

According to Kelly's account, Barber seemed to have realized his transgression in marveling at Mantle's form. He backpedaled, searching for more masculine descriptors such as "strong" and "husky" to restore the gender disruption of applying supposedly feminine beauty to a man. It was precisely this divide that Kelly wanted to undermine.

He was intent, if not desperate, to challenge people's assumptions about art and manliness. *Why couldn't a man be beautiful*, he seemed to ask. But, like Barber, he felt compelled to limit male beauty to discussions of strength, vitality, and physical conditioning. So even as he tried to claim grace and beauty for men, he did so in decidedly masculine terms. He rejected the conflation of grace, beauty, and femininity, but warned men not to mistake "beauty of movement with effeminacy of movement."⁸⁶ Arguing that a man could be beautiful, then, had its limits because of the political taint of homosexuality. If art was to be manly it had to remain solidly attached to athletics, a world where men's sexuality was usually not questioned.⁸⁷

Long after his television show aired, and indeed, long after he had stopped dancing in front of the camera, Kelly was "still chagrined at the public's insistence that somehow men aren't or shouldn't be graceful." In a 1972 interview with Richard Cuskelly of *the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, Kelly recalled, "I once told an interviewer that John Wayne was one of the most graceful people I'd ever seen on screen. And I meant it. When the Duke saunters into a scene or drops his massive frame into a chair it's choreography done with masculine assurance and confidence and grace. But we get all mixed up when we talk about

⁸⁶ Working script, 28, GKC, Box 1, Folder 5: " 'Dancing is a Man's Game' 1958 Working Script."

⁸⁷ Though the same does not hold true for female athletes, who increasingly in the fifties were slapped with a lesbian label if they refused to conform to mainstream femininity. Susan K. Cahn, "From the 'Muscle Moll' to the 'Butch' Ballplayer: Mannishness, Lesbianism, and Homophobia in U.S. Women's Sport," *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 343-364.

what is graceful and what isn't. Grace is not a synonym for feminine."⁸⁸ Even beyond the postwar period, in the midst of gay liberation, Kelly still eschewed any association with homosexuality by linking his definition of grace to something so obviously manly that it would not be threatening. His use of John Wayne—the epitome of rugged masculinity—was particularly effective, as Wayne was frequently positioned opposite less “manly” men in Hollywood, perpetuating a male hierarchy in which strong men ruled over “soft” men.⁸⁹

In his attempt to normalize his admiration of graceful men in “Dancing: A Man’s Game,” Kelly ultimately upheld the idealized postwar gender binary, complete with its distinct division of labor and disparate set of qualities for the sexes. He admitted to his television producer:

I do not mind women dancing as long as they are graceful and beautiful and lovely and soft. The minute a woman starts to dance like a man then she is not very interesting to me any more than a woman who grows a mustache and a beard; any more than a woman who sings bass. That is a very queer analogy. It is not a woman’s place to dance like a man, any more than if a man should sing soprano or should bear babies.⁹⁰

In spite of the ways in which Kelly himself confused and sometimes crossed gender lines in his dancing, as Chapter Two explores, when it came to speaking publicly about dance, he

⁸⁸ Richard Cuskelly, “Gene Kelly: A Shy ‘Mr. Wonderful,’ ” *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* (1 October 1972): F-1, GKC, Box 18, no folder.

⁸⁹ Montgomery Clift, the first of the “rebel males” who used Method Acting to develop more sensitive, vulnerable, and androgynous screen characters, starred opposite Wayne in Howard Hawks’ *Red River* (1948), in which, as Steven Cohan sees it, two opposing versions of masculinity duel for prominence. Wayne would later star opposite Jimmy Stewart in John Ford’s *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), reiterating many of the same themes of competing masculinities. See, Cohan, *Masked Men*, Chapter 6: “Why Boys Are Not Men,” 201-263; McCann, *Rebel Males*; and Virginia Wright Wexman, *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), Chapter 3: “Star and Genre: John Wayne, The Western, and the American Dream of the Family on the Land,” 67-129.

⁹⁰ Hogstrom, Dictated notes for Omnibus Gene Kelly Show, 23, GKC, Box 13, Folder: “OMNIBUS PROGRAM – Dec. 21, 1958.” For more on postwar gender roles, see, e.g. May, *Homeward Bound*; Weiss, *To Have and to Hold*; and Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

always felt that there were rigid and immutable gendered roles in dancing. He believed that men should dance with strength, power, and vitality; women should be delicate, ornamental, and submissive. The male dancer was to wield his complete control over his partner—manipulating her body as he saw fit.⁹¹

If dancing was to be artistic *and* manly, the dancing man must always look like a man and move with a man's power.⁹² Conversely, a female dancer was as an adornment *to-be-looked-at*. "...When a woman dances like a woman beautifully and gracefully, fine; the man can lift her up and he makes her look lighter and more beautiful," Kelly insisted. "The woman's best advantage in the art of dancing is when she is up against a man and you see her dancing with a man, it is most interesting. Why? Because she looks more like a woman then, you see, more graceful, more beautiful, she is set off by the man."⁹³ According to this logic, dancing was the "province of the man;" a woman's role was to help the man demonstrate his strength and agility.⁹⁴ Adhering to this traditional binary thus enabled Kelly to wrestle dance away from its feminized associations.⁹⁵

⁹¹ For more on this more traditional (balletic) approach to dance, see Kendall, *Where She Danced*, Part I and Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 24-28, 106-110.

⁹² Gerstner explores how Kelly was attempting a masculinization of art. "Dancer from the Dance," 59.

⁹³ Hogstrom, Dictated notes for Omnibus Gene Kelly Show, 23, 24-5, GKC, Box 13, Folder: "OMNIBUS PROGRAM – Dec. 21, 1958."

⁹⁴ Gerstner, "Dancer from the Dance," 50. While careful not to be too rough on women, the actual Omnibus program was surprisingly negative towards women, as when Kelly sneered, "Writers may lament our matriarchy, our 'mommism,' but on the dance floor the man leads and the woman must follow. If she doesn't, she's considered a *bum* [changed to *bad* on the show] dancer and she isn't taken out the next time." The production notes for the show bordered surprisingly on the misogynistic. Compare the working script (p 7) with the production notes, GKC, Box 1, Folder 5: "'Dancing is a Man's Game' 1958 Working Script."

⁹⁵ Kelly applied this gender binary to *all* dancing, including social dancing, which he identified as a way for men to get close to girls. He bemoaned the end of romantic music, which brought with it the end of ballroom dancing. As he explained, "A fellow cannot take a girl out the first time and say, 'I love you,' while throwing her around his neck ... like a barbell. Or if he is streaming with sweat after they have just finished a very torrid rock and roll number he cannot say it." Hogstrom, Dictated notes for Omnibus Gene Kelly Show, 38, GKC, Box 13, Folder: "OMNIBUS PROGRAM – Dec. 21, 1958."

Though Kelly was very serious about his thesis of male dance, he could also be somewhat lighthearted in his approach, reviving some of the old playfulness of his days spent dancing at MGM. This was most clearly visible in the case of Sugar Ray Robinson's guest appearance, to which the boxer agreed for tax purposes. In a production meeting the preceding August, Kelly and his producer bantered around several ideas about how to make best use of Robinson. Kelly proposed that the boxer might perform a simple social dance with a blonde, but Robert Saudek was concerned that Southern affiliates might "pull the plug" to avoid the specter of miscegenation implied by an interracial dancing team. Kelly thought about it and then jokingly suggested that he could "dance with Sugar Ray. I could kiss him as we dissolve out, and he taps me on the shoulder. I think that's a good finish."⁹⁶

Instead, Robinson appeared mid-way through the program. Dressed in an identical black sweater vest to Kelly, the two performed a simple, somewhat understated tap routine side-by-side to "Broadway Melody." While this in no way captured the vigor of Kelly's typical dances, in part because of Kelly's age and in part because Robinson was not a dancer by training, it was still a high point of the hour-long special. Kelly had taught Robinson a few basic moves, and Robinson executed them effortlessly. Where Kelly's arms were unusually stiff, Robinson's were far more animated, as would be expected of a boxer

⁹⁶ Hogstrom, Dictated notes for Omnibus Gene Kelly Show, 48-49, GKC, Box 13, Folder: "OMNIBUS PROGRAM – Dec. 21, 1958." While the Hollywood Production Code had allowed the depiction of miscegenation by 1956, actual anti-miscegenation laws remained on the books in many Southern states until *Loving v. Virginia* (1967). And Nat King Cole was nearly lynched in Birmingham, Alabama in April 1956 at a "whites-only" concert. Oddly, some viewed him as a threat who conjured up "the horror of black defilement of white youth and womanhood" when he began to sing "Little Girl." Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 95, 102.

accustomed to using his arms. It was said that his brief appearance practically stole the show.⁹⁷

While Kelly abandoned his early ideas of dancing in the boxer's arms in favor of a more conventional role, the suggestion is nonetheless powerful. Though Kelly argued that men and women must adhere to strict gender roles when dancing, whether alone or together, he contemplated defying this steadfast rule in his own show. Such a possibility suggests the ways in which he felt far freer while dancing to do things he would never dream of saying. But this image might have undermined the weight of his words, which helps explain, at least in part, why he ultimately chose a more conventional and far less homoerotic role for the boxer. Playfulness, it seemed, was only permissible when language did not get in the way.

Asserting man's ownership over dance, Kelly believed, had to begin at an early age. He and Saudek had toyed with the idea of using Omnibus as a mouthpiece to encourage young boys to enroll in formal dancing lessons. After all, dance seemed a natural outlet for boys who loved to run around, stomp their feet, and make noise. While he conceded that all children—not just boys—felt the urge to move around and dance when they heard music, he contended that boys did so in a uniquely masculine (albeit youthful) manner. Yet most boys cringed at the thought of dancing lessons, as Kelly himself had nearly forty years prior. “The reason that boys have this feeling—I had it when I was a kid—is because dancing is associated with politeness and manners and mincing steps, and [is] a direct rebuttal of all the things that boys like to do,” he informed his producer. As he reasoned:

⁹⁷ Herb Boyd with Ray Robinson II, *Pound for Pound: A Biography of Sugar Ray Robinson* (New York: Amistad/HarperCollins, 2005), 173-174. Joyce Carol Oates' work on boxing draws some interesting connections between boxing and art/dance. Many of the themes explored here—disciplining the body, homoeroticism, race, masculinity, and manly beauty—directly echo Kelly's thesis of manly dance. Joyce Carol Oates, *On Boxing with Photographs* by John Ranard (Garden City, New York: Dolphin/Doubleday, 1987).

Boys should be taught dancing in a lusty, loud, slap-dash way where they can have as much fun moving about as they do in swinging a bat. Any boy if given the chance to make some noise and a chance to do some movement and do it in a group of other boys can enjoy it, but if he is given movements that properly belong to girls he will not enjoy it. He may submit to it but he will not enjoy it.

He maintained that it was important to teach boys to dance in a fun way that would suit their natures.⁹⁸ Kelly believed that American fathers had a responsibility to cultivate in their sons appropriate attitudes about dance, in part by adhering to Kelly's gender division. While this thread was dropped from the final version, his comments about boys, as much as anything else in the planning notes for his Omnibus show, reflected some serious flaws and limitations in the dancer's thinking.

Most notably, Kelly assumed that his version of manliness monolithically fit other men (and boys). His vision forced all men into a position of heterosexuality that left no room for alternatives because Kelly himself could not risk leaving open any marginal space in a restrictive Cold War climate. If he was going to rescue the male dancer from suspicions and slurs, he had no choice but to eliminate the specter of deviance. And so, he could only connect dancers and athletes via manly movement if athletes were straight. It was not simply Kelly's "implicit naïveté that all athletes are heterosexual men" as David Anthony Gerstner views it.⁹⁹ Kelly could not afford to see athletes as anything else if he and other male dancers were to gain cultural acceptance.

He likewise essentialized masculinity across time and cultures. By asserting a common love of movement that first manifested itself in prehistoric days, he was, in essence, calling for a universal, immutable masculinity rooted in biology and nature rather than

⁹⁸ Hogstrom, Dictated notes for Omnibus Gene Kelly Show, 34, 39-40, GKC, Box 13, Folder: "OMNIBUS PROGRAM – Dec. 21, 1958."

⁹⁹ Gerstner, "Dancer from the Dance" 62n.

recognizing it as a cultural construct. Even as he played around with competing masculine types in his screen work, he upheld the “hegemonic” model when speaking publicly. He could not and did not stray far from popular norms; the most he hoped was to expand the center to include what had once been considered on the fringe.

His call for universal manhood also erased racial variation, just as his dancing did. While he publicly admitted the influence of African-American forms in his own career, he frequently described his dancing as a “sort of a melting pot, like the country itself.”¹⁰⁰ It is particularly telling that Kelly would think of his style—an admitted amalgamation of various dance elements—as a melting pot that erased the origins of those unique and disparate ingredients. Indeed, he consistently claimed that his dancing was a distinctive “mélange of ... American dance[s].”¹⁰¹ The final product of this mixing was a uniquely American and implicitly white style that matched the postwar hegemonic model of masculinity and left no room for racial variety.¹⁰²

These problems point the way to more significant and underlying fault lines in Kelly’s vision of manly dance. His thesis of dance depended on a false distinction between athlete and dancer. Promoting the re-masculinization of male dancers, Kelly labeled dance as a sport—albeit artistic rather than explicitly competitive in form—as a way to lend legitimacy to male dancers who might otherwise be considered sissies. In order to accomplish this, Kelly blurred the boundaries between dancer and athlete, even in his own

¹⁰⁰ Howard Reich, “Gene Kelly: A tribute to a super dancer and ‘regular guy’,” *Chicago Tribune* (7 August 1983): section 12, page 5, GKC, Box 18, no folder.

¹⁰¹ Gene Kelly, “Fantastic Toe,” Typescript of article for *Seventeen Magazine*, n.d., 7, GKC, Box 3, Folder 13: “Articles by Gene Kelly.”

¹⁰² For more on how Kelly erased race, see Carol J. Clover, “Dancin’ in the Rain,” in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Cohan, 157-173.

life. Yet by doing this he actually reified those very divisions by unwittingly approaching the dancer as an oddity needing explanation and categorization.¹⁰³ In trying to normalize the male dancer by labeling him an athlete, Kelly called attention to the fact that the dancer was *not* widely seen this way but, rather, was considered less than a whole man. “Dancing: A Man’s Game” brought this dilemma to life. Arguing that the dancer and the athlete were one and the same, Kelly recreated the very distinction he hoped to obliterate, thereby undermining the original intention of his artistic message. In the process of linking the athlete and dancer, Kelly was really pointing out how the dancer was an Other—somehow not athletic and, hence, less manly.

His view of manly dance relied on a second false distinction: the gendered division of art, itself rooted in a broader gendered vision of society. Kelly aimed to recover the male dancer’s image from slurs of effeminacy because he, like so many of his contemporaries, believed that artistic expression, at some level, was feminine. And since dance was a form of art, it too must be feminine. Thus, in trying to wrangle back dance from women, he infused art with rugged masculinity, much as Pollock had done in the early postwar years. Kelly therefore approached dance as an athletic activity, like any professional sport. This entailed downplaying dance’s creative and expressive aspects (which he saw as its defining artistic characteristics) in favor of an emphasis on physical strength and bodily control. At the same time, he tried to draw out the more creative elements of athletics to cover all of his bases. The comparison he used for this project—external bodily movement versus internal

¹⁰³ Here I follow the lead of works on freakery, whiteness, and masculinity. See, e.g., Most, *Making Americans*; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Robert Brogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Introduction.

emotional life—was gendered. This produced an unmistakable confusion, as much for Kelly as for his public, about where art ended and sports began.

Ultimately Kelly could not move beyond the gender, artistic, and sexual conventions of his era. He tried to challenge the assumptions that art was feminine and male dancers were sissies without dismantling the core assumption that there were natural differences between the sexes. His efforts could therefore only extend as far as acceptable gender roles allowed. His vision could not stray too far from the norm in a climate that demonized leftists, deviants, and individuals who otherwise were not quite in sync with the vital center.

Language as Spectacle

At the beginning of his film career Gene Kelly wanted to be recognized as a sailor rather than a sissy dancer. But by 1958, barely a year after the box office failure of his all-dance picture *Invitation to the Dance*, he denied that dancers could be sissies at all. As Kelly ended his dancing career, he grew more adamant about defending the male dancer to American society. His message in “Dancing: A Man’s Game” was the culmination and crystallization of his fifteen years as a Hollywood dancer, and nearly forty years of proving that he was a “real man.” Speaking about dance and masculinity, he staunchly stuck to dominant postwar gendered ideals. But his cinematic dances, typically homosocial and playful, tell a more complicated story.

Enjoying almost absolute creative control throughout his postwar film career, Gene Kelly used his dances as moments when he could let go of social prescriptions. While his dances always showcased his physical strength and agility, many were also lighthearted jabs at rigid gender lines. On the surface his performances might appear to contradict his artistic

vision of manly dance. But it was in these moments, fleeting and brief, that he could use his body to play around with notions of masculinity, sexuality, and art in ways that would be too dangerous to articulate verbally given the postwar political climate, not to mention the Hollywood Production Code's limitations on screenplay dialogue. What was risky to say could be suggested cinematically through his body. In truth, he could use dancing routines to push his vision even further. Cinematic spectacles proved to be places of release for Kelly, places where he could develop and perform his art without having to adopt the defensive stance he would on television and in newspaper and magazine interviews. On film he could uphold but also undermine social conventions of gender and art—all in the name of entertainment. When we read his dancing in juxtaposition to how he *talked* about dance, we can begin to appreciate the radical potential of his artistic vision.

In the final analysis, “Dancing: A Man’s Game” was just as much a performance for Kelly as any of his previous celluloid dances. In his Omnibus program he adopted a persona—the staunch defender of heterosexual masculinity—and every word, every movement, adhered to that character. Indeed, this hour-long show was a spectacle not unlike those of his days in Hollywood, a place for him to play around with and refigure masculinity. But unlike his actual dances, his linguistic performance was far more constricted by a postwar climate of anxiety, fear, and suspicion. What he could intimate with the tap of his feet he could not always articulate directly. “Dancing: A Man’s Game” reminds us that his discursive performances were far more limited than his dancing performances.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th Anniversary Edition (New York: Routledge, 1999); Sonya O. Rose, “Cultural Analysis and Moral Discourses: Episodes, Continuities, and Transformations,” in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, eds. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 217-238.

But this television show, airing well after he had stopped appearing in musical motion pictures, nevertheless provides an important framework from which to read his earlier MGM routines. While he might have danced with a certain degree of carefree abandon, when the music stopped playing, he was always forced to return to a world where gender boundaries could not be safely blurred. The striking gap between sound (his public discourse about manly dance) and image (his celluloid dances) simultaneously point to the limits of language and the possibilities of dance. It is from this *in-between* space that I will interpret Kelly's song-and-dance numbers in the next chapter.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter Three for an explanation of this concept of *in-betweenness*.

Chapter 2

“You can’t run away from yourself”: Unleashing the Possibilities of Kelly’s Cine-Dance

... we all thought we were trying to create some kind of magic and joy. And you know, that’s what you do up there. You dance love, and you dance joy, and you dance dreams. And I know if I can make you smile by jumping over a couple of couches or running through a rainstorm, then I’ll be very glad to be a song and dance man. And I won’t worry any more that the Pittsburgh Pirates lost a helluva shortstop.¹

Brooklyn ... three in the morning ... 1944. A lone man walks down a deserted street, hands tucked sullenly in pants pockets, head hanging low. There’s not a sound to be heard—not even the sound of his feet hitting the pavement. Danny McGuire is dejected—the love of his life has abandoned him. As he walks past closed storefronts, his thoughts grow audible. *Should he give up and let her go? Or should he fight for her?* He gazes at himself in a window, contemplating what his other self might do. To his surprise, his reflection answers back, egging him on. He walks away but he can’t seem to shake his image. With every step his reflection becomes clearer and brighter, his voice louder. “Hey, Danny! You can’t run away from yourself. You’ve got to make up your mind about this and I’m going to see that you do it now.” He walks away but his reflection calls after him, “Wait a minute. Stop!” and then jumps out of the window onto the street. A bang of tympani topped by the threatening vibrato of violins blare as his feet touch the ground.

¹ Gene Kelly’s acceptance speech for the American Film Institute’s Lifetime Achievement Award (1985). While Kelly did not write this speech, it can still be considered an accurate expression of his own sentiments. George Stevens, Jr. and Jeffrey Lane, “The American Film Institute Salute to Gene Kelly,” Script, 69-70, GKC, Box 11, no folder, sent to Kelly by George Stevens, Jr. on May 19, 1985. The show was taped on 7 March 1985 and aired on CBS 7 May 1985.

A harp and trumpets join the growing cacophony of sounds, and before long the two men begin tapping to the rhythm of a bass and piano, with saxes, flutes, and trombones adding to the intensity. At first the reflection has control, like a puppet master pulling Danny's strings. He moves backwards, Danny does the same. He taps a small rhythm, Danny echoes. But Danny begins to break away from his own spell, fighting back, dancing his own steps in contrapoint. They continue dancing on the sidewalk and street, challenging each other at first, but then dancing side-by-side in synchronization, and then mirroring each other's moves.² The reflection chases Danny across the street, up a fire escape, down a pole, forcing him to dance throughout. The two dance out Danny's dilemma. He is resigned to give her up, trusting her to do the right thing and return to him. His Alter Ego wants him to be a man and fight for her. Their frenzied dance is the outward articulation of this struggle, and Danny is losing to his shadow.

Suddenly Danny gains control and chases his reflection back into a window. As the music reaches its crescendo, he picks up a metal garbage can, preparing to hurl it into the window and destroy his mirror image. The trumpets sustain their shrill high note until the moment the can shatters the window. All is silent again as Danny walks away on the still deserted Brooklyn street, just as the scene had started.

² In an essay on the expression of heterosexual love through dance, Richard Dyer has identified four dancing styles that progressively express love through the relation of the two bodies: side by side, mirroring, mutually holding, and relations of dependency. We can read Danny McGuire (Gene Kelly)'s dance with himself, then, as narcissistic. But we can also interpret the progression from side to side to mirroring as Kelly's character using dance to resolve his emotional conflict. The progression to mirroring suggests the eventual compromise and meeting on common ground that is so common to the so-called creation of the couple, a central theme to most postwar musical films. Richard Dyer, " 'I seem to find the happiness I seek': Heterosexuality and Dance in the Musical" in *Dance, Gender and Culture*, ed. Helen Thomas (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 52. For more on challenge dances, see Richard Kislán, *Hoofing on Broadway: A History of Show Dancing* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1987), Chapter 3: "Dance Specialties During the Vaudeville Era," 24-40.

This classic number, commonly referred to as the “Alter Ego Dance,” was featured in *Cover Girl* (1944), one of Gene Kelly’s earliest musicals and the only one not filmed for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.³ While Kelly had quickly made a name for himself in Hollywood with his film debut opposite Judy Garland in Busby Berkeley’s *For Me and My Gal* (1942), it was this dance, hailed for its technical innovation and creativity, which catapulted him into stardom, though he did not receive screen credit for his choreography.⁴ Reviewing local theatrical dance performances, including one by Martha Graham, influential *New York Times* critic John Martin described the “Alter Ego Dance,” as “originally conceived, adroitly danced and timed with incredible accuracy.”⁵ The same journalist who would help conceive and write the background material for Kelly’s 1958 “Dancing: A Man’s Game” thought so highly of the “Alter Ego Dance” that he listed it as among the many exciting dance shows worth catching in New York (this was the only motion picture included). He applauded how it

³ MGM loaned Kelly out to Columbia for this picture. With the exception of *Christmas Holiday* (Universal, 1944), he would not make another non-MGM picture until *Marjorie Morningstar* (Warner Brothers, 1958). *Cover Girl*, Produced by Arthur Schwartz, Directed by Charles Vidor, Color, 105 min., Columbia, 1944, Videocassette, MRC.

⁴ The first film for which he was given screen credit was *Anchors Aweigh* (MGM, 1945). Kelly, of course, was not the first to use special effects in designing his dances. Consider, for instance, Busby Berkeley’s dizzying and disembodied camerawork in the 1930s. See, e.g., Lucy Fischer, “The Image of Woman as Image: The Optical Politics of *Dames*,” in *Genre: The Musical: A Reader*, ed. Rick Altman (London: Routledge/BFI, 1981), 70-84. Fred Astaire experimented with special effects in the 1930s. In *Carefree* (RKO, 1938), for instance, he employed slow motion in the filming of a fantasy dance. For an excellent explanation of this dance see John Mueller, *Astaire Dancing: The Musical Films* (New York: Wings Books, 1985), 144.

⁵ John Martin, who graduated from the Chicago theater scene, was an important dance critic who, according to *Contemporary Authors*, “was an influential figure in establishing modern dance as a major art form.” He helped bring modern dancers such as Martha Graham into the national spotlight. Hal May, ed. *Contemporary Authors: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide to Current Writers in Fiction, General Nonfiction, Poetry, Journalism, Drama, Motion Pictures, Television, and Other Fields*, vol. 116 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1986), 306. This can also be accessed online at *Literature Resource Center* (via UNC article databases).

“actually develops character and advances plot” rather than the run-of-the-mill “specialty dance” merely intended to showcase a performer’s talent.⁶

This routine represented Kelly’s first attempt at designing a dance solely for the camera. “The conception of this dance came from the desire to do a pure cine dance,” he recalled in a 1953 letter to a fan. “There had been other ‘trick’ numbers in movies before. I didn’t want to do a ‘trick’ number but I did want to use the visual medium in a way so as to express an emotional struggle.” Rather than following the traditional format of using two dancers to convey opposing ideas, Kelly decided to represent both sides of the conflict with one body. It was then only a matter of figuring out the technology to make that possible. “The shooting problems on this number were terrific,” he admitted. “It is the only time in the history of cinema that anyone has ever panned or dollied with the camera in double exposure ... Each separate angle was a shooting problem in itself and had to be carefully worked out.”⁷

The “Alter Ego Dance,” considered an early “integrated” musical number, vividly illuminates some of the ways that dance could be used for self-expression. In the most obvious and explicit way, Kelly designed his two dancing selves, in competition with each other, to suggest his character’s internal conflict. The voiceover between the two Dannys, which immediately preceded the street dance, established the *mise-en-scène* for this “emotional struggle.” But the reflection’s assertion—“you can’t run away from yourself”—was not simply an admonition for Kelly to face his inner self. Rather, the dance, coupled with this dialogue, instructed people to be true to themselves. Like Danny McGuire, Americans could not evade their own internal dancers to figure out who they really were and

⁶ John Martin, “The Dance: Spring Freshet,” *New York Times* (30 April 1944): X8, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

⁷ Gene Kelly, England, to Marc Houlihan, carbon typed letter, 27 May 1953, GKC, Box 3, Folder 13: “Articles by GK.”

what they really wanted. Though he claimed to be nothing more than an entertainer, a song-and-dance man, Kelly actually modeled for his audiences how dance could be employed to explore questions of authenticity. The “Alter Ego Dance,” while filmed before the war’s end, points the way to understanding his postwar work, for it explicitly proposes what later films only suggested. These films, particularly Kelly’s dances, encouraged postwar audiences to be themselves—to be individuals—in a mass and conformist culture and society.

These important lessons, embedded within his postwar dancing, particularly *The Pirate* (1948), *An American in Paris* (1951), and *It’s Always Fair Weather* (1955), stemmed from his explicit artistic agenda to redefine dance. While Kelly had already begun experimenting with new and improved techniques for filming dance before the war, it was not until he gained first-hand experience *behind* the camera while in the Navy that he could fully appreciate and explore the intricate relationship between the camera and a dancer’s body.⁸ After the war, he went on to develop a dancing style that fused technology and art. It was this style of cinematic dance, the “cine-dance,” that could not be performed on the stage, which made unbounded self-expression possible. What he could not articulate in his everyday life, or in his public discourses, he was safe to intimate in his technologically innovative cine-dances.

In the process of crafting such dances, he blurred high and low art forms to make dance more accessible to a wider range of Americans.⁹ The wide appeal of his mixed style,

⁸ David Castell, “Gene Kelly song and dance man,” *Films Illustrated* (November 1974): 98-99, GKC, Box 14, no folder.

⁹ Kelly, of course, was not the first dancer to blend high and low art forms. Many of Astaire’s RKO films picked up this theme, as in *Shall We Dance* (1937). The tension of high and low art, most notably in the clash of dance and music styles, was a prominent theme in numerous postwar backstage musicals such as *Summer Stock* (MGM, 1950), *The Band Wagon* (MGM, 1953), and *Silk Stockings* (MGM, 1957). See Dennis Giles,

disseminated by the mass medium of film, offered more and more Americans a new outlet—dance—for their own internal struggles. Nowhere was this more apparent than with masculinity. As Chapter One elucidated, Kelly tried to redraw gender lines by masculinizing dance and challenging commonly held prejudices about male dancers. His project, part artistic in nature, was also part of a deeper, less visible but critical social agenda underpinning all of his work: namely, using creative self-expression to affirm one’s own individuality against a stifling and mass culture. Just as Danny McGuire’s reflection managed to escape the confines of the window, albeit temporarily, so too could audiences imagine other possibilities by allowing their inner selves to break free.

This chapter explores the ways in which Kelly’s unique brand of cine-dance—that combination of technology and middlebrow art—afforded him the kind of freedom of expression not possible elsewhere. These spectacles provided him with layers of protection, rooted in technology, to step out of the demands of postwar masculinity and play around. He could and did dance exuberantly with other men, props, himself, and, yes, women, but rarely did he feel the need to prove his manhood. Even when his dances were hyper-masculine, powerfully athletic, and brimming with *machismo*, as he claimed all male dancing should be, there was always an alternate subtext to his celluloid performances, always the suggestion of release and abandon. It was if he could let his guard down when dancing, and dance without worry of being labeled a “sissy,” or homosexual, or other sort of deviant. Even though he was executing perfectly choreographed and tirelessly rehearsed song-and-dance routines, these spectacles nonetheless allowed him more alternative ways of being than everyday life

“Show-making,” in *Genre: The Musical*, 85-101; Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); and Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

and speech afforded. His cine-dances showed the way for audiences who might have felt similarly stifled by the prevailing gender prescriptions of the day. The possibilities embedded within his cinematic dances suggest some of the ways in which dance, as an avenue of release, was part of larger processes of cultural rebellion at work in the 1950s.

The Technology of the Cine-Dance

Gene Kelly used dancing to break away from the rigid definition of masculinity he adopted in public. This artistic vision could not have been realized without technological innovation. But while Kelly was eager to discuss the role of technology in his art, he was loath to admit to the ways in which his dancing challenged prevailing gender norms. He openly rejected the possibility that “special messages” lay embedded in his dancing, claiming instead that he was merely a humble dancer.¹⁰ “I never did a musical to teach a lesson, just to bring joy,” he insisted in a 1980 newspaper interview.¹¹ But his clickety taps intimated another story. He used the camera to create a unique style of dancing that was seemingly boundless in its possibilities.

When he first danced in front of a camera in Busby Berkeley’s *For Me and My Gal* (1942), he wrongly assumed that he merely had to *dance*, just as he had been doing for years on the stage. But when he saw the final print, he realized translating dance from stage to film lost something critical.¹² “Dancing is really not a good medium for motion pictures,” he

¹⁰ Ken Ferguson, “Gene Kelly talks to Ken Ferguson: Why Fred and I Rarely Starred Together,” *Photoplay* (August 1976): 61, GKC, Box 19, no folder.

¹¹ Charles Schreger, “An offer Gene Kelly couldn’t refuse!,” *New York Post* (9 October 1980): 51, GKC, Box 18, no folder.

¹² Ronald Haver, “Gene Kelly: Who Could Ask for Anything More?” (interview with Gene Kelly and Saul Chaplin), *American Film X*, no. 5 (March 1985): 24, GKC, Box 12, no folder.

wrote later in the 1950s. “It is a three dimensional art like sculpture. When you put it on a screen you lose most of the muscular or physical force (dancers call it ‘kinetic’ force.). You also lose ‘presence’ of the dancer, which in high fallutin’ terms we might call his three-dimensional personality.”¹³ So he began to experiment with the camera, seeking ways not only to preserve the energy and dynamism of live dance on film, but also to push cinematic dances in directions that could not be achieved on the stage. His first successful attempt, the “Alter Ego Dance,” employed the camera to create an effect only possible on the screen. From then on, Kelly looked to exploit this medium to compensate for its two-dimensional limitations, building on the vast experience and knowledge he acquired making films during the Second World War.

Like Fred Astaire before him, Kelly rejected Busby Berkeley’s kaleidoscopic approach to dance. Rather than focusing on the power and possibilities of the dancer’s body, Berkeley made the camera the spectacle. He used the camera in new and inventive ways to create dizzying and fantastic images—women were no longer women but petals on a flower. Berkeley relied on camera tricks, massive editing, and rapid cuts to create a sense of endless fantasy, as in the title song from *Dames* (1934). Astaire, on the other hand, insisted that a dancer’s body be filmed in its entirety with minimal editing and cuts. He re-established the boundaries that Berkeley’s camera had violated, lifting dance out of the realm of fantasy and restoring it back into the proscenium arch.¹⁴ But reflecting on these earlier experiments in 1965, Kelly lamented how “Fred’s innovations were confined pretty much to his own films.

¹³ Gene Kelly, “Fantastic Toe,” Typescript of article for *Seventeen Magazine*, n.d., 4, GKC, Box 3, Folder 13: “Articles by Gene Kelly.”

¹⁴ For more on Busby Berkeley see Fischer, “The Image of Woman as Image: The Optical Politics of *Dames*,” 70-84. On Astaire, see Mueller, *Astaire Dancing*; and John F. Kasson, “Dances of the Machine in Early Twentieth-Century America,” in *A Modern Mosaic: Art and Modernism in the United States*, ed. Townsend Ludington (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 153-174.

When I arrived on the Hollywood scene the Berkeley type musical was still the most prevalent.”¹⁵

Following Astaire’s lead, Kelly incorporated medium and long body shots in his choreography, using minimal cuts only when necessary. And like Astaire, he did not keep the camera static in filming. Rather, he approached the camera as “an unobtrusive but supportive dancing partner.”¹⁶ The audience, in turn, was drawn into the dance through the camera’s action, transforming the passive spectator into a proxy dancing partner. Film theorist and biographer Jeanine Basinger described Kelly’s approach to film as a way to “bring the audience into the dance as a participant via the moving camera.” She illuminated his signature filming style:

Through high crane shots that lifted and dipped, unusual camera angles, and a rapidly moving camera that sometimes followed the dancer and sometimes seemed to dance toward him or around him, or lead him or even partner him, the audience could experience the sensation of dance itself. They felt the dance as movement, and thus became not just viewers of dance, but dancers.¹⁷

Consider, for instance, Kelly’s infamous dance with Cyd Charisse in *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), the classic backstage comedy about the 1927 arrival of sound in Hollywood. The two dance together in a speakeasy as part of the “Broadway Melody” montage, a fantasy-styled production number shot on a clearly-delineated stage. Their dance centers

¹⁵ Gene Kelly, “Exclusive to *Sound Stage*,” typed manuscript, 18 August, 1965, 4, GKC, Box 3, Folder 3: “Articles by GK.”

¹⁶ Kasson, “Dances of the Machine in Early Twentieth-Century America,” 167. See also Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Schweizer Familie*, 21 April 1956, typed translated transcript, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc,” Sub-folder A.

¹⁷ Jeanine Basinger, Introduction to Ronald Haver, “Gene Kelly: Who Could Ask For Anything More?” (interview with Gene Kelly and Saul Chaplin), *American Film* 10, no. 5 (March 1985): 22, GKC, Box 12, no folder.

around her attempts, as a 1920s vamp, to seduce the bright-eyed and rather naïve hooper. The camerawork in this fifteen-minute production number is quite exquisite.

At first the camera moves only minimally from right to left, following and mirroring Charisse's equally subtle movements as she circles Kelly, who is frozen in place. In essence, the camera, not Kelly, is her dancing partner. The camera occasionally pans in for a close-up, first of her legs, then her face, then back to her legs. But once Kelly begins dancing with her, the camerawork becomes more complicated, matching the more elaborate moves of the couple. As Kelly grabs her and lifts her in his arms the camera returns to a close-up of her face. He begins to lower her to the ground as the camera moves upward, reaching its pinnacle as she is placed on the ground, so that the distance between the two is at its greatest. When Kelly begins to raise her off the floor, the camera begins to drop; now she and the camera are moving closer together until they meet in the middle. The camera returns to its original spot—a standard medium shot—as she begins to dance side-by-side with Kelly. The camera engages in this pattern with her one more time, matching the music as it crescendos.¹⁸ The fusion her body's movements with that of the camera's, coupled with the building intensity of the trumpets, is seamless and almost organic in its invisibility. Here Kelly, who choreographed the number, handled the camera delicately, producing an understated yet intricate effect without calling undue attention to the camera.¹⁹ Rather, he wove it into the

¹⁸ *Singin' in the Rain*, Produced by Arthur Freed, Directed by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, Color, 103 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952, DVD, Author's Collection. Vincente Minnelli employed similar camera work to film the "Girl Hunt Ballet" with Charisse and Astaire in *The Band Wagon* (1953).

¹⁹ Since Kelly appeared in this number, his co-director, Stanley Donen, actually handled the camerawork for this scene. However, Donen's camerawork was primarily an extension of Kelly's own vision. See Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 100, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 5-234, Envelope 2 and Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 30 October 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 65-66, HOHP, OH 112.

dance itself, so that the average audience member would not think about the camera shots, angles, or edits.

In a 1975 interview, Kelly explained his approach to designing dances specifically for film:

What the choreographer in movie musicals does is he constructs the dance, he looks out and he says that's good ... now, how do I photograph? If he's *really* cinematically minded and has a nose for the camera or eye for the camera, ... he constructs that dance with the camera as he goes along. So that in his head he carries that little tiny screen and he cuts it. He knows every cut. Some people say, "You know, you did that whole thing in one cut". I may have had half a dozen in there ... And nobody knows this. But it's very important. It's just as important in the mood of the dance because it's photographed. It's not what you can see with your two eyes. It's what that monster in the camera sees with one.²⁰

"Broadway Melody" is an ideal example of this technique. For even though there were several edits made during the dance, Kelly designed them to be virtually undetectable. He did not simply craft this dance as he would for the stage. Rather, he created a dance specifically geared to the camera's cold eye, taking advantage of the mechanical possibilities not available in other venues.

Kelly did not just look to the camera to enhance and recapture dance's three-dimensional kinetic force. He wanted to use the entire medium—and all of its technological possibilities—to create a full-fledged *cine-dance*. As he explained it, cine-dancing was "any dancing choreographed specifically and particularly to be filmed or televised. Many dances which have been constructed for the theatre have been photographed on film. This is not cine-dance. I make a sharp distinction because I often hear young dancers confuse dancing

²⁰ Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 114-115, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 5-234, Envelope 3.

made for film, and dancing merely *put* on film.”²¹ While he felt that dance was not by definition well suited for the screen, he maintained that the camera opened up endless possibilities for dance. This demanded training the camera to dance and relying on special effects, as he did in the “Alter Ego Dance.”

He was fortunate enough to have the power at MGM to experiment with this art form. When he arrived in Hollywood, having made a name for himself first as a Broadway choreographer and then dancing in the title role of *Pal Joey* (1940), he was able to negotiate a relatively powerful contract with the studio. He quickly earned the trust of producer Arthur Freed, and by association then studio head Louis B. Mayer, and by 1945 he had received on-screen credit for his choreography. Four years later he succeeded in convincing his superiors that he, aided by Stanley Donen, was ready to step out on his own. The two were given their first directorial project, *On the Town* (1949). The studio even permitted them to film parts of the film, most notably the opening “New York, New York” sequence, on location—an unusual and expensive undertaking for musicals at that time. The challenge, as Kelly explained it, was to choreograph and shoot in synchronization with Leonard Bernstein’s music, all the while contending with the everyday problems of traffic and the mobs of fans who followed the crew, hoping for a glimpse of Frank Sinatra.²² Kelly’s immense power and control translated into greater opportunities for artistic experimentation and development. His innovative dances, therefore, truly represented his own visions of the cine-dance.

²¹ Gene Kelly to Selma Jeanne Cohen of *Dance Perspectives Magazine*, carbon typed letter, 1 February 1967, GKC, Box 3, Folder 13: “Articles by GK.”

²² Hugh Fordin, *M-G-M’s Greatest Musicals: The Arthur Freed Unit*, originally published: *The World of Entertainment! Hollywood’s Greatest Musicals* (New York: Doubleday, 1975; reprint n.p.: Da Capo Press, 1996), Chapter 8.

The (American) Art of the Cine-Dance

In his 1951 masterpiece, *An American in Paris*, Kelly fully realized the technological-artistic vision that was only nascent in the late 1940s with *On the Town*. His second of three collaborations with director Vincente Minnelli, Kelly not only choreographed all of the numbers, but was instrumental in nearly every aspect of production.²³ The film chronicled the life of ex-G.I. Jerry Mulligan, who remained in Paris after the War to become a painter in Montmartre. Kelly used the city and its artistic traditions not just as a backdrop for the ensuing love story (though the film was shot almost completely in Culver City), but as a character in the musical itself.²⁴ To that end, he envisioned fusing dance, art, and the camera together in a wholly new fashion. In August 1951, just a few months prior to the film's release, he wrote an article for *Dance Magazine* articulating his aesthetic blueprint.

What distinguished stage dancing from film dancing, in his eyes, was the spectator's point-of-view. In a theater, every seat affords a different angle, a different sight line, a different slice of the living image. But at the movies, everyone shared a universal eye—the camera's lens. "The camera is made fluid, moving with the dancer, so that the lens becomes the eye of the spectator, *your eye*." *An American in Paris* capitalized on that principle with the spectacular backdrops of its dances. While most of the musical numbers were relatively conventional in their settings—a café, a bridge, a canal, a stage, an apartment—the dazzling seventeen-minute concluding ballet, set to George Gershwin's orchestral poem, "An

²³ *An American in Paris*, Produced by Arthur Freed, Directed by Vincente Minnelli, Color, 113 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1951, DVD, Author's Collection. For more on the production of *An American in Paris*, see Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, Chapter 10; and Donald Knox, *The Magic Factory: How MGM Made An American in Paris* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

²⁴ The city-as-character is very similar to Freed's nonmusical *The Clock* (1945) in which Minnelli positioned New York, its buildings and diverse population, as one of the main characters in this love story starring Judy Garland and Robert Walker. Fordin provides background on the production of the film in *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 146-151. See also David Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend* (New York: Hyperion, 1992), 164-167.

American in Paris,” captured the many artistic sides of the city. Kelly patterned each segment of the ballet after a French artist—Renoir, Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec, Dufy, Rousseau—recreating famous paintings through costume, scenery, and dance. Kelly insisted that a ballet that fused famous French paintings with music and dance was not superfluous, for it advanced the plot of the film as much as any number would in an integrated musical. As he argued, the dream ballet “*is* a ballet about a painter, and the mainspring of this character’s action in both dream and real world lies in his relation to the master painters he studies.”²⁵ (See Chapter Six for a more extended discussion of the “American in Paris Ballet.”)

For Kelly, the “American in Paris Ballet” was more than an exercise in creating a cine-dance. It was also an ideal opportunity to play around with art—to combine traditional ballet with George M. Cohan-styled tap, to place Gershwin’s jazzy American moods against classic French paintings. “[W]e really tried to make a *ballet*—not just a pure dance. Not a series of beautiful, moving tableaux, but an emotional whole consisting of the integrated arts which spell ballet, whether on the screen or the living stage.”²⁶ In short, the ballet encapsulated his grab-bag approach to art. Drawing on the best of what various art forms had to offer, he reformulated dance and music to make both more appealing to a broader crowd. While not many truck drivers would enjoy the opera or ballet, they could certainly get a kick out of a man tapping. And if that man happened to dance with a prima donna ballerina, well, Kelly maintained, that too could be palatable to those unaccustomed to the finer arts.

²⁵ Gene Kelly, “Making a Cineballet for ‘American in Paris,’” *Dance Magazine* (August 1951): 24, GKC, Box 10, untitled folder. The folder only had the first page of the article, but I was able to obtain the rest of it through Inter-Library Borrowing at UNC’s Davis Library.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

In pouring diverse sources into his dancing, Kelly participated in a larger project to redefine art—not simply to remasculinize it, as he attempted in “Dancing: A Man’s Game.” He sought to blur the boundaries of highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow art forms, extracting and applying more popular forms, such as tap or tango, to less widely-appreciated styles, such as ballet.²⁷ The “American in Paris Ballet” was a meeting of two worlds—the Old World of high European art and the New World of lower, American forms.

Kelly used his musicals, then, as a platform for democratizing art. He repackaged elite art for the masses by playing average guys dancing to average music (although he occasionally incorporated classical music in his work).²⁸ In 1961 he became the first American commissioned to choreograph a dance for the Paris Opera. He chose a love story between Aphrodite and a mortal “muscleman,” set to George Gershwin’s “Concerto in F” (the third movement of which had been used a decade earlier for Oscar Levant’s concert dream in *An American in Paris*). Kelly claimed he had to teach the Parisian dancers an entirely new form of dance, an *American* form of dance or jazz ballet as he referred to it, that closely resembled his own athletic melting-pot of classical and folk styles.²⁹ Of course, few

²⁷ For more on cultural hierarchies see Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Michael Kammen, *American Culture American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); and Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). Janice Radway offers some interesting insights into some of the ways 1950s housewives read and understood romance novels (so-called middlebrow culture). Janice Radway, “Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies: The Functions of Romance Reading,” in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, eds. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 465-486.

²⁸ Dale Pollock, “Gene Kelly: He’s Still In Step,” *Los Angeles Times* (1 August 1984): VI-8, GKC, Box 18, no folder.

²⁹ Associate Press, “Gene Kelly Sees U.S. Lag in Aiding Art,” *New York Herald Tribune* (20 June 1960): Section 4, p 5, GKC, Box 3, Folder 11: “Miscellaneous.”

Americans were privileged enough to experience first-hand this blending of elite and popular dance styles.³⁰

Thus not only did Kelly toil to create a uniquely cinematic form of dance, but one that was decidedly American in its movement and expression. He always insisted that his dancing style was a blend of various influences, from Irish clog dancing to African-American movement. In short, his dance was a veritable melting pot, like the country itself.³¹ As he explained, “Most audiences think of tap dancing as the trademark of an American, and since I usually play Americans, putting a few tap steps at the beginning immediately establishes the nationality of the film character.”³² Thus, Kelly always used dance to create his various on-screen personae.

But beyond specific steps culled from various American immigrant influences, Kelly drew on a more abstract notion of the modern American character in developing his signature dancing style. Like George Balanchine’s choreography or Aaron Copeland’s orchestrations, Kelly’s dances celebrated the bold energy and inventiveness of the American male, relying on explosive movement that required endless amounts of space. It would seem only natural, then, that he would incorporate athletic movement into his work, beyond his need to demonstrate and legitimize his heterosexual masculinity. As he recalled many years later,

sports influenced my dance style because I was groping for an *American style*—and I still use that term—I noticed that all classically trained dancers when they tried to dance to pop music or to jazz, look

³⁰ What Kelly had attempted on the Paris stage he had already undertaken in much grander form in front of the camera, with his all-dance picture, *Invitation to the Dance* (1952/1956). For an in-depth discussion and analysis of this film, see Chapter Six.

³¹ Howard Reich, “Gene Kelly: A tribute to a super dancer and ‘regular guy,’” *Chicago Tribune* (7 August 1983): section 12, page 5, GKC, Box 18, no folder; and Gene Kelly, “Fantastic Toe,” Typescript of article for *Seventeen Magazine*, n.d., 7, GKC, Box 3, Folder 13: “Articles by Gene Kelly.”

³² Quoted in Pat B. Anderson, “Tap Dancing to the Top Is a Tough Act to Follow,” *Los Angeles Times*, n.d., 1, GKC, Box 11, Folder: “S.M. College U.S.C. Linda’s Package.”

like a ballet dancer dancing to jazz. They look wrong. Often you had to use a mixture of modern and ballet. Modern dancers ... didn't look exactly right either. Because it had nothing to do with what an American looked like: how he moved, how he dressed. And the closest thing I could get was how American men moved in the field of sports.³³

Kelly's dancing style, therefore, bridged class divides by blending elite art forms, such as ballet, with the working-class tradition of American sports to forge a specifically American, and decidedly masculine, technique that would appeal to the ever-expanding middle class. His dance was "an expression of our times, our environment, and our feelings—demonstrating its reflection in our ever-changing American landscape!"³⁴ As in the nineteenth century, the middle class reached out for elite markers of respectability; they could watch Arturo Toscanini conduct the NBC Symphony Orchestra on their televisions in the comfort of their living rooms.³⁵ Kelly's dancing, as a blend of high and low art, fit with their aspirations.

Kelly, then, was part of a larger postwar effort to bring the arts, including dance, into the cultural mainstream. Broadway choreographer Agnes de Mille, who made a name for herself on Rodgers' and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* (1943) and *Carousel* (1945), was instrumental in elevating dance on the stage with groundbreaking dream ballets that

³³ Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 127-128, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 18-19, Envelope 1.

³⁴ Judith Addington, Typed outline for "I Hear American Dancing," 12 October 1982, GKC, Box 11, Folder: "I Hear American Dancing (Judy Addington)." This program was a music special intended to air on the Disney Channel. Writer/Producer Addington envisioned Kelly as the star/narrator. I was unable to determine if this program ever came to fruition.

³⁵ Lynn Spiegel, "High Culture in Low Places: Television and Modern Art, 1950-1970," in *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 265-309. For more on nineteenth-century middle-class Americans' use of art to claim respectability, see Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*; Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); and John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Noonday/Hill and Wang, 1990).

expanded the “storytelling possibilities of dance.” Her ballets celebrated America’s “quaint” folk past, creating pieces of Americana matched in Hollywood, particularly in MGM’s Freed Unit. (And, of course, many of these groundbreaking Rodgers’ and Hammerstein musicals were adapted into films with their original choreography intact.) Thus, de Mille used classic ballet forms to tell American stories, widening the appeal of ballet for theater-goers in this country.³⁶

Likewise, Jerome Robbins, celebrated Broadway choreographer of Leonard Bernstein’s *Fancy Free* (1944), *On the Town* (1944), and *West Side Story* (1957, film adaptation 1961) similarly tried to broaden ballet’s appeal by transforming it into the dance of the common man. In a 1945 article in the *New York Times*, Robbins contended that, “ballet, that orchidaceous pet of the Czars, has come out of the hothouse and become a people’s entertainment in our energetic land. A democratic people’s mark on the ballet is directly evidenced in its subject matter, its dancers, and the kind of audiences that attend it.” Recognizing the contributions of both Broadway and Hollywood in this project, Robbins pointed to a more general Americanization of ballet’s music, characters, and costumes, arguing that ballet could be as socially relevant as any other form of artistic expression. “A choreographer can justifiably look to the ballet as a medium in which he can say pertinent things about ourselves and our world,” he concluded triumphantly. “For its part, the

³⁶ John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England: 2003), 143; Ethan Mordden, *Beautiful Mornin’: The Broadway Musical in the 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 75, 79, 100-101; and Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 129. For a broader discussion of the impact of Rodgers’ and Hammerstein’s early musicals, see Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves*, Chapter 4: “World War II and the Rodgers and Hammerstein Years,” 123-160; Knapp, *The American Musical*, Chapter 6: “American Mythologies,” 119-134; and Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), Chapter 4: “‘We Know We Belong to the Land’: The Theatricality of Assimilation in Oklahoma!,” 101-118. According to an interview from 1975, Kelly never had the chance to work with de Mille. Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 49-50, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 5-234, Envelope 1.

audience will come to expect as much of ballet as it does of a play, a novel, or a film.”³⁷

Championing social relevance, de Mille, Robbins, and Kelly believed that ballet—like any dance form—could be used as a means for artists and audiences alike to cope with and even critique their world. Designing dances that were specifically American in look and feel, in turn, made that possibility even stronger.

The Social Possibilities of the Cine-Dance

Just after the close of WWII, when social pictures such as *Gentleman’s Agreement* (1947) were at their peak, Kelly looked to the musical genre to address important issues through its highly entertaining style. He maintained that audiences patterned their own lives on what they saw in the movies, and therefore the film industry had a responsibility to produce realistic and socially relevant films. Despite his proclivity for lighter fare, such as comedies and musicals, he admitted: “much too large a proportion of the pictures made today are meaningless in the face of a world which needs truth and guidance. If audiences are going to model their lives after what they see in pictures, I think a respectable percentage of the films they see should give them an honest appraisal of the world we live in.”³⁸ While Kelly continued to make musicals, he infused his work with social commentary, most notably in *It’s Always Fair Weather* (1955).

Kelly always maintained that his dances were rooted in the reality of his characters, and in this way he was able to use his pictures to comment on everyday life. On 1 October 1954, just a few days before filming began on *It’s Always Fair Weather*, Kelly gave a lecture

³⁷ Jerome Robbins, “The Ballet Puts on Dungarees,” *New York Times* (14 October 1945): 18, GKC, Box 7, Scrapbook 4 (1945-1948).

³⁸ Gene Kelly, “Movies Should Give Honest Appraisal of Current-Day World, So Says Gene Kelly, SPG Guest,” *SPG News* (May 1947): 4, GKC, Box 7, Scrapbook 4 (1945-1948).

on dance at a San Francisco Museum in which he tackled these very issues. As Robert Cornwall, a local landscape architect and fan, wrote the next day: “I had never quite understood until last night what it was about your pictures that were so completely natural in their expression of life through dance.”³⁹

Kelly believed that all dancing, whether ballet, tap, or modern, enabled self-expression in cultural, social, and personal terms. But while many of his dances were rooted in reality, others were constructed in dream worlds, enclosed fantasies that seemed unconcerned with everyday life. In effect, he approached his dancing from multiple and competing positions. On the one hand he argued for the social relevance of his dances but he always denied that his work contained ideological drives, messages, or social lessons. Rather, he claimed to dance joy, a joy that often seemed to exist independent of the “real world.” He saw joy-through-dance as a release from the banality of the workaday world. But embedded within that joy was another layer of release. As British journalist John Cutts once observed, Kelly “brought to his dances a wonderful uncluttered sense of simple vitality; there was nothing extraneous or ostentatious about his dancing. He danced simply, but fully: there was no holding back or holding down; no repression.”⁴⁰ Kelly’s dances thus sought a release from the demands of postwar life. Specifically, they could liberate him from the very categories of masculinity and art that trapped him on Omnibus. While he tried to expand definitions of masculinity to allow for manly beauty and grace, his dancing was far less rigid and noticeably more fluid than any of his verbal pleas.

³⁹ Robert Cornwall, San Francisco, to Gene Kelly, Typed signed letter, 2 October 1954, GKC, Box 2, Folder 10: “Thank You Letters (General).”

⁴⁰ Kelly bracketed this passage off with a question mark, underlining the words “fully” and “repression.” John Cutts, “Kelly ... dancer ... actor ... director, Part II,” unidentifiable clipping, c. 1964: 37, GKC, Box 3, Folder 12: “Biographical Material.”

If dancing provided him with a release from the concerns of everyday life, then spectacles, along with more general art forms, could do the same for other postwar Americans.⁴¹ In his attempts to tap into Hollywood's far-stretching network of commercial entertainments, Kelly tacitly encouraged others to use dance as an outlet for breaking free of social conventions. Though he never claimed that as his goal, his attempts to build a mass audience for all dancing, both in the postwar era and beyond, can be read in more than just aesthetic terms. It was not simply that he hoped to expand his audience, or even expose more people to ballet and other forms of dance, whether on the screen or the stage. His use of technology, along with his "common man" approach to dance produced a message, most likely unintentional, for his fellow Americans. Filmmaking allowed him to experiment with his dancing, whether with technology or by blurring the boundaries of reality and fantasy. The camera offered him endless possibilities to play around with his dances.

Ironically, Kelly could only play with his masculinity by masking himself in Hollywood's technology.⁴² Any performative gestures to individual self-expression ultimately were mediated and filtered through the technology of the Hollywood machine, a studio system that often approached filmmaking, particularly formulaic musicals, with an assembly-line mentality. Each studio had its own trademark product, the Warner Bros.'

Busby Berkeley Depression-era backstage musicals, RKO's Fred and Ginger films of

⁴¹ In her memoir, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (New York: Random House, 2004), Azar Nafisi maintains that the novel, as an art form, "offers the potential to surpass present limits, ... [it] offers you freedoms that reality denies," 48. Richard Dyer makes a similar point more broadly about entertainment, though he positions that escape firmly in capitalistic and commercial desire. See Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," in *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Altman, 175-89. See also Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁴² In contrast, David Anthony Gerstner argues that the limited space and "more stable" setting of the Omnibus television show, particularly in comparison to the elaborate and expansive sets in *The Pirate* (1948), created a safer and less confusing image of masculinity that could not be construed as effeminate. David Anthony Gerstner, "Dancer from the Dance: Gene Kelly, Television, and the Beauty of Movement," *Velvet Light Trap* 49 (Spring 2002): 61.

extravagance, and MGM's Technicolor spectacles. The musical numbers, rather than the formulaic plots, were what "distinguished a particular musical through their execution." Studios developed technologies to set their musical numbers apart. Thus "innovation and conformity went hand-in-hand," as Steven Cohan elucidates. "The industrial need to make each new musical appear 'new' while remaining the same fundamental product allowed for ongoing innovation on the part of the artists and craftspeople involved when planning and shooting a routine (this commonly used term, in fact, implies the conventionality regulating the singularity of a number's execution)."⁴³ The ironies and contradictions of encouraging individuality through the mass-produced musical film cannot be overstressed.

Reading Kelly's celluloid dances, then, demands navigating through multiple, often overlapping, and frequently contradictory contextual and textual layers. Even as he wielded technology to create a more expressive form of movement, the camera nonetheless mediated his dancing image. And while he enjoyed creative control over his dances at MGM, he nonetheless was required to answer to studio producers and executives, as Chapter Six chronicles. Additionally, he was tethered to postwar definitions of masculinity and art. Even though he attempted to redefine and expand these categories, both on- and off the screen, he could never fully escape widely-accepted norms. All of these lenses necessarily frame his film performances, pointing to the ways in which he endeavored to use dance for personal release. But such a release could never be complete, anchored as it was to these structural and figurative demands. Despite this caveat, his dances nonetheless taught a valuable lesson to Americans on how to be authentic and true to themselves. Kelly's art was part of the

⁴³ Steven Cohan, ed., *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), Introduction, 10-11.

rebellious culture that exploded in the 1960s, but which had its origins and development in the 1950s, as W. T. Lhamon Jr. points out.⁴⁴

Kelly Unbounded: The Cine-Dance in Action

Though he frequently touted the many ways that dance was manly, particularly in “Dancing: A Man’s Game,” his on-screen performances, while always rooted in rugged athleticism, were far less staunch and dogmatic about upholding a strict gender divide. These celluloid moments were opportunities for alternate sides of Kelly to come shining through. These dances revealed a more authentic personality, the one he dared not display in public.

He never claimed to be a stellar dramatic actor, and had never intended to be one either. He had left his hometown of Pittsburgh to be a choreographer on the Great White Way. “I always wanted to be a director, not an actor, anyway,” Kelly reflected in a December 1984 interview. “I always wanted to be a choreographer, not an actor. My joy and my fun is creating. It is not performing ... I would just as soon sit in a room and, say, pull things out of thin air and put them on paper or onto the screen or whatever ... I became a performer because there was nobody else around dancing the way I danced.”⁴⁵ But his talent was too big to remain behind the curtain, and he was quickly cast in several musicals before landing the lead in *Pal Joey* on Broadway (1940).⁴⁶ While Kelly was sensitive to film

⁴⁴ W.T. Lhamon Jr., *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990; reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁴⁵ Ronald Haver, “Gene Kelly: Who Could Ask for Anything More?,” *American Film* 10, no. 5 (March 1985): 26, GKC, Box 12, no folder; and Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 194, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 5-234, Envelope 4.

⁴⁶ Alvin Yudkoff, *Gene Kelly: A Life of Dance and Dreams* (New York: Back Stage Books, 1999), 46-80; and Clive Hirschhorn, *Gene Kelly: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), 52-72.

reviewers' attacks on his overblown style, he did eventually and ruefully admit his fairly limited range as an untrained actor long after he had retired to behind the camera.⁴⁷

Despite his mediocre acting range, he claimed that his dances were inherently dramatic in nature. His choreography for musical comedies originated in the character's psychology and motivation. A dance could not just materialize out of thin air as Kelly saw it. It needed a logical introduction and reason for being, as the "Alter Ego Dance" sprung out of Danny McGuire's internal struggle to determine his next course of action.⁴⁸ He saw in dance the possibility for communicating ideas, feelings, notions that could not necessarily be articulated with spoken words. In short, Kelly intended his dances to directly contribute to the film's larger plot while moving beyond to hint at other things, whether related to the film or not.

In many ways, his dances gestured back to himself.⁴⁹ His dances therefore can be read as moments stripped of their fictional characters. When he danced, he danced himself, as many critics have subsequently remarked. No matter what the dance, nearly every one, regardless of plot or character, was typified by his wide, infectious, Irish grin.⁵⁰ According to journalist John Cutts, "It is often said of Kelly that he 'dances people'; but this really isn't

⁴⁷ For descriptions of Kelly's acting, see Lindsay Anderson, "Minnelli, Kelly and An American in Paris," *Sequence* 14 (London) (New Year, 1952): 37, GKC, Box 9, Scrapbook 8 (1951-1953); Pete Martin, "The Fastest-Moving Star in Pictures," *The Saturday Evening Post* 223, no. 2 (8 July 1950): 72, GKC, Box 12, no folder; and "Movies" (column accompanying a review of *The Black Hand*), *Newsweek* 35, no. 13 (27 March 1950): 84, GKC, Box 8, Scrapbook 6 (c. 1950-1951?).

⁴⁸ He was very much in line with Agnes de Mille, whose choreography stemmed from characters' inner psychology. Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves*, 143 and Mordden, *Beautiful Mornin'*, 77.

⁴⁹ Fred Astaire's postwar work did this much more explicitly, as many of the roles he took on literally referenced his earlier stage career with sister Adele. See, for instance, *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), *Royal Wedding* (1951), and *The Band Wagon* (1953).

⁵⁰ Countless newspaper and fan magazine stories about Kelly, both in the postwar period and beyond, emphasize his broad, infectious Irish smile. See, e.g., Michael Kernan, "Gene Kelly, Turning Over a New Leap," *The Washington Post* (1 April 1982): B1, 3, GKC, Box 11, no folder; or Dale Pollock, "Gene Kelly: He's Still In Step," *Los Angeles Times* (1 August 1984): VI-8, GKC, Box 18, no folder.

true, for he danced but one person: himself.”⁵¹ Like Peter Pan, the eternal boy who chased his shadow, Kelly played with his own even beyond the literal shadow dance of “Alter Ego.” And, much like Pan, Kelly was a figure who, at some level, refused to grow up. His dances expressed joy, exhilaration, beauty, and vitality, encouraging spectators to be themselves even if that meant disregarding social expectations.

He was not afraid to expose his body to the camera’s scrutiny, though some film scholars suggest that this bodily attention made him especially vulnerable to emasculation.⁵² But given the possibilities of a film text’s multiple interpretations, particularly in the age of the Production Code, Kelly could let go of his anxiety, disregard what people might say about him, and just dance.⁵³ In public, Kelly indefatigably defended male dancers through his attempts to redefine masculinity. Certainly that was a major driving force in his dancing, shaping everything from his style to his costumes to the roles he adopted in front of the camera. But there was much more at work, both behind and in front of the camera. An examination of a select number of his celluloid dances from *The Pirate* (1948), *An American in Paris* (1951), and *It’s Always Fair Weather* (1955) reveal the ways in which he both

⁵¹ John Cutts, “Kelly... dancer ... actor ... director, Part I,” unidentifiable clipping, c. 1964: 41, GKC, Box 3, Folder 12: “Biographical Material.” Curiously, Cutts’ prose echoes nearly verbatim an earlier article: “It has been said that Kelly ‘dances people.’ Perhaps it would be truer to say that he dances ‘a person’—himself.” Lindsay Anderson, “Minnelli, Kelly and An American in Paris,” *Sequence* (London) 14[?] (New Year, 1952): 37, GKC, Box 9, Scrapbook 8 (1951-1953).

⁵² See Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1995); Steven Cohan, “‘Feminizing’ the Song-and-Dance Man: Fred Astaire and the Spectacle of Masculinity in the Hollywood Musical,” in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993), 46-69; Steve Neale, “Masculinity As Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema,” in *Screening the Male*, 9-20; Miriam Hansen, “Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship,” *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1986): 6-32; and David R. Shumway, “Watching Elvis: The Male Rock Star as Object of the Gaze,” in *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons*, ed. Joel Foreman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 124-143.

⁵³ Richard Maltby, *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983).

adhered to and flouted his own theories about masculine dance. These technologically and artistically-infused cine-dances, read against his verbal performances off-screen, also gesture towards the ways in which dancing spectacles could be used to break free from conventional norms. For the purposes of analysis, we might think of Kelly's dancing in four categories: Hyper-masculine Solos, Playful Ensembles, Homosocial Routines, and his Solo/Prop Dances.⁵⁴

Flaming Trail of Masculinity: Kelly's Machismo Dancing

Though *The Pirate* was the only one of the three above-mentioned films that Kelly did not direct, he collaborated with Vincente Minnelli on nearly every aspect of the picture.⁵⁵ Based on the non-musical S. N. Behrman play which starred Lynn Fontane and Alfred Lunt, the movie was an updated version with music by Cole Porter.⁵⁶ Set on a nineteenth century Caribbean Island, the film chronicled the adventures of Manuela (Judy Garland), betrothed to one man but in love with the mythical Macoco the Pirate. When she meets strolling actor Serafin (Kelly), she falls under his spell, believing him to be "Mack the Black."⁵⁷ While critics generally praised the film, it was a box office bomb, though has recently garnered

⁵⁴ These are, of course, fictive classifications to a large extent, as many of his dances cross multiple categories. While he frequently danced with women, most often in a romantic *pas de deux*, I have chosen not to explore these much more subdued dances, which were intended to advance the love stories in their various films, rather than display Kelly's prowess or inner character. Additionally, these routines adhered to his theory about male-female dancing, where gender divides are maintained and the man's role is to make the woman look good. Studying his romantic dances thus does not complicate his Omnibus discussion very much.

⁵⁵ For production information, see Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, Chapter 6; Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 25 October 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 27-28, and 30 October 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 54-57, HOHP, OH 112; and Shipman, *Judy Garland*, 200-214.

⁵⁶ "In a Nutshell," *The M-G-M Record* 2, no. 88 (4 June 1948): n.p., GKC, Box 8, Scrapbook 5 (1948-1949).

⁵⁷ *The Pirate*, Produced by Arthur Freed, Directed by Vincente Minnelli, Color, 102 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1948, Videocassette, Author's Collection.

quite a cult following. With its dizzying camerawork and colorful *mise-en-scène*, it is widely regarded as a picture steeped in the camp aesthetic.⁵⁸

Kelly's performance throughout the picture is a rather stilted affectation of masculinity, a gag he and Minnelli designed to pay *homage* to but also poke fun at the hyper-heroic Douglas Fairbanks.⁵⁹ Nowhere is this more apparent than in the "Pirate Ballet" that he choreographed with the aid of Robert Alton, who designed dances for Freed films such as *The Harvey Girls* (1946), *Easter Parade* (1948), *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), and *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950). The ballet, "brilliantly photographed in flaming shades of red and punctuated with yellow bursts of flashing gun powder," represents the fantasy of Manuela, as she gazes from her balcony window at Serafin, who is impersonating Macoco below her. Set to an orchestrated version of "Mack the Black," which Garland sang earlier in the film, this number, "the pinnacle of spectacle," is a classic dream ballet.⁶⁰

The number begins with Serafin on the street outside Manuela's window. He is shot from high above to represent her point of view, which is reinforced by his constant upward glances towards her. In this way the film acknowledges that he is performing for her (and us). As the scene fades into her dreamworld, the camera moves to a more level position, but her gaze throughout the number has already been established and thereby frames the entire sequence. Day turns into night, and his white shirt and dark, rather tight pants are transformed into an even tighter, far skimpier, black outfit of short-shorts, boots, and a

⁵⁸ Matthew Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital, Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 66-70; and Douglas Pye, "Being a Clown: Curious Coupling in *The Pirate*," *Cineaction* 63 (2004): 4-13; and Gerstner, "Dancer from the Dance," 55-57.

⁵⁹ Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 205; and Hirschhorn, *Gene Kelly*, 136.

⁶⁰ T. M. P. [Thomas M. Pryor], "'The Pirate,' With Gene Kelly, Judy Garland and Walter Slezak, at Music Hall" (review), *New York Times*, 21 May 1948, 19, VMP, Folder 119: "The Pirate – pub. & reviews," also found in GKC, Box 8, Scrapbook 5 (1948-1949).

nearly-sleeveless low-cut shirt—all of which show off his taut, thick muscles, particularly his powerful thighs. His dancing is a combination of balletic steps, turns and leaps, with gymnastic movements—the perfect encapsulation of the style he would celebrate ten years later in “Dancing: A Man’s Game.”

Numerous scholars have commented on the homoerotic and camp qualities of this dance—most notably its “orgiastic” and “flamboyant” texture.⁶¹ Though his manliness cannot be questioned in terms of the action and vitality of his movements, the *mise-en-scène* undermines his masculinity by turning him into a hyper-sexualized object—that “blazing trail of masculinity”—of Garland’s desire.⁶² Even as he performs gross acts of piracy—plundering, ravaging women, butchering—he does so with exaggerated and purposeful movements. He keeps his body extended, so that it always appears as a single fluid line. There is something truly graceful about it, but it is a highly eroticized grace. Even as he threatens Manuela, who has been cowering in the corner during the entirety of his routine, his dancing is seductive and enticing. The camera employs a surprising amount of close-up shots, in which only his torso and a bit of his legs appear, as he circles her. Thus, and quite uncharacteristically, the camera dismembers his body for moments during his dance.

The original idea for this solo dance, as Robert Alton envisioned it, was not as a dream sequence. Rather, he wanted to use Kelly’s dancing to chronicle a “series of episodes” highlighting Macoco’s terrifying ruthlessness.⁶³ It is unclear when the idea to turn the number into a dream ballet occurred, but it certainly seems that Minnelli and Kelly

⁶¹ Quoted in Gerstner, “Dancer from the Dance,” 55.

⁶² Lyric to “Mack the Black.” Douglas Pye provides an insightful analysis of how Kelly’s body becomes an object of Garland’s desire in “Being a Clown,” 9.

⁶³ Robert Alton, “Idea suggested by Robert Alton for Gene Kelly’s solo number in ‘THE PIRATE,’” Typed notes, 24 January 1947, VMP, Folder 116: “The Pirate – notes.”

realized that, in order for audiences and censors to accept the routine, it had to be completely enclosed in fantasy. The filmmakers' desire to showcase powerful manly movement thus had to be justified and legitimized; manly dancing was acceptable, but it needed to be bounded to remain safe. The ballet's fantastical *mise-en-scène* was necessary precisely because the number was so "over the top" in its manly spectacle.⁶⁴

The "Pirate Ballet" upheld Kelly's vision of male dancing as both graceful and athletic far less rigidly than his later articulation on *Omnibus*. The excess of the number—his costume, the constant blaze of flames, the overly purposeful movements—lends it an almost self-parodying quality. Kelly and Minnelli put manliness on display here, but in such a way as to make obvious the artifice necessary for the postwar construction of manhood. One might read the ballet, then, as a big joke—a lighthearted wrestling with prevailing gender norms. Furthermore, the artifice engenders a rather campy interpretation of the dance. Though most scholars tend to focus on Judy Garland's role, combined with Minnelli's artistic sensibilities and Cole Porter's music, in creating a camp feel to the film, Kelly's performance in this ballet cannot be understated.⁶⁵ His emphasis on "sex through costuming (tights and shorts...)," his "movement (...wiggling his bottom..., flexing his thighs...)," and the "camerawork (sinuous camera movement... [and] low-angle, crotch-centered positioning...)" unite to provide a queer reading of his performance.⁶⁶ Truly, manliness, more than dance itself, is the spectacle on display in this ballet. Here, Kelly

⁶⁴ Gerstner, "Dancer from the Dance," 55. Audiences did not always accept dances that were overly fantasy laden, as reactions to Kelly's cartoon *pas de deux* in *Invitation to the Dance*'s "Sinbad the Sailor" demonstrated. In contrast to the "Pirate Ballet," "Sinbad" had no real narrative to bind its dancing which seemed to make audiences uncomfortable. See Chapter Six for a more detailed explanation.

⁶⁵ Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 142. Richard Dyer, however, acknowledges that it is "Kelly, not Garland" who largely provides the film's camp feel, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 179-184.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

invites his viewers to gaze longingly at his body, just as Garland does from the edge of the proscenium arch. This self-conscious hyper-masculine performance in many ways mocks his own public position on manly dance, and thus suggests the release and freedom he felt in front of movie cameras. On *Omnibus*, he could never dare to be this playful, but in 1948, before the more virulent of the two postwar Hollywood Red Scares, he could embrace a degree of abandon and be far more laid-back about the presentation of his masculinity.

This playfulness saturates all of his cine-dancing in *The Pirate*, most of which is far less intense and obvious in its display of eroticized manliness. Indeed, co-choreographer Alton had initially imagined a much lighter side to Kelly's Macoco, one which could be momentarily charmed, if not tamed, by a child's innocence. This aspect of the character was swapped for the more masculine, more stylized, and far more fantastic final print of the ballet. But it nonetheless comes out at the film's end, with Kelly's "Be a Clown."

"Be a Clown": Kelly's Playful Dancing

Kelly performs "Be a Clown" twice at the conclusion of *The Pirate*, the first time with the African-American dancing team, the Nicholas Brothers, and the reprise with Garland, who is dressed in an identical costume to Kelly as an androgynous tramp.⁶⁷ According to Hugh Fordin, Kelly urged Cole Porter to write this song for him.⁶⁸ Both film versions are playful, though the dance with Harold and Fayard Nicholas is far more acrobatic and energetic, while his routine with Garland is silly but rather stationary. The former dance is expansive, utilizing a good deal of ground to capture the explosive energy of the three

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁶⁸ Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 205; and Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 30 October 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 53-54, HOHP, OH 112.

men. They make impossibly high leaps, jump on each other, swing each other in the air, and execute difficult flips with graceful ease, all the time with huge grins on their faces. Though the number is to be Serafin's final performance before being hanged, the song-and-dance is lighthearted. Indeed, when he and the Nicholas Brothers dance too close to the gallows, they back off with comically-horrified expressions on their faces as they grab protectively at their necks.⁶⁹

This routine is the epitome of homosocial dancing—three men roughhousing—but there is nothing homoerotic about it, unlike the “Pirate Ballet.” It was, for Kelly, his archetypal clowning performance. This was his trademark, according to Rick Altman: “For Kelly dance is ... a silly, clowning, childish activity, an expression of the eternal youth which seems even today to be fixed in Kelly's smile. From film to film Kelly's partners and his style may change, but his adolescent energy and ego never disappear.”⁷⁰ His celluloid dancing captured an infectious youthful verve that expressed a disregard for the demands of postwar adult life. Dancing was not simply an escape for Kelly, it was a release, a way for him to abandon gender and sexual anxieties. In “Be a Clown” he demonstrates no compulsion to prove the manliness the “Pirate Ballet” had called into question (despite its display of masculine prowess). He simply and joyfully dances, unconcerned with labels.

This playfulness infused almost all of his dancing throughout the postwar period, and is perhaps most visible in his routines with children. *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), *An American in Paris* (1951) and *Invitation to the Dance* (1952/1956) each incorporated a routine with a

⁶⁹ The specter of racial lynching is quite pronounced in this moment. While Kelly's horror at the noose is narrative-driven, the Nicholas Brothers' reaction is extra-diegetic. As a specialty act who only appeared in this one scene, and thus had no place in the overall plot, there is no narrative context in which to interpret their reaction to the rope. See Chapter Five for a discussion of black specialty acts.

⁷⁰ Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 57.

child. In *An American in Paris*, Jerry Mulligan (Kelly) is well-loved by the local children “because I give them American bubble gum.”⁷¹ Early in the film, two-dozen children bombard him on the street in front of his apartment. He begins an impromptu English lesson as they follow him to a nearby flower stand. He then proposes they learn “an American song,” George and Ira Gershwin’s “I Got Rhythm.” He teaches them to say “I got,” and points at them to shout the lyric each time it comes up in the song. But the number quickly transforms into “*la danse American*” as he begins tapping to the song’s beat. He shouts out the names of the steps he performs as the children repeat after him: the time step, the shim sham, the Charleston. The song ends at this point; the dancing takes over as he begins clowning around, making up dance steps: Chu-Chu Train, Soldier, Napoleon, Cowboy, Chaplin, and Airplane.

With each new dance, his steps become more intricate, more playful, more exuberant. And as the dance continues, the rather confined space of the flower stand opens up to include more of the street, filled with on-lookers. The camera pans alongside Kelly as his movement becomes more expansive. He extends his legs high, pretending to kick the children, skips and leaps down the street, whizzing and twirling dizzily back to the flower stand to represent an airplane. Throughout the scene he appears completely at home with the children, goofing around, making faces, joking with them, pretending to be a stern *Professeur* but really just an over-grown child himself.

Years later, Kelly recalled how much he enjoyed children as dancing partners. “I found out that I loved working with children,” he confessed. “They’d laugh at everything I said and they giggled. We enjoyed being with each other. They changed my attitude a lot

⁷¹ *An American in Paris*, DVD. All subsequent quotations come from the DVD unless otherwise specified.

about dancing.” He explained that his love of working with children stemmed from his days as a dance instructor in Pittsburgh:

... they made me love the teaching of dance. They made me love being with them. They came there because they wanted to come. It’s not like regular school where you go because of state law. They couldn’t wait to get to class. I knew them all by name no matter how big a class or how many students I had in a day. We just had a great time together. I must say, with no modesty, that they learned very good dancing and they learned it properly. Children were important to me. So later on working with children as often as I did—and everybody would say, ‘God! Never work with dogs or with children.’⁷²

His love of children shines through “I Got Rhythm,” infusing it with a sense of pure joy and fun. As one of the kids, palling around with them, he exudes a sense of abandon. And though the routine begins in a rather uncharacteristically confined space compared to most of his dances, his childlike abandon bursts out onto the street.

As in “Be a Clown,” Kelly seems completely at ease. There is no sense of *machismo* here, no need to prove his manliness. Though rigorous, his choreography is understated, subtle, and not particularly athletic. It is not simply for the benefit of the children’s enjoyment that he dances, but for his own. As he advocated in “Dancing: A Man’s Game,” Kelly dances in a “slap-dash way.” He is a child here, not a man, and can thereby let go of the burdens of manhood in the postwar period.

Coming Home: Kelly’s Homosocial Dancing

This playfulness continues through the next song-and-dance routine in the film, “Tra-La-La,” though in a far more adult setting. Coming about forty-five minutes into *An American in Paris*, this number expresses Mulligan’s joy and excitement about his upcoming

⁷² Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 127-128, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 5-234, Envelope 3. For more on his days as a dance instructor, see Hirschhorn, *Gene Kelly*, 46-51.

date with Lise (Leslie Caron), with whom he was instantly enchanted. Returning home from the perfumery where she works, Mulligan runs into his across-the-hall neighbor, Adam Cook (portrayed by the equally cantankerous pianist Oscar Levant), hard at work on his latest piano composition. Mulligan begins singing of his love for Lise as he takes off his sports coat and unbuttons his shirt, with sleeves rolled up to display his biceps (a common look for Kelly):

This time it's really love, tra la la la.
I'm in that blue above, tra la la la.
She fills me full of joy,
Tell me, Papa—
Am I not a lucky boy?
Tra, la la la la.⁷³

In yet another understated routine, Kelly performs his masculinity in curious ways that both uphold and also undermine his clearly-articulated vision of manly dancing. The *mise-en-scène* is undeniably masculine—a man's room, complete with framed photographs of boxers hanging on the walls. But it is nonetheless a man's bedroom—a very intimate, close, and confined space—and Kelly is only half-dressed in it. Though dancing with other men for Kelly was not usually problematic, the narrow space and costuming blur the line between acceptable homosociality and deviant homosexuality.⁷⁴ While Levant remains at the piano for the duration, pausing only momentarily to stand up twirl with Kelly as they shout: “Rah-rah. Sis-boom-bah. Swing your partner with a Tra-la-la,” this number can nonetheless

⁷³ George Gershwin and Arthur Francis, New lyrics by Ira Gershwin, “Tra La La,” PCAR, Folder: “An American in Paris [MGM, 1950].”

⁷⁴ Burt, *The Male Dancer*, 22-24. Of course, Levant is positioned as an asexual character, akin to Rock Hudson's celluloid sidekick Tony Randall (e.g. *Pillow Talk*, 1959) to mute any potential homoerotic undertones. But, as Steven Cohan argues, such a sidekick can also be interpreted as closeted, thereby complicating the diegesis and engendering a camp reading. Steven Cohan, “The Bachelor in the Bedroom,” in *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 264-303.

be considered a homosocial duet. The twosome is centered at the piano; twice Kelly performs a four-handed duet, once while lying on the piano, and at the conclusion of the routine, when he sits down and bangs out the *Secondo* line as the men belt out: “What a thrill I’m getting from it. Tra la la la la la la.” The nature of Levant and Kelly’s performance is minimalistic and tight, unlike the raw explosiveness of his dances with Donald O’Connor the following year in *Singin’ in the Rain*.⁷⁵ It was unusual for Kelly to dance with other men in such a small setting; the intimacy of “Tra-La-La” belies Kelly’s usual strong, unequivocally masculine image.

The atypical setting further reinforces the gender blurring at work. Kelly preferred to use wide spaces to move about and demonstrate his athleticism, but this scene is shot in a constricted, almost suffocating, space. His dance steps reinforce the smallness of the room. He begins by simply lying on top of Levant’s piano, stretched out on his side to draw attention to the curves of his body. He stays on the piano when he actually begins to dance; the narrow space forces him to minimize his movements. Even as the song’s tempo increases and he leaps off the piano to match the pace with broader movements, he still has a very limited space in which to maneuver (indeed, Adam’s bed occupies the majority of the floor space). He keeps his arms stiffly at his side, slightly hunched over, perhaps to suggest his discomfort at dancing in such a restrictive site. His dancing is graceful, but never explosive. Employing only six edits, the camera manages to follow him with minimal but exquisite panning, always maintaining full-body shots. The tight, controlled camera movement, coupled with Kelly’s relatively restrained movements, creates a sense of confinement that he typically associated with female dancers.

⁷⁵ “Fit as a Fiddle,” “Moses Supposes,” and (with Debbie Reynolds) “Good Morning.”

But despite the gender problematics of this number, it is nonetheless quite playful in nature. Indeed, Kelly seems to flout gender norms by resorting, yet again, to a childlike dancing persona. At one point in the routine, he grabs Levant's hat, which is several sizes too big for his head. Kelly puts on the hat as if he were a child playing dress-up with his father's clothing. Kelly shakes his head, causing the hat to fall over his eyes, as he stumbles blindly from the hallway into the bedroom. As in "I Got Rhythm," he is more a child than a man, and this affords him the opportunity to be more playful and disregard the rigid rules of masculinity. He feels free enough, in fact, to give Levant a quick peck on the top of his head—something a "real man" could never do.

It would seem that the tiny homosocial setting, despite its homosexual undertones, allowed Kelly more room to play around with his gender than Omnibus provided. He could be feminine-like (daintily swinging his legs, holding up the ends of his shirt as if they were a skirt hem, batting his eye lashes) without risking a slur on his manhood precisely because he was in male space. Though he filmed his television special in a male arena—a gymnasium—he could not be as flexible in 1958. There could be no kiss with Sugar Ray Robinson, whereas he could display playful affection for the non-dancing Levant. Even though Kelly tried to broaden definitions of masculinity on "Dancing: A Man's Game," he had only a small discursive space in which to maneuver. In contrast, cine-dancing released Kelly from the expectations of being a responsible man in postwar America.

Not all of his homosocial dancing was marked by gender release. Often, such routines expressed camaraderie and celebrated a shared manliness, particularly when he and his fellow hoofers portrayed soldiers. In such routines, Kelly could explore manly bonds safely, in a way that did not automatically imply inappropriate behavior, as one of his final

MGM musicals demonstrated. *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955) reunited *On the Town*'s directing team of Kelly and Stanley Donen with writers Betty Comden and Adolph Green to explore demobilization and the postwar reintegration of soldiers into civilian life. Where *On the Town* had been jubilant and frenzied, *Fair Weather* was subdued and dark, a musical version of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (book 1955, film 1956) chronicling the life of three soldiers reunited ten years after the war.⁷⁶ The film opens on a high note—an inventive dance routine with Kelly and Broadway-to-Hollywood hooper Dan Dailey, joined by newcomer Michael Kidd, who was making quite a name for himself in Hollywood with such choreographic projects as *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954).

The number begins after Kelly (Ted Riley) learns that his girlfriend has gotten married while he was fighting in Europe. He goes on a bender, joined by Dailey and Kidd, who refuse to leave his side. After hours of bar-hopping, they emerge euphoric, wildly dancing through New York's quiet early-morning streets to André Previn's distinctive score. Filmed in CinemaScope, the wide-screen makes the already sprawling set that much bigger. Kelly and Donen employ long shots for the duration, keeping the three dancing bodies intact but at a distance from the spectator. Uncharacteristically, they also rely on three dissolves to change locations throughout the routine, creating an episodic feel to the extended dance number.

⁷⁶ *On the Town* premiered on Broadway on 28 December 1944. Set squarely during the War, there was a sense of bittersweet urgency to the play, as the haunting version of "Some Other Time," underscored. When Freed, Kelly, and Stanley Donen adapted the show to the big screen, they updated the story for the postwar period, losing much of the story's emotional power. See Didier C. Deutsch, Liner Notes for *On the Town* Featuring Members of the Original Cast, Reissue of 1959 Recording, Columbia Broadway Masters/Sony 60538.

It's Always Fair Weather, Produced by Arthur Freed, Directed by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, Color, 101 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1955, Videocassette, Author's Collection. Most reviews of the film focused not on the darker aspects of postwar life, but on the satire the film offered of television and advertising. See, e.g., Archer Winsten, "'Always Fair Weather' at Music Hall" (review), *New York Post*, 16 September 1955, 33, GKC, Box 10, Scrapbook 9 (1952-1955); and Jack Moffitt, "'It's Always Fair Weather' is a Fast-Paced Musical" (review), *The Hollywood Reporter*, 22 August 1955, 3, GKC, Box 10, Scrapbook 9 (1952-1955), also located in PCAR, Folder: "It's Always Fair Weather [MGM, 1954]."

Initially, the three dance in front of a saloon, kidding around, roughhousing, jokingly kicking each other on their bottoms. They dance like drunken children, gleeful and carefree. At one point, Kidd climbs on Dailey's shoulders, and Kelly dances with the two of them in a jesting rumba. They halt a cab in its tracks, wreaking havoc on it as they run through and on top of it, sliding in and out of the sunroof. Next we find them in an alley filled with metal garbage cans. They leap around the cans, playing the lids as if they were symbols. Dailey puts a lid on his foot and begins stomping around; the other two follow his lead. They execute a clanging, boisterous street dance, at times dancing in unison, at other times performing a classic challenge dance. Each one is bolder and more athletic than the last. After returning the lids to their cans, the three dancers frantically run and leap down an empty street, combining athletic with balletic movements similar to Jerome Robbins' street dances in *West Side Story*, which opened the following year on Broadway.

While this routine stands out from the rest of the film for its lighthearted style, it serves as an excellent example of the power of the cine-dance. While it incorporates a great deal of physical contact between the three men, it in no way suggests anything but homosociality. Unlike the confined space of "Tra-La-La," this untitled routine is unrestrained, matching the space and energy Kelly argued boys and men needed to dance properly. There is an undeniable element of release at work here. A decade earlier Kelly had used a garbage can to break a storefront window in an attempt to destroy his reflection. Here Kelly, Dailey, and Kidd use the garbage cans to let their inner selves loose. On the surface, it does not seem that they are engaged in any sort of internal conflict the way Danny McGuire was, and yet, the relief they require seems to suggest just that—a conflict between being a "Man" and being a fun-loving child without a care in the world. Indeed, the whole dance is

framed as a way for Kelly to forget his broken heart. At the song's conclusion, the three return to the first bar and soberly remember that the war is over and they are once again civilians. The mood suddenly turns dark and somber. The spell of the dance has been broken, and they must return to the (nonmusical) civilian lives they had left behind before enlisting.

"I Like Myself": Kelly's Solo/Prop Dancing

This opening number is likewise an excellent example of one of Kelly's signature dancing styles—the prop dance. Whether dancing with others or alone, he frequently incorporated objects into his routines, from brooms to newspapers and squeaky floorboards. Jane Feuer explains how prop dances use objects to help explain the logic of the dance, a “creative repository out of which the audience has come to expect a dance may be born.” When props are not available, she notes, “the performer may simulate props using his body as a tool ... Gene Kelly doesn't need props to become, say, an airplane or Charlie Chaplin.” The ultimate purpose of these props, she argues, is to create the aura of spontaneity, or what she has called *bricolage*. “Engineering,” she tells us, “is a prerequisite for the creation of effects of utter spontaneity in the Hollywood musical. The *bricolage* number attempts to cancel engineering (a characteristic of mass production) by substituting *bricolage* (a characteristic of folk production).”⁷⁷

Kelly accomplishes this in his solo routine, “I Like Myself.” His character (Ted Riley) had spent the past decade since demobilization disillusioned, sinking lower and lower into a world of gambling and petty crime. But when he meets Jackie Leighton (Cyd

⁷⁷ Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 4-5.

Charisse), he begins to reform. The number occurs in the latter half of the film, following a chase scene in which Kelly had ducked into a roller-skating rink to hide from his crooked business partners. Once he is certain that he is safe, he leaves the rink, forgetting that his metal skates are still strapped to his shoes. He rolls down a crowded New York street, whistling his amazement that Jackie could possibly love him. And he starts to sing:

Can it be?
I like myself?
She likes me.
So I like myself.
If someone wonderful as she is
Can think I'm wonderful.
I must be quite a guy.⁷⁸

He begins skate-dancing as a crowd begins to follow him. When he stops, they stop. He looks around, realizing for the first time that he is still wearing his rented skates. He shrugs, grinning, and continues his song:

Feeling so unlike myself.
Always used to dislike myself.
But now my love has got me riding high.
She likes me.
So, so do I.

The song ends and the dancing takes over, much like in “Singin’ in the Rain.” He skates down sidewalks, onto wide streets in front of oncoming traffic, and hops curbs. All the while the crowd grows even bigger around him. In another unusual move, he actually incorporates the diegetic audience into his routine, so that he is performing for two audiences: the fictive one on screen and the spectators sitting in darkened theaters across the nation.⁷⁹ He seems completely nonplussed that he is the center of attention, in fact, he

⁷⁸ *It's Always Fair Weather*, Videocassette.

⁷⁹ On the fictive, diegetic audience, see Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 26-34.

welcomes strangers' gazes and, in the end, their applause. His dance is rather understated for a solo, though his alternating taps and glides are far more difficult than he makes them appear. As in the film's opening number, he employs long shots and keeps his body centered in the frame, but at a slight distance from the viewer.

Here is a moment of sheer playfulness, incorporating children's skates in a seemingly simple but joyful routine.⁸⁰ But its lyrics remind us how Kelly used dancing to face his inner self. In *It's Always Fair Weather*, his character had deteriorated in the ten years following his release from the army. He had come to despise himself, until forced to take a good, hard, long look at himself. While he was not literally gazing at and grappling with his reflection, this dance nonetheless accomplishes the same thing as "Alter Ego" on a more figurative level. Whether with the use of trick photography and complicated camera ploys, or with a basic set of skates, Kelly's dancing was always inward-looking. His discursive performances, such as "Dancing: A Man's Game" always looked outwards, like David Riesman's *other-directed* men, ever vigilant about guarding his reputation and defending his masculinity. But his celluloid dancing was far more *inner-directed*, and in that sense far more authentic, because he felt free enough to shuck such anxiety in favor of sheer joy, fun, and play. Sometimes his dancing celebrated male bonds, and sometimes his dances bordered on the homoerotic and campy. But in all cases, his cine-dancing was a better expression of his inner self than any public statement could capture.

In the end, Kelly used technology and middlebrow art to protect himself against attacks on his manhood while simultaneously circumventing even his own gender expectations. Though he consistently employed a dancing style that showcased his athletic

⁸⁰ In his youth, Kelly and older brother Fred danced on skates. Earl Wilson, "Gene Kelly Resents Sissy Idea," *Lawrence Daily Journal-World* (Lawrence, Kansas), 8 January 1957, 6.

abilities and muscular power, he could afford greater fluidity in his cine-dances than in his *language* on dance. He could cross gender lines, be a child, or celebrate overblown masculinity in his celluloid spectacles. His usual concern over personal attacks, so prominent in his speeches and interviews, seemed to melt away when he danced, suggesting how cine-dances were safe spaces for him. His lack of anxiety on-screen, particularly when juxtaposed to his linguistic performances off-screen, points to the ways in which dance was a release for him, and could be a release for countless other Americans.

On the surface Kelly's dancing might appear wholly conventional. But if we dig deeper and compare those celluloid moments to his public discourses, we can begin to see how cinematic dancing fits into a broader story of cultural rebellion in the postwar period. While Kelly relied on the conventions and traditions of musical comedy, unlike rebel artists such as Jackson Pollock or Allen Ginsberg, he nonetheless proved to be a model of resistance. His dances demonstrated some of the ways American audiences could use art to express themselves safely against mainstream norms. Of course, Kelly could not completely break away from the anxieties of postwar life; the Red Scare and widespread homophobia cast an undeniable shadow over his career, constricting the latitude necessary in creating his art. But when he stepped in front of the camera and began kicking his legs, those anxieties dissolved. If dance, and art in general, provided a degree of abandon for him, imagine what it could do for countless others.

Chapter 3

“In-Between”: Judy Garland and the Nostalgia of Failed Femininity

On 6 August 1950, the *New York Times* ran its usual Hollywood gossip column dishing out all of the latest industry affairs. The third item down was a three-paragraph description of “Metro’s Dilemma,” in which Thomas F. Brady outlined Judy Garland’s troubled status at MGM. Though she was immensely popular at the box office, studio executives disapproved of her difficult behavior on the sets of films, which since 1945 had consistently resulted in production delays and additional costs. Brady reported that, in a bold and somewhat unusual move, MGM had decided to suspend Garland temporarily without pay. The following month, on 28 September, her long-term contract would be severed.¹

What made this report all the more remarkable was the seemingly unrelated picture that ran next to it—a still from Billie Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard*. The picture captured the concluding moments of Wilder’s creepy and self-reflexive homage to the glory and decay of Hollywood glamour and power—former silent film star Norma Desmond (portrayed by former silent film star Gloria Swanson) awaiting her final close-up as the police prepare to lead her out of her house, media swarming around her. The headline above the photograph

A version of this chapter was presented at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro’s “Creative Action: Gender and the Arts” Conference on 30 March 2006.

¹ Thomas F. Brady, “Hollywood Agenda: Employment Figures Indicate Economies Have Reached Base Level—Other Items,” *New York Times*, 6 August 1950, X3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

encapsulated the moment succinctly: “Final Dramatic Flourish in the Life of a Faded Star.” The film was to be released in September, the same time as Garland’s final MGM musical, *Summer Stock*, was schedule for nationwide exhibition.²

The likeness between the fictive and real-life fading stars could not be more clear. Desmond had long since drifted into obscurity, unable to adjust to the “talkies.” Unwilling to face the harsh reality that her career was over, never to be resurrected, she instead retreated to her crumbling mansion, where she watched her old movies, entertained other nameless silent film stars, responded to fake fan mail her butler and former husband forged, and prepared for a comeback that would never come to fruition. Her rich fantasy life enveloped her, suffocating those around her. And when reality came crashing down, in the form of Joe Gillis (William Holden), her only method of coping was to shoot him.³

Garland (1922-1969), though something of a relic of Hollywood’s past, was nonetheless still at the top of her profession when she was fired in 1950.⁴ But despite the enduring box office success she had enjoyed since 1939, she could not keep from self-destructing, much like Desmond. More importantly, she had nearly as much trouble as Desmond distinguishing between reality and fantasy; the studio, which shaped all aspects of her publicity, had been constructing on- and off-screen personae for her since she arrived at

² “Box Office Champions for September, 1950” (unidentifiable clipping, but most likely from *Motion Picture Herald*), JPC, Folder: “Summer Stock (Folder 2 of 2) (Grosses/Financial Info).”

³ Lois Banner, “A Perverse Tribute to Hollywood’s Past: *Sunset Boulevard*,” in *Hollywood’s America: United States History Through Its Films*, eds. Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts (St. James, New York: Brandywine Press, 1993), 203-209. *Sunset Boulevard*, Produced by Charles Brackett, Directed by Billy Wilder, Black and White, 110 min., Paramount, 1950, Videocassette, MRC.

⁴ According to biographer David Shipman, a 1945 Gallup poll found that she was Hollywood’s third most popular star, while Motion Picture Yearbook placed in a tie for sixth place in their ballot. David Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), 181. The *New York Times* reported that Motion Picture Herald, one of the major trade journals in Hollywood geared to film exhibitors, listed her as eighth in the top ten money-ranking stars. “Bing Crosby Again Box-Office Leader,” *New York Times*, 28 December 1945, 21, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

the Culver City lot as a child of thirteen in 1935. She would frequently become confused about her true identity, which could never quite live up to the image MGM tried to project for her.

Unable or unwilling to be what the studio wanted her to be, both on- and off-camera, Garland tried to voice her own identity. During her tenure at MGM, executives maintained an unyielding grip over her voice and body, controlling her performances and constricting her every movement. Her lack of power at the studio forced her to find indirect forms of resistance. Unlike Gene Kelly, who enjoyed immense freedom in the Freed Unit, Garland was trapped under contracts first signed as a young girl. Because she had come to MGM as a child, a child forced to grow up under the camera's prying eye, she was unable to ever fully break away and assert her own star power, at least not in a traditional sort of way.⁵ While Kelly would take the reins on a project and inject his own choreography, or insist on directing his films, Garland was resigned to fight back in small ways—by being sick, by refusing to show up, by pressuring executives to replace directors with whom she clashed. Although such behavior was visible from her earliest days at Metro, it was not until the postwar period that the now-adult actress's actions became a constant source of consternation for executives and producers, who had suspended her from three projects between 1948 and 1950.⁶ After fifteen years in front of the cameras, Garland retreated, unhealthy, tired, and seemingly in defeat.

⁵ Thomas F. Brady, "Hollywood Wire: Judy Garland Bids an Amiable Farewell To Metro-Gene Autry vs. Showmen," *New York Times*, 8 October 1950, X5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶ *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), suspended 17 July 1948; *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950), suspended 10 May 1949; and *Royal Wedding* (1951), suspended 17 June 1950. For an overview of Garland's behavior on various sets, see Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, Chapter 9 and Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, *passim*, HOHP, OH 112. Hugh Fordin only makes mention of Garland's extended absences due to illnesses, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals: The Arthur Freed Unit*, originally published: *The World*

The tumultuous story of Garland's success and ultimate failure at MGM is not simply a story about an awkward child's rocky transition to adult stardom. It is also a story about a working woman in Hollywood—a woman struggling to assert her femininity in an era when its very definition was in flux. The limits to her modes of resistance extended far deeper than her position at the studio down to her very gendered identity. As a rather unconventional woman, she always seemed to fall a little short of gender ideals, a failure which was reflected in her celluloid work. Neither looking nor acting quite like a woman was expected, the studio crafted roles for the actress that *appeared* to be women, relying on the spectacle of nineteenth-century nostalgia to enforce its vision of femininity. Unable and unwilling to embody this picture of traditional womanhood, Garland's performances represented challenges to hegemonic gender constructions. Even though she lacked creative control over her on-screen work, she nonetheless managed to create ironic and self-parodying fissures in her performances that often undermined the image of femininity MGM imposed upon her.

As one of Hollywood's leading actresses, and undoubtedly the most talented and popular song-and-dance lady of the big screen, Judy Garland's postwar career serves as a window into larger questions about gender and femininity in an era when the popular press and experts alike championed domesticity.⁷ As she struggled to be a successful actress by day and well-kept housewife and mother by night, she crumbled under the pressure of all three demands, but never without putting up a fight and carving out small victories for herself.

of *Entertainment! Hollywood's Greatest Musicals* (New York: Doubleday, 1975; reprint n.p.: Da Capo Press, 1996), 161-62, 246-51, 271-78.

⁷ David Shipman describes Garland as “the most talented singer-actress in Hollywood history,” in *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 253.

In-Between Child Actor and Adult Star

From the day she arrived on the Culver City lot in 1935 to her final departure in 1950, Judy Garland was constantly under the arm of older men. Whether studio head L.B. Mayer, publicity head Howard Strickling, producer Arthur Freed, music arranger and composer Roger Edens, or her second husband and director Vincente Minnelli, these men guided, tempered, and in some instances restricted her movements.⁸ In part she sought this, as a child star whose father had passed away early in her career. Biographer David Shipman argues that her reliance on and often willing submission to older men was a major component of her personality.⁹ The trajectory of her career—the difficulties and attempts she made to transition from child to adult, both as a star and in her private life—shaped the power she wielded but also lacked while working at MGM.

Arriving at the studio as a preteen, and not appearing in any major films for several years, Garland certainly found herself in an odd place at MGM. Lumped in with the other child actors, she attended school with the likes of Mickey Rooney, Lana Turner, and Jackie Cooper while waiting for studio executives to figure out how to best make use of the talents of “a somewhat plump and almost completely unknown little girl.”¹⁰ When she finally began making films regularly, she always played young girls, complete with frilly dresses and ankle socks.¹¹ Indeed, it was not until 1942, three years after *The Wizard of Oz* catapulted her into

⁸ The one notable exception to this is the hold Garland’s mother, Ethel Gumm, held over the star while at MGM, See Gerald Clarke, *Get Happy: The Life of Judy Garland* (New York: Random House, 2000).

⁹ Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 104-5, 159.

¹⁰ “There’s a Song for Every High Spot in Judy’s Career,” M-G-M Press Book for *Easter Parade* (1948), 10, PBC, no folder.

¹¹ *American Masters: Judy Garland: By Myself*, Produced and directed by Susan Lacy, Color, 114 min, Thirteen/WNET New York (PBS), 2004, DVD, Author’s Collection. Included in the two-disc special edition of *Easter Parade*.

major stardom, that she began to transition to adult roles with *For Me and My Gal*.¹²

Garland desired to be seen as more than just a novelty act or girl-child.¹³ She wanted to be a glamorous woman, a true starlet like Greta Garbo. But her appearance—her “baby face” and “pudgy body”—hardly conformed to prevailing beauty standards of the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁴ As Garland herself later recalled: “In the movies beauty was the standard of judgment and definitely I didn’t have it and so I began to dislike the me I saw reflected in my mirror, especially when I compared myself to the real beauties on the lot, like Lana Turner, for instance.”¹⁵ Stuck in the body of what she perceived to be an over-weight and unattractive girl, a body L. B. Mayer jokingly referred to as his “little hunchback,” Garland had only her voice to carry her.¹⁶

That voice was one of the most unique and powerful voices, female or otherwise, of the twentieth century. Even as a child, she sophisticatedly manipulated her voice as the youthful champion of swing.¹⁷ Her vocal signature—her velvety depth, her timing and

¹² *For Me and My Gal* was the first picture in which her name appeared alone above the title in the opening credits. Many critics and scholars consider *The Wizard of Oz* to be Garland’s breakout role. The studio, too, recognized the importance of this film for her career. “Judy Garland Celebrates 15th Year in Films Doing ‘Farm Chores’ on Set,” M-G-M Press Book for *Summer Stock* (1950), 3, PBC, no folder.

¹³ See, e.g. Liza Minnelli’s narration in *That’s Entertainment!*, Produced and Directed by Jack Haley, Jr., Color, 131 Min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1974, Videocassette, Author’s Collection.

¹⁴ Holly Gillian Kindel, “Judy Garland: Stardom, Resistance and the American Film Musical” (M.A. Thesis, San Francisco State University, 1997), 15.

¹⁵ This quotation was performed in voice-over by an actress, *Judy Garland: By Myself*. Shipman pays considerable attention to Garland’s feelings of inadequacy as a beauty in his biography, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*.

¹⁶ Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 75.

¹⁷ In her first MGM short, “Every Sunday Afternoon,” Garland performed with the studio’s other youthful singer Deanna Durbin. The two represented opposing vocal styles—Garland popular swing and Durbin opera. While Durbin was initially thought to have greater star potential, MGM ultimately dropped her contract and built up Garland. “‘Summer Stock’ is 27th Musical for Judy,” M-G-M Press Book for *Summer Stock* (1950), 5, PBC, no folder. Deanna Durbin, MGM’s original hope for the next great child star to rival Shirley Temple, was snatched up by Universal Studios after her contract at Metro lapsed. Her career never came close to Garland’s; she is often little more than a footnote in histories of MGM, as in the case of Crowther’s *The Lion’s Share*, 255.

syncopation, “her unique plaintive quality”—was seen as natural.¹⁸ Indeed, her vocal arranger Rogers Edens remarked of her singing abilities: “Her talent was inborn. She had the perfect anatomy for a singer, built round a superb muscle of a diaphragm. She had a wonderful memory. What could I teach her? How to sing a lyric? How to get the meaning across?” He was not the only one to approach her talent as “inborn” or “natural.” Lyricist E. Y. “Yip” Harburg, who wrote “Over the Rainbow,” evoked Garland’s “ability to project a song and a voice that penetrated your insides ... She was the most unusual voice in the first half of this century. When she started, Judy was the greatest. As a child, she sang with all the naturalness and clarity of a child.”¹⁹ And one documentary described her performance in *The Wizard of Oz* in a similar fashion: “Judy had the ability to believe herself into a role, an inexplicable gift that gave Dorothy universality and made Judy Garland an icon.”²⁰

These descriptions are problematic because they undermine, mystify, and obscure the hours of training and rehearsal necessary to perfect her craft, much of which Edens directed. But such constructions were not uncommon, particularly with respect to African-American singers and dancers, whose talent was often depicted as uncultivated, natural, and—by implication— savage, primitive, and raw.²¹ Indeed, many critics have identified her

Theoretical works on musicals emphasize Durbin far more, as in the case of Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), Chapter 3: “The Celebration of Popular Song.”

¹⁸ “There’s a Song for Every High Spot in Judy’s Career,” M-G-M Press Book for *Easter Parade* (1948), 10, PBC, no folder.

¹⁹ Quoted in Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 55, 84.

²⁰ *Judy Garland: By Myself*. For yet another account of Garland’s “natural” abilities, see “Joe Pasternak Produces Those Top M-G-M Musicals and Encourages Young Talent to Hitch Its Wagon to a Star,” M-G-M Press Book for *Summer Stock* (1950), 5, PBC, no folder; and “Judy Masters Harp Technique,” M-G-M Press Book for *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949), 2, PBC, no folder.

²¹ Such racial constructions can be considered an extension of antebellum racial attitudes. Many cultural historians delineate such a construction, particularly as a gendered notion, well into the twentieth century. See, e.g., Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle*,

particular signature as a form of “vocal blackface” in which her “singing style ... consistently mined musical forms and practices that register in the racial logic of mass culture as ‘black.’”²² Failing to attribute Garland’s singing—the heart of her stardom—to the hard work she endured at the studio denied the many ways in which she found herself at the mercy of men such as Edens and producer Arthur Freed, for whom she labored almost exclusively in the postwar period.

When Roger Edens first met little Frances Gumm, who was yet to become Judy Garland, he was struck by the power of her voice, an adult’s voice trapped in a child’s body.²³ He immediately took her under his wing, training her voice and creating arrangements of popular songs specifically suited to her unique instrument. He was, in every sense, her first and most important mentor at the studio (though Mayer was perhaps her greatest champion, even at the end of her film career). Her singing, now mythic, can largely be attributed to him; indeed, she would not fully find her own voice until leaving Edens’ influence at MGM behind, as Chapter Four discusses. Under his guidance, she took MGM and Hollywood by storm when she sang “Dear Mr. Gable,” which Edens had written as an

Sexualities (London: Routledge, 1995); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), Chapter 3: “‘Still a Wild Beast at Heart’: Edgar Rice Burroughs and the Dream of *Tarzan*.”

²² Brian Currid, “Judy Garland’s American Drag,” *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 46, no. 1 (2001): 129. See also Brian Currid, “‘Ain’t I People?’: Voicing National Fantasy,” in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, eds. Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 113-144; and David Artis, “Swing, Judy Garland and All That Jazz,” *The Black Scholar* 21, no. 4 (1991): 30-34.

²³ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 179; and *Judy Garland: By Myself*.

introduction to “You Made Me Love You (I Didn’t Want To Do It).” She performed this at Clark Gable’s private birthday party and later immortalized it in *Broadway Melody of 1938*.²⁴

That same year, Edens wrote “In-Between” for Garland to sing in *Love Finds Andy Hardy*, one of her many films with Mickey Rooney.²⁵ This song captured the very dilemma in which Garland found herself as an awkward teenage star. She yearned to be a pin-up beauty like rival Lana Turner, who was only one year younger, but met with a disappointment that haunted her throughout her life. In a prescient way, Edens’ lyrics presaged the uniquely liminal place Garland occupied in the studio—a full-fledged star in her own right but one without much actual power:

Fifteen thousand times a day I hear a voice within me say,
Hide yourself behind a screen,
You shouldn’t be heard,
You shouldn’t be seen,
You’re just an awful In-Between.
That’s what I am,
An In-Between,
It’s just like small pox quarantine,
I can’t do this,
I can’t go there,
I’m just a circle in a square,
*I don’t fit in anywhere.**

* Italicized lyrics were cut out of the film version.

I’m past the stage of doll and carriage,
I’m not the age to think of marriage,
I’m too old for toys and too young for boys,
I’m just an In-Between.

²⁴ “There’s a Song for Every High Spot in Judy’s Career,” M-G-M Press Book for *Easter Parade* (1948), 10, PBC, no folder. Edens’ role as a Svengali-like figure in her career parallels a common theme in her (and others’) musical pictures, such as *Easter Parade* (1948) and *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), which was initially intended as a vehicle for her and Astaire before she was replaced with Ginger Rogers. For more on the mentor, or in Freudian terms parental, dynamic in such films, see Dennis Giles, “Show-making,” in *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman (London: BFI, 1981), 85-101. For more on Edens’ relationship to Garland, see Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend* and Clarke, *Get Happy*.

²⁵ She and Rooney starred together in two types of MGM musicals the late 1930s and early 1940s: the Andy Hardy series in which she played Betsy Booth, Hardy’s girl-Friday pal, and Busby Berkeley’s “let’s put on a show” series beginning with *Babes in Arms* (1939).

I'm not a child,
All children bore me,
I'm not grown up
Grown-ups ignore me,
And in ev'ry sense I'm just on a fence,
I'm just an In-Between.

I'll be glad when mama lets me got to dances
And have romances
I'll be glad to have a party dress that boys will adore,
A dress that touches the floor.
I'm sick and tired of bedtime stories,
I'm so inspired by love and glories
But I guess it's no use,
I still get Mother Goose
I'm just an In-Between.²⁶

It's such an imposition,
For a girl who's got ambition
To be an In-Between.

I'll be glad when Uncle Jim can't call me precious child,
That simply drives me wild.
I'll be glad to have a date that doesn't grow on a tree,
A date that's not history.
I'll be so glad when I have grown some,
All by myself I get so lonesome.
And I hope and pray for the day
When I'll be sweet sixteen.
Then I won't have to be an In-Between.²⁷

At first glance, this song is about Garland's desire to be a grown-up woman. It represents the odd but unique qualities of a voice that did not quite fit the body of a child, but also did not

²⁶ "In-Between," words and music by Roger Edens (1938). Reprinted in David C. Olsen, ed., *Songs of Judy Garland*, volume 1 (Hialeah, Florida: Columbia Pictures Publications, 1984), 12-15.

²⁷ These last two verses are not part of the original published lyrics, but Garland sang them in the film. *Love Finds Andy Hardy*, Directed by George B. Seitz, Black and white, 82 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1938, Videocassette, MRC (no producer listed in titles).

quite match the popular stylizations of the day.²⁸ In the film, Garland (Betsy Booth) sings this tune when she realizes Andy Hardy (Mickey Rooney) sees her as a mere child lacking any romantic possibilities. According to Holly Gillian Kindel, Betsy sings this to vent her frustration, paralleling Garland's own vocal sublimation and disappointment.²⁹

But if we read “in-between” the lines, a story about her larger struggles with the studio becomes legible. Because she was only thirteen when she came to MGM, she was granted much less freedom than an adult star of Gene Kelly's caliber enjoyed. Though federal child labor laws at least nominally protected her, enforcement was another story. Hollywood columnist Louella O. Parsons later denied that Garland had been abused as a child, noting that, “Child actresses on the motion picture lots are sent to school and permitted by the courts to work only a certain number of hours.”³⁰ Indeed, Garland did attend school on the studio lot during her first two years at MGM. By the time she began to work regularly, she was sixteen, and thus protective child labor laws no longer applied.³¹ In the late 1930s, she would frequently work on two movies at a time—filming one by day and rehearsing the second by night.³²

Beyond regimenting all aspects of her time, studio executives also controlled her entire body, from her diet—clear soup and cottage cheese—to her movements within and beyond the studio walls, as “In-Between” lamented: “I can't do this, I can't go there, I'm just

²⁸ MGM later conceded that “the selection of songs made for Judy during these years didn't always sit well with the youngster, however, who now was beginning to feel grown-up.” “There's a Song for Every High Spot in Judy's Career,” M-G-M Press Book for *Easter Parade* (1948), 10, PBC, no folder.

²⁹ Kindel, *Judy Garland: Stardom, Resistance and The American Film Musical*, 18-24.

³⁰ Louella O. Parsons, “The Only Hope,” *Photoplay Magazine* (September 1950): 75.

³¹ The Fair Labor Standards Act (1938) only limited working hours and demanded education for children under the age of sixteen.

³² Clarke, *Get Happy*, 137, 143; and Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 74.

a circle in a square, I don't fit in anywhere."³³ The studio's stifling grip began with her mother Ethel and extended through the publicity department's web of spies who befriended Garland and then reported on her youthful transgressions, no matter how minor.³⁴ The rising star acted out any way she could—by sneaking off the lot or smuggling ice cream sundaes into her dressing room.³⁵ Indeed, so great was her desire to break free that, in 1941 at the age of nineteen, she secretly eloped with musician David Rose against Mayer's wishes—"It was Judy's declaration of independence," a way "to escape from Mayer and her mother," and the act that spurred one of her first roles as an adult.³⁶

Ultimately, however, the studio managed to keep her in line. Even after her elopement to Rose, "MGM still regarded me as their personal property," and she therefore was not allowed to have a life—or a family of her own—beyond her mother's probing influence.³⁷ The studio felt she was "past the stage of doll and carriage" but not quite ready "to think of marriage." Metro felt that Garland's marriage would hurt her rise to stardom, particularly if she were to get pregnant, because she would no longer be able to portray the sort of juvenile characters for which she was typically known. "The wedding ring she refused to remove during filming provided a minor headache; a studio craftsmen could add a device to disguise it: but pregnancy was something else again," Shipman recounts. "There

³³ Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 75.

³⁴ For an excellent account of MGM's Publicity Department, including their treatment of Garland, see E. J. Fleming, *The Fixers: Eddie Mannix, Howard Strickling and the MGM Publicity Machine* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2005).

³⁵ Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 75.

³⁶ Arguably, her first "adult role" was as the dual characters of deceased mother and her daughter in *Little Nellie Kelly* (1940), though she only portrays the adult mother briefly. *Judy Garland: By Myself*. See also Shipman, 127.

³⁷ *Judy Garland: By Myself*.

was general agreement that a baby would disrupt her work and finish off her youthful image,” and so, in 1942 the studio arranged for her first of several illegal abortions.³⁸

MGM’s control over her body was utterly complete. To keep her weight down and her energy level high enough for the grueling hours of work, studio doctors started her early on a low calorie diet supplemented alternatively with amphetamines and narcotics to ensure that she was working and sleeping according to their timetable. Common practice among the studios in this era, not even her mother Ethel thought this was wrong or dangerous. But unlike so many other female stars forced to rely on drugs, Garland’s adolescent use of pills quickly became an addiction, one which resulted in cycles of depression to which she turned to alcohol to cope and escape.³⁹

Despite attempting to assert her own desires, even after becoming a star, Garland could never fully break away from the tight grip of studio executives. That is not to suggest that Garland was totally powerless at the lot. Indeed, she was one of MGM’s most prized stars because of her immense and consistent box office success since *The Wizard of Oz*. She had one of the highest salaries in Hollywood by 1948; at \$300,342 plus benefits, she earned close to Bette Davis, who was the top-earning Hollywood star that year. Moreover, Garland’s salary was not even two hundred dollars less than Louis B. Mayer’s if one does not count bonuses, profit sharing, and retirement funds.⁴⁰ Beyond income, Garland enjoyed a degree of clout at the studio, though it was never as absolute as Kelly’s. Star vehicles were frequently designed for her as a way to further cash in on her success. She could, when she

³⁸ Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 127-128.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

⁴⁰ “Louis Mayer Tops All Film Salaries,” *New York Times*, 14 January 1948, 28, ProQuest Historical Newspapers..

wanted to, influence the selection or dismissal of a director. Typically she enacted such power indirectly through temperamental behavior on the set, as when she flared up against director Fred Zinnemann during the filming the non-musical *The Clock* (1945) before she finally “demanded that he be removed from the picture, but not before Zinnemann himself had offered his resignation.” On a smaller scale, Garland possessed a degree of costume control in her latter days at MGM.⁴¹ But most importantly, she maintained a modicum of power over her performances. She often refused to rehearse, which potentially undermined the creative visions of her producers, directors, music arrangers, and choreographers.

Ultimately, though, Garland operated within a very limited range of rebellious possibilities. Ironically the addictions the studio spawned became the very root of her trouble on the lot. On one level she was literally too sick to arrive on time, perform on cue, and stick to the demanding schedule of rehearsals, recordings, and filming. On the set of *The Barkleys of Broadway*, for instance, unit manager Hugh Boswell documented all of her absences during pre-production. Between 14 June 1948, when she began rehearsals, and 17 July, when she was replaced, the actress notified the studio on eight separate occasions that she would not be able to show up for work due to illness.⁴² Within seven days of her final absence, and only two days after she was officially dismissed from the picture, Ginger Rogers signed with MGM to take over the part; the minor delay stemmed from contract negotiations with Rogers’ agent.⁴³ While illnesses and other production delays were to be

⁴¹ Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 165, 174, 250.

⁴² Hugh Boswell to Fred Datig, et al., Inter-office communications, 22 June 1948, 30 June 1948, 6 July 1948, 8 July 1948, 10 July 1948, 12 July 1948, AFC, Box 4, Folder: “The Barkleys of Broadway Folder 1 (1 of 2)” and Hugh Boswell to Mr. Freed and Mr. Ryan, Inter-office communication, 12 July 1948, AFC, Box 54, Folder: “The Barkleys of Broadway (Folder 1 of 3).”

⁴³ F. L. Hendrickson to L. K. Sidney, Inter-office communication, 27 August 1948, AFC, Box 4, Folder: “The Barkleys of Broadway Folder 1 (1 of 2).”

expected, the focus of documentation on Garland alone was striking; seemingly the studio was bracing itself for a repeat of previous difficulties, and looked to track the problem in order to nip it in the bud. The rapidity with which Garland was replaced by a non-contracted player suggests that producer Arthur Freed, long wary of Garland's erratic behavior, had been preparing a back-up plan during the earliest stages of production.

But beyond her addictions and illnesses, whether real or feigned, Garland's temper, absenteeism, and often unruly behavior at the studio might also have been her only way of fighting a system that claimed near total power over her. When taken on an individual, case-by-case basis, it seems that she was merely an unreliable worker. But when considered together, her tiny actions become symbols of defiance, no different from other marginal people enacting resistance through small victories. Garland's actions, to borrow from feminist scholar-poet Adrienne Rich, was "behavior which often constitutes, given the limits of the counterforce exerted in a given time and place, radical rebellion."⁴⁴

Garland's conduct was not necessarily viewed as purposefully rebellious at the time. Just as she was being released from her contract in September 1950, Hollywood gossip columnist Louella O. Parsons published a sympathetic yet sordid article detailing Garland's various problems at MGM. In rather damning language, Parsons denied the studio's

⁴⁴ Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 652. I further follow the lead of historians such as Eugene D. Genovese, who locates slave resistance and rebellion in everyday life and culture. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972). Ann Douglas Wood notes how many nineteenth-century women were thought to use illness as an escape from the duties of the domestic sphere, " 'The Fashionable Diseases': Women's Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* IV, no. 1 (Summer 1973): 34. Several historians emphasize the connection between alcohol/drug use, particularly in the post-WWII era, with a desire to escape, if not wholly rebel, from social roles. See, e.g., Lori Rotskoff, *Love on the Rocks: Men, Women, and Alcohol in Post-World War II America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), particularly Chapter 5: "Drink and Domesticity in Postwar America." There is, as well, some work on female bohemians/beats-as-rebels, such as Wini Breines, "The 'Other' Fifties: Beats and Bad Girls," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 382-408.

complicity in the star's demise, instead suggesting that the actress herself was to blame—a “victim of her sensationally successful career” who could “no longer control herself.” The journalist refused to acknowledge the myriad ways MGM had exploited their prized singer.⁴⁵ Of course the studio was not the villain Garland claimed, nor was she a helpless innocent. But it is no less accurate to depict Garland as a self-destructing star burning out despite the studio's best efforts to provide her with therapy and rests in sanatoriums. The real story, in truth, rests somewhere “in-between.”

Garland's powerless position at MGM, and her attempts to assert her own voice, spoke to larger problems American women faced in the postwar period. In 1963 Betty Friedan argued that women of the fifties suffered from the “problem that has no name”—the stifling life of the American housewife, whose potential had been squashed in her suburban consumerist lifestyle. Rather than identify their boredom, frustration, and depression as structural, housewives across the nation “suffered from it alone,” resorting to dulling their senses, either through alcohol and drugs, or by some other private coping mechanism.⁴⁶ Historians have long-since revised Friedan's notion of the feminine mystique, demonstrating how the domestic ideal did not apply to women of color, lower-class women, and professional women, many of whom were celebrated in mainstream women's magazines.⁴⁷ While Garland was a star, she too lacked the language to articulate her problems, and had a very narrow range of options for managing her powerlessness.

⁴⁵ Louella O. Parsons, “The Only Hope,” *Photoplay Magazine* (September 1950): 75, 76.

⁴⁶ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963; reprint, New York, Laurel/Dell, 1983), 15 (page citations are to the reprint edition). See also Rotskoff, *Love on the Rocks*.

⁴⁷ Joanne Meyerowitz has led the way in revising Friedan's thesis. “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958,” *Journal of American History* 79, no. 4 (March 1993): 1455-1482.

“Too much bloom”: The Spectacle of Failed Femininity

Judy Garland’s peculiar status as a child-turned-adult star (one of a few who successfully managed the transition) is all the more noteworthy when we consider the longing she expressed to be a woman. “In-Between” presents her almost as an ungendered voice: “I’m past the stage of doll and carriage, I’m not the age to think of marriage, I’m too old for toys and too young for boys.” No longer a child, but certainly not a woman, this song, as much as anything else in Garland’s film career, renders visible the studio’s construction of her womanhood. Positioned cinematically as somehow pre-sexual but also feminine (just as Gene Kelly’s childish clowning antics contrasted with the hyper-masculine image he simultaneously tried to project), Garland’s *in-between-ness* prevented her from embodying any single feminine image. Stuck between various postwar constructs well after reaching adulthood, Garland could not fully live up to any one expectation.

Whether on or off the screen, Garland always seemed to fall short of the ideal woman. In her personal life, she was a rather unsuccessful wife (she was married five times), mother, and homemaker, despite the studio’s best efforts to publicize her as all three. Yet, as an employed woman who defied the postwar domestic ideal, her labor was consistently obscured when critics and colleagues naturalized her abilities. Every time Roger Edens spoke of her innate vocal abilities, for instance, he reduced her efforts to raw talent and thereby undermined her identity as a career woman. On screen, the females she played similarly defied neat categorization. They were either too bold or too androgynous to be unquestioningly feminine.

Her celluloid work complicated these not-quite-fully-female characters. Garland’s performances were always and constantly mediated through others, from her two most

frequent postwar choreographers, Robert Alton and Charles Walters, to Edens' musical direction.⁴⁸ There always seemed to be a struggle in her screen performances—a struggle to try to assert her own personality, voice, and identity—against the powerful visions of her various directors. When Kelly danced, layers of social convention seemed to melt away. He had the freedom to let go of postwar anxieties and be playful. But it was never that simple for Garland. Because she lacked the kind of total creative control Kelly had won by 1949, she could not use her performances as expressions of release. Rather, her performances reveal the power struggles—both literal and figurative—in which she engaged every day at Metro. There are fissures in her screen work, moments where we can see her resisting social conventions just as she rebelled when the cameras were turned off. Often these moments would appear as self-parody, sarcasm, or perhaps even a self-distancing irony that has since been credited as the source of her campness (and hence her dominance as a gay icon to this day).⁴⁹ The conflicts embedded within her performances underscored her attempts—and frequent failures—to be a woman in her own right.

Of course, there was no single feminine type in the postwar period, though certainly there was an ideal—the retrenched Rosie the Riveter-turned-June Cleaver homemaker. While earlier accounts of 1950s gender labeled this as the hegemonic image promoted in television, movies, and women's magazines, more recent scholarship has debunked this myth. Like masculinity, postwar femininity was in a state of flux, a collection of competing,

⁴⁸ According to Shipman, Alton and Walters were long-term lovers. *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 137.

⁴⁹ Perhaps not coincidentally, Garland's funeral occurred the same month as the Stonewall Riots, which many attribute as the origins of the Gay Liberation Movement. See Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 193n 2. Jane Feuer similarly explores Garland's gay iconography in *The Hollywood Musical*, Chapter 6: "A Postscript for the Nineties." See also Currid, "Judy Garland's American Drag."

and often contradictory, ideals.⁵⁰ More women, and more young mothers, worked for pay in the postwar era than ever before, partly fueled by patriotic consumption, the cultural component to the early Cold War which Vice President Richard Nixon epitomized in his Kitchen Debate with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1959.⁵¹

American women, like their male counterparts, were confused and ambivalent about the social roles they were expected to assume. Many resented being forced out of the jobs they had held during wartime. Others, who had used the wartime emergency as a chance to gain access to education, now were uncertain how and where to apply their knowledge. Still others probably felt guilty for having to leave their children to take jobs outside the home, which media and experts warned was a leading cause of juvenile delinquency.⁵² Of course, a mother who was too involved, too stifling, was equally condemned for what Philip Wylie

⁵⁰ On media depictions of femininity, see Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique;" Nina C. Leibman, *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); Jackie Byars, *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988); and Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham: NC, Duke University Press, 2001); Joel Foreman, ed., *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); and Nancy A. Walker, ed., *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1998).

⁵¹ For more on the revision of 1950s femininity, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *NOT June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1994); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992, 2000); Arlene Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise: The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Jessica Weiss, *To Have and To Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Peter G. Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); and Eugenia Kaledin, *Mothers and More: American Women in the 1950s* (Boston: Twayne, 1984).

⁵² See also Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin, 2000), Part One: "Refugees from the Fifties," 3-59; Ruth Rosen, "The Female Generation Gap: Daughters of the Fifties and the Origins of Contemporary American Feminism," in *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays*, eds. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 313-334; and *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*, Produced and Directed by Connie Field, Color and black and white, 65 min., Clarity Productions, 1980/Direct Cinema Ltd., 1987, Videocassette, MRC.

labeled “momism,” which was linked to the raising of feeble children who could be easily manipulated, blackmailed, or brainwashed.⁵³ Though unusual in her stardom, Judy Garland struggled like other women with these contradictory pulls, just as confused about what sort of woman she ought to be.

First and foremost, she defined herself as a *working* actress who was hard pressed to see herself as anything but employed. For all of her absenteeism, suicide threats, nervous collapses, and blow-ups on the set, she was still a working girl. “Far from being *forced* back to work against her will,” Louella Parsons reported in *Photoplay Magazine*, “she was actually begging M-G-M to put her to work. ‘I’ve worked all my life,’ she pleaded with them. ‘I’m restless being idle.’”⁵⁴ Indeed, her departure from MGM did not spell the end of her career. She continued to make movies for other studios, most notably her dramatic cameo in *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961) and her attempted musical comeback in *A Star is Born* (1954). Further, she parlayed her earlier successes at MGM into a booming concert career both abroad and throughout the United States that would continue until her death in 1969. In many ways, her concert performances helped solidify her position as a cultural icon well beyond her film career.⁵⁵

But as a working woman, she never felt complete, always craving something more, perhaps because she and countless other women were told that a career was not enough. This longing was perhaps compounded by the fact that she did not have a “normal” childhood. Never feeling like a real woman, she grabbed out for anything that would help her to feel otherwise, whether that be a husband, a lover, a home, or a child. Even from birth, she fell

⁵³ Philip Wylie, *A Generation of Vipers*, Newly annotated by author (New York: Rhinehart and Co., 1955).

⁵⁴ Louella O. Parsons, “The Only Hope,” *Photoplay Magazine* (September 1950): 76.

⁵⁵ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 139.

short, since her parents longed for a boy to complete their family of two girls (in fact, Ethel Gumm initially contemplated terminating this final pregnancy). Such feelings of inadequacy, according to biographer David Shipman, haunted the youngest Gumm daughter throughout her lifetime. When Garland first began making pictures at MGM, this inadequacy only grew as she saw herself on the big screen: “I thought I’d look as beautiful as Garbo or Crawford—that makeup and photography would automatically make me glamorous. Then I saw myself on the screen. It was the most awful moment of my life. My freckles stood out. I was *fat*. And my acting was terrible.”⁵⁶ Makeup was supposed to make her beautiful, instead it only seemed to accentuate her flaws.

Her first marriage to David Rose, eleven years her senior, was her attempt not only to wrench free from Metro’s iron grip but also as a way to assert her own womanhood, which she herself questioned.⁵⁷ When that marriage quickly failed she married her director, Vincente Minnelli, with the studio’s reserved blessings, in June of 1945. They had their first child, Liza Minnelli, the following March.⁵⁸ MGM publicists immediately went to work to present Mrs. Minnelli as an ideal wife and mother. “As wife, mother and beach home owner,” MGM proclaimed, “the private side of her life was complete.”⁵⁹ While promoting *The Pirate* (1948), Garland’s third picture under Minnelli’s direction, the studio touted Garland’s success in juggling her career with more traditional feminine pursuits:

⁵⁶ Quoted in Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 61.

⁵⁷ Additionally, many claim that her marriage to Rose was her way of coping after Artie Shaw, with whom she was in love, eloped with rival Lana Turner on their first date. Clarke, *Get Happy*, 127, 147, Chapter 6 *passim*.

⁵⁸ Garland would go on to have two more children, Lorna (1952) and Joseph (1954), with her next and third husband, Sidney Luft, with whom she co-produced *A Star is Born* in 1954.

⁵⁹ “Judy Grew from Talented Child to Talented Screen Celebrity,” M-G-M Press Book for *Easter Parade* (1948), 8, PBC, no folder.

Combining the jobs of wife and mother and a professional career might present difficulties for many girls. The problem has been simplified for Miss Garland. Her husband is a film director ... This means husband Minnelli understands the problems of a girl who is trying her best to make a success out of three careers. If the biscuits at dinner were to be burned a trifle and the potatoes less fluffy than they might be, he isn't likely to complain. He'll know she had to rush like mad to get out of her makeup and costumes at six o'clock in order to get home to the baby. He'll realize she had to let the biscuits and the potatoes suffer rather than little Liza. He won't 'beef' about the fact that she begins her day by romping with the baby at five-thirty in the morning. He'll understand she has to be at the studio by seven.

Interestingly, this studio-generated article tempered Garland's ability to balance "three careers" by presenting the account from Minnelli's perspective, suggesting that, if she did fall short now and again, he would not mind as a fellow Hollywood craftsmen. As this account argues, she was only "successful" as a working wife and mother because she cut corners, blurring the boundaries of her career and private lives. But the article quickly shifted gears, asserting that Garland was, in fact, a proper wife and mother, one who always longed to have a child. "In the Minnelli household, Judy is the chief in all matters pertaining to the kitchen. She plans the menus a week in advance and does all the marketing, using the telephone on days she must be at the studio." The article, and by proxy the studio, triumphantly concluded with its faith in Garland's accomplishments: "To be a successful actress, wife and mother of four [*sic*] children, a girl might have to be a modern miracle worker. Hollywood figures that if any girl can manage it, Judy Garland is the one."⁶⁰

This glowing story of Garland's domestic skills was far from the truth. The actress' infrequent attempts to run Minnelli's kitchen were met with bemusement on the part of his servants, who never took her requests seriously. "It was understood that Minnelli would run

⁶⁰ "Hollywood Labels Judy Garland its new 'Triple-Threat' Star," M-G-M Pressbook for *The Pirate* (1948), 9, PBC, no folder. This same article ran in *The M-G-M Record* 2, no. 88 (4 June 1948), n.p., GKC, Box 8, Scrapbook 5 (1948-1949).

the household as he always had, attending to such details as the food for their dinner parties. Such things were important to him, and while she was capable of ordering a menu, she would have been quite happy to exist on her three favorite foods: eggs in butter, stewed tomatoes and peanut-butter sandwiches,” Shipman admits. “Every so often, she emerged from her lethargy to seize the reins of domesticity, rather as if taking on a new role. Her efforts in this direction were haphazard and short-lived, but typically obsessive.”⁶¹ Ultimately, Minnelli was more the homemaker than Garland, who knew far less than her homosexual husband about art, fashion, and entertaining. The contrast between her real life and the studio accounts are striking, and the incongruity between the two seemed only to confuse her more: “Sometimes you begin to wonder who you really are,” she once brooded.⁶²

The studio, it seemed, was just as confused about how to handle Garland’s publicity. As “a circle in a square” who did not appear to “fit in anywhere,” press for the actress, and her family, remained inconsistent.⁶³ At times promoted as a hard-working career gal, and at other times as the ideal mother, the studio, and Garland herself, could never decide which construction best fit her, perhaps because none did fit her properly. Attempts at projecting her maternal side, for instance, were complicated and often contradictory. Garland was simultaneously shown as a nurturing mother who put childcare above her career, a stage mother who encouraged little Liza into acting, and a woman in competition with her talented child.

⁶¹ Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 193.

⁶² *Judy Garland: By Myself*.

⁶³ It should be noted that by and large M-G-M press books treated male and female stars substantially different. Features on men focused on their career and talent (e.g. Fred Astaire’s magic feet), while articles about women often delved into their private, and very feminine, lives. See, for instance, “Dancing 80% Brain-Work, 2% Footwork, Says Fred Astaire,” M-G-M Pressbook for *Easter Parade* (1948), 7, PBC, no folder.

Promotional materials for *Easter Parade* (1948) emphasized Garland's maternal nature, noting how "her pride as she watches her favorite daughter growing up, pushes everything else into the background. She loves to tell the latest story of her little Liza." Curiously entitled "Judy Grew from Talented Child to Talented Screen Celebrity," this article focused not on Garland's acting and singing abilities, but on her newest role as a mother. This piece, penned by the studio publicity department, concluded with a telling, and most likely fabricated, vignette:

She brought her daughter to the "Easter Parade" set one day when Fred Astaire, Jr., was also a visitor. Seated beside the youngsters, she was busying herself with yarn and needle, starting a new sweater for Liza while waiting for her next scene. Meanwhile, Astaire was in one of his dancing solos before the camera. Freddie, watching his famous father, finally nudged Liza and, pointing to the stage, declared, "That's my dad. He dances!" It took Liza only a moment's consideration to point proudly over to her mother and respond, "That's my mama. She knits!"⁶⁴

It is curious that, for a child who literally grew up at MGM, Liza would not identify and describe her mother as a singer-actress.

As Liza grew up and began demonstrating an interest for show business, Garland's studio-constructed image as an ideal woman became that much more difficult to maintain. Articles vacillated between praising Garland for fostering Liza's talents, which like her mother's were seen as natural and not in need of cultivation, and pitting little Minelli against her mother.⁶⁵ Making her screen debut at less than three years old, playing Garland's daughter in the final scene of *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949), Liza was depicted as

⁶⁴ "Judy Grew from Talented Child to Talented Screen Celebrity," M-G-M Press Book for *Easter Parade* (1948), 8, PBC, no folder.

⁶⁵ One article noted how "Liza has the stuff that stars are made of. [She is] completely self-possessed" and a naturally-good singer," "Judy Garland One Parent Who Won't Impede Daughter's Acting Career," M-G-M Press Book for *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949), 3, PBC, no folder.

eager to become a star like her mother. In an era of rising concern about the links between maternal absenteeism and juvenile delinquency on the one hand, and stifling motherhood on the other, MGM praised Garland for encouraging her daughter's love of acting and singing in an article aptly titled, "Judy Garland One Parent Who Won't Impede Daughter's Acting Career." According to the account, Garland nurtured her daughter's interest in acting. " 'Three careers in one family? Why not?' she says. 'If Liza wants to be an actress, more power to her. I can think of no career that could bring her more satisfaction.' ”⁶⁶

Despite Garland's support of her daughter's budding career, this same article concluded by hinting that Liza was actually a threat to Garland's own star power. As the story went, Garland brought her daughter to the studio for a recording session. Not content to just sit quietly and observe, Liza "took the spotlight and the situation into her own small hands. She left her seat, stood in the center of the recording stage, and gave out with a loud but perfectly keyed rendering of 'The Farmer in the Dell.' All ten verses!"⁶⁷ While understated, the presumption here was that Liza stole the show from Garland, whose own career was beginning to founder due to her bad health, drug addiction, and psychological distress. The studio drove this point home when celebrating how Liza "has beaten her mother's record by three months! Judy made her professional debut as a singer when she was three years old. Daughter Liza makes hers at the age of two-years and nine-months."⁶⁸ But despite "besting her mother's glamour record," publicity executives assured fans that

⁶⁶ "Judy Garland One Parent Who Won't Impede Daughter's Acting Career," M-G-M Press Book for *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949), 3, PBC, no folder.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ "Little Liza Minnelli Makes Auspicious Screen Debut!" (caption), M-G-M Press Book for *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949), 4, PBC, no folder.

Garland “loves it!”⁶⁹ While Garland had spent nearly two decades at MGM longing to be seen as a beauty, with roles to match, ironically, little Minnelli was afforded a glamour label immediately.⁷⁰ This seemed to further emphasize Garland’s failure as a woman—and an actress—who could not even compete, in beauty or talent, with her three-year-old child. That point was driven home when she finally left the studio in September 1950.

In her private life, as much as on screen, she was anything but the picture of the postwar heterosexual woman. As the daughter and wife of closeted homosexuals, Garland adopted a fairly fluid stance to her own romantic relationships.⁷¹ While she craved stable partnerships with male father figures, she neither shied away from lesbian relationships while at MGM nor did she labor particularly hard to hide such fleeting relationships from the rest of Hollywood.⁷² David Shipman describes Garland’s ravenous and wolf-like sexual appetite with women and men alike, which was considered unladylike despite the findings of the Kinsey Report on female sexuality.⁷³

Unlike Kelly, who spent his entire lifetime defending his heterosexual masculinity, Garland never expressed anxiety about her bisexuality, which the studio took great pains to

⁶⁹ “Judy Garland One Parent Who Won’t Impede Daughter’s Acting Career,” M-G-M Press Book for *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949), 3, PBC, no folder.

⁷⁰ “Ballerina,” *Photoplay Magazine* (July 1950): 54-55.

⁷¹ It did not hurt that Garland was a member of the so-called “Fairy Unit” (Arthur Freed’s production team). For more on the Fairy Unit, see Matthew Tinkcom, “Working Like a Homosexual: Camp Visual Codes and the Labor of Gay Subjects in the MGM Freed Unit,” *Cinema Journal* 35, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 24-42; and Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital, Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), Chapter 1: “Working Like a Homosexual: Vincente Minnelli in the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Freed Unit.”

⁷² This was common practice for many homosexuals in Hollywood, though such information was kept out of the press. Rock Hudson, for example, went so far as to marry a woman long enough to appear heterosexual, as well as comply with his studio’s normalizing publicity asserting his heterosexuality. Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), Chapter 7: “The Bachelor in the Bedroom.”

⁷³ Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 136-140. Alfred C. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1953).

cover up, along with her notorious illicit heterosexual affairs.⁷⁴ She could afford to be more at ease because, while lesbianism was demonized in the postwar period, male homosexuality was far more politicized; “soft” masculinity was equated with being soft on Communism. And, while Garland and Minnelli’s crowd was rather bohemian, she otherwise managed to project a relatively normative image, which studio publicity reinforced. Additionally, she was never part of an underground lesbian sub-culture.⁷⁵ Finally, being a singer-dancer was less at odds with her femininity than Kelly’s choice to be a dancer at a time when such a trajectory was still stigmatized as effete. But despite the apparent lack of concern over her sexuality, her rapacious appetite might be considered a manifestation of her larger uncertainty about who she was expected to be.

Her screen performances revealed a similar confusion about the sort of lady she was supposed to portray. As early as “In-Between,” when she longed for “romances” and “a party dress that boys will adore/ A dress that touches the floor,” Garland’s brand of womanhood had always been contradictory and ironic, even as she feigned to perform normative femininity. In *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), for instance, Garland’s portrayal of teenager Esther Smith, the auburn-haired girl in love with the boy next door, captures something of the paradox in Garland’s own personality. While primping for a party, Esther confides matter-of-factly to her older sister Rose (Lucille Bremer) that she will allow John

⁷⁴ It was common practice for studios to cover up the private lives of their stars. Rock Hudson, for instance, was pushed into a marriage to establish a fictive heterosexuality for fans. Such treatment was never as extreme of Garland, despite her numerous and infamous affairs, both at Metro and beyond.

⁷⁵ For background on lesbianism and lesbian sub-cultures, see Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in 20th-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). In his assessment of the Kinsey Report on Female Sexuality, Donald Porter Geddes notes, “Strangely, society is very little concerned with homosexuality in women, whereas it is particularly active and repressive about males.” Donald Porter Geddes, ed., *An Analysis of the Kinsey Reports on Sexual Behavior in the Human Male and Female* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1954), 22.

Truitt to kiss her that night, though it would have been their first meeting. Defending herself against her sister's shock, Esther contends, "Well if we're going to get married I may as well start it." Rose responds, "Nice girls don't let men kiss them until after their engaged. Men don't want the bloom rubbed off." Garland stares at herself in the mirror, pauses a moment, and then sardonically says, "Personally I think I have too much bloom."⁷⁶ Her deadpan delivery, tinted with self-irony and perhaps even self-loathing, suggests confusion about the type of woman she ought to be, particularly since she was still transitioning from juvenile to adult roles at this point in her career.⁷⁷

On the surface, most of her postwar characters *appeared* to be properly feminine. Indeed, in *The Harvey Girls* (1946), Garland portrayed Susan Bradley, an idealistic young woman from Ohio seeking her future out West in the 1880s.⁷⁸ For her the great adventure—marrying a man with whom she had only corresponded—becomes a life of independence as a Harvey Girl waitress.⁷⁹ Studio publicity about Garland's acting, like that describing her personal life, seemed confused as to whether she was strong or daintily feminine. "Judy Garland, than whom no actress has been more lady-like in her screen roles to date, can be tough when the occasion demands it," one article boasted. But that toughness, the story hinted, seemed artificial. In particular, the piece mentioned an especially comic scene in

⁷⁶ *Meet Me in St. Louis*, Produced by Arthur Freed, Directed by Vincente Minnelli, Color, 113 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1944, DVD, Author's Collection.

⁷⁷ This was, in fact, her final adolescent role, one she took on only reluctantly. Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 154.

⁷⁸ *The Harvey Girls*, Produced by Arthur Freed, Directed by George Sidney, Color, 104 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1946, Videocassette, Author's Collection.

⁷⁹ For information on Harvey Girls and women in the West, see Mary Lee Spence, "Waitresses in the Trans-Mississippi West: 'Pretty Waiter Girls,' Harvey Girls and Union Maids," in *The Women's West*, ed. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 219-234; and Paula Petric, "Capitalists with Rooms: Prostitution in Helena, Montana," *Montana: Journal of Western History* 31, no. 2 (1981): 28-41.

which Garland clumsily handles two guns in order to recover stolen steaks. The publicist asserted that, while the actress had already proved she could make good use of her fists in *Meet Me in St. Louis*, “the thought of pearl-handled revolvers undoubtedly would have thrown her into the most feminine of faints.”⁸⁰ Garland’s usual self-effacing irony in this scene pointed to the ways in which her “lady-like” character was little more than a pose, a notion reinforced in the insincere tone of the article.

In truth, everything about this role seemed ill-fitted and forced, from the publicity to her shirtwaists. One reviewer harshly commented: “Judy Garland has never looked worse. She is, in this, all of the things, photogenically, a leading lady should not be, and her voice and acting ability are not enough to counterbalance this fact. The care given a star of her calibre by a supervising cameraman is obviously not sufficient to embellish her to romantic role quality.”⁸¹ Writing for a trade journal, this critic exposed the artifice that was supposed to be invisible, and thereby hinted at the feminine masquerade Garland was approximating, but not quite achieving. And all of the makeup and magic of Hollywood could not help her.

She wore her femininity as if it were another costume to don in front of the camera, a costume that could just as easily be removed, as when she performed in drag. The ease with which she could step in and out of her feminine costume further highlights the ways in which femininity was at times ill-suited, but always malleable, for the actress.⁸² It was as if her gender was in a constant state of *in-between-ness*. Take her final song-and-dance routine for

⁸⁰ “Shy Judy Garland Proves She Can Be Plenty Tough,” M-G-M Press Book for *The Harvey Girls* (1946), 5, PBC, no folder.

⁸¹ Jim Henaghan, “‘Harvey Girls Different; ‘7th Veil’ Lauded in N.Y.: Lacks Plot But Lavish Musical,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 31 December 1945, n.p., PCAR, Folder: “Harvey Girls [MGM, 1943].”

⁸² On the performance of femininity, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th Anniversary Edition (New York: Routledge, 1999); Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

MGM, “Get Happy,” from *Summer Stock* (1950).⁸³ One of her most memorable performances, the film’s release ironically coincided with her last days at the studio. This particular number was shot during post-production, after Garland had returned from a six-week rest in Santa Barbara. In that time, she had lost a considerable amount of weight, and appeared much thinner in this number than in the rest of the film. As such, “Get Happy” stands out from the rest of the film, in an almost jarring way. But according to Liza Minnelli, “a lot of people, including myself, feel [“Get Happy”] was one of her very best [performances].”⁸⁴ Dressed in a man’s tuxedo jacket and fedora, with hair slicked back, she danced with eight men (in similar tuxedos but without hats) against a burnt sienna background full of painted clouds.⁸⁵ Decidedly upbeat in lyrics, tone, and rhythm, her performance at first glance seemed the same.

But upon closer inspection, this now classic number is reserved, strained, even pained. In part due to her poor health, Charles Walters’ choreography is oddly reserved for such an “overelaborate” orchestration; Garland barely moves around on the sound stage, with the chorus of dancers executing only moderately vigorous movements around her.⁸⁶ Even her smile appears forced. The camerawork is equally reserved, with minimal movements and only a few close-ups.

⁸³ *Summer Stock* constitutes an ironic and bitter-sweet end for Garland at MGM. Having first made a name for herself playing opposite Mickey Rooney as theatrically-aspiring youth seeking to put on a show (often in their barn), her character in this final film is a farmer inundated with a summer stock theater company seeking to use her barn for their production. It seems, in many ways, she ended her career at the studio right where she had started fifteen years prior. *Summer Stock*, Produced by Joe Pasternak, Directed by Charles Walters, Color, 108 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1950, Videocassette, Author’s Collection.

⁸⁴ *That’s Entertainment!*

⁸⁵ This was the same outfit she had worn for “Mister Monotony” in *Easter Parade* (1948), though this number was subsequently cut. According to biographer David Shipman, she selected this costume. Shipman, *Judy Garland*, 250. “Mister Monotony” can be seen on the special edition DVD of *Easter Parade*, released 2005.

⁸⁶ Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 250.

As the scene opens, we see the silhouettes of the eight men, arms up-stretched. One by one, the dancers fall to the ground, until only one is left standing, his back to the camera. It is not until he falls that we see Garland, who up to this point has been obscured by all of the men. Indeed, there is a complete lack of femininity at first. As the men drop, the camera moves in for a medium shot of Garland, showing off her stocking-clad legs and high heels as if to reassure the audience that she is, in fact, a woman in this otherwise masculine space.

In the middle of the number, Garland wanders into the group of men, who rest on their knees in a circle, arms around each other, swaying. Each one raises his arm with palm flattened towards her, punctuating the syncopated trumpet blasts, as if to restrain her singing. At first she shrugs them off with a quick glance and smile, pushing back their hands. But as those behind her raise their hands, she actually stops singing for a moment, pauses in rhythm, and, forcing them aside, breaks out of the circle and resumes the number.⁸⁷ The look on her face, while fleeting, is quite revealing. Is there a flash of annoyance, perhaps, or anxiety? In either case, it is clear the male dancers are trying to overtake her, and she has to step out of the performance for a moment to reassert herself—albeit an ungendered self—in one last act of resistance at the studio.

Coming at the end of her career at MGM, the lyrics add to the irony of her performance:

Forget your troubles and just
GET HAPPY
You better chase all your cares away.
Sing Hallelujah, come on,
GET HAPPY

⁸⁷ Of course, musical arranger Saul Chaplin “choreographed” this pause, which had been pre-recorded, For more on the intricacies of pre-recording, see Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 28 October 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 44, 48; 5 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 88; 6 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 92; and 8 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 104, 106-7, HOHP, OH 112.

Get ready for the judgement day.

The sun is shining, come on
GET HAPPY
The Lord is waiting to take your hand.
Shout Hallelujah! come on,
GET HAPPY
We're going to the promised land.

We're headin' 'cross the River,
Wash your sins 'way in the tide.
It's all so peaceful on the other side.

Forget your troubles and just
GET HAPPY
You better chase all your cares away.
Shout Hallelujah! come on,
GET HAPPY
Get ready for the judgement day.⁸⁸

This song's message of forgetting your troubles and getting happy acquires a rather painful meaning when applied to Garland, whose own troubles, both on and off the screen, were compounding at the time of filming. Even though she had just returned from an extended rest to shoot this number, she nonetheless appeared rather unhealthy. And, of course, audiences across the nation saw this routine as word of her termination from Metro became public. Well aware of her problems at the studio, moviegoers championed the battling star. As one reviewer related, "Her fans know she is in some kind of trouble and they want somehow to show that they are with her."⁸⁹

Written in 1929, the collaboration of lyricist Harold Arlen and composer Ted Koehler, this song speaks directly to the trajectory of Garland's life in 1950. Her "judgement day" was no biblical day of reckoning to be sure, but she certainly stood in judgment before

⁸⁸ Harold Arlen and Ted Koehler, "Get Happy," (1929), Reprinted in David C. Olsen, ed., *Songs of Judy Garland*, volume 1 (Hialeah, Florida: Columbia Pictures Publications, 1984), 78-80.

⁸⁹ "Judy Garland in Summer Stock" (review) (unidentifiable clipping), JPC, Folder: "Summer Stock (Folder 1 of 2) (Reviews/publicity)."

studio executives who were about to hand down her fate. Yet the song does not simply capture a sense of impending doom for the singer. The lure of the “promised land” evokes a world outside of MGM, a place “all so [quiet and] peaceful on the other side” where she would no longer need to fight with others for control over her body and voice. Indeed, the journey to this other place held the prospect of rebirth for Garland, where she could cast her troubles—from her various addictions to her failure as an ideal womanhood—“ ‘way in the tide.” Indeed, the camerawork and vocalization emphasizes this final point; the only close-up in the routine occurs when she sings the three-line bridge (“We’re heading down the river...”) for the second time, and the third time her voice becomes softer and more bluesy in tone. In both cases, these three lines are bracketed off from the rest of the performance. Here, then, Garland infuses hope into her work even as she was on the verge of yet another nervous collapse.

Furthermore, Garland’s rendition of Koehler’s lyrics underscores another layer of cultural meaning in her performance; namely that of passing. The *mise-en-scène* establishes Garland’s gender bending vis-à-vis her cross-dressing, from her feminized tuxedo to the male-dominated dancing chorus. But there is also an element of racial passing detectable in this number. The song was intended to *sound* like a Negro spiritual, particularly due to Saul Chaplin’s musical arrangement; Garland’s use of dialect (“De Lord” instead of “The Lord”), syncopation, and slight *glissando* (sliding from note to note to generate a *blues feeling*) all reference back to her days of more direct “vocal blackface.” Reviving the singing style that had first catapulted her into stardom at MGM highlights the ways in which she constantly employed blackface throughout her film career. But it also gestures towards the disappointment she felt at losing the once-promised and highly coveted role of Julie, *Show*

Boat's tragic mulatto, in Arthur Freed's 1951 remake.⁹⁰ In the final analysis, "Get Happy" was the ideal final performance for Garland; it encapsulated the fifteen-year span of her time at MGM and captured the multi-layered complexities of her filmic performances, all of which defied precise categorization.⁹¹

Because Garland's work, as much as her time away from the camera, represented multiple and often contradictory versions of postwar femininity (some of which were at complete odds with the hegemonic ideal), we might think of her as a failed woman. In the literal sense of the word, she ultimately failed as a movie starlet, having been fired from MGM despite her immense box office draw.⁹² And as a wife, she was not much better; her marriage to Vincente Minnelli deteriorated swiftly and was over by March of 1951, just a few months shy of their six-year anniversary.⁹³

But on a more figurative level, Garland was a failure at being a woman, or at least the ideal woman the studio tried to make her. Always "on a fence," caught "in-between" competing gender norms, the actress was incapable of fitting any mold. Her constant slippage, both on- and off-camera, rendered visible the postwar construction of womanhood,

⁹⁰ The role was eventually handed over to the non-singing actress Ava Gardner. Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 334. For a discussion of Julie's place in Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein's *Show Boat*, see Lauren Berlant, "Pax American: The Case of *Show Boat*," in *Cultural Institutions of the Novel*, eds. Deidre Lynch and William B. Warner (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 399-422.

⁹¹ Garland shot a few numbers for *Annie Get Your Gun* before she was fired. Some of these outtakes have been preserved, and can be seen in the PBS documentary, *Judy Garland: By Myself*.

⁹² Even her Hollywood comeback, the 1954 musical remake of *A Star is Born*, which she co-produced, ultimately was a failure. Though she delivered one of the greatest performances of her entire career, the film was slashed prior to general release, which many argue robbed her of a much-deserved Academy Award. More importantly, the film failed to re-ignite her film career. For a more in-depth discussion of the film, see Chapter Four.

⁹³ "Divorce for Judy Garland: Husband Made Her Ill When He Left Her Alone, She Say," *New York Times*, 23 March 1951, 23, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

which seemed so poorly suited to her. Indeed, she often seemed more comfortable in men's clothing than in women's.⁹⁴

The Spectacle of Nostalgia

“Get Happy” was by no means the only cross-dressing, androgynous, song-and-dance number Garland performed in the postwar period. Richard Dyer has identified two forms of cross-dressing in Garland's performances: the “vamp-androgyne ... [which] emphasises sexuality, [and] the tramp-androgyne [which] dissolves both sexuality and gender.” Of all of her postwar cross-dressing routines—including scenes cut out of final prints, work filmed before being replaced on *Annie Get Your Gun*, and her post-MGM *A Star is Born*—Garland appeared as a tramp four times and a vamp three times over the course of five films.⁹⁵ And two of these five cross-dressing routines were part of films set in the past. *The Pirate* (1948) took place on a Caribbean island during the early nineteenth century, while *Easter Parade* (also 1948) glorified New York City's Vaudeville of 1910-1912. With the exception of *Summer Stock* (1950), along with her cameos in *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946) and *Words and Music* (1948), all of Garland's postwar work at MGM comprised period pieces. Interestingly, two of the three films from which she was suspended, *The Barkleys of Broadway* and *Royal Wedding*, were each contemporary pieces. Clearly, Garland did not

⁹⁴ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, Chapter 3: “Judy Garland and Gay Men;” Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, Chapter 6: “A Postscript for the Nineties;” and Brian Currid, “Judy Garland's American Drag.”

⁹⁵ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 175. The five films were: *The Pirate* (1948), *Easter Parade* (1948), *Annie Get Your Gun* (released 1950, she filmed from 7 March to 10 May 1949), *Summer Stock* (1950), and *A Star is Born* (1954). Of her postwar musicals, four contained no cross-dressing, including *Royal Wedding*, which she was working on when the studio fired her.

seem well suited for anything but musicals steeped in nostalgia.⁹⁶ What was it about Judy Garland that, like Norma Desmond, kept her trapped in the past?

To answer this question, we must consider American filmmaking as a whole during this era. Postwar Hollywood was an extremely unstable, if not volatile, industry. Between a splintering and shrinking audience, the result of ever-rising competition with television; court-ordered studio divorcement intended to destroy the five major studios' monopoly over production, distribution, and exhibition; and a virulent industry-wide Communist witch hunt in the early 1950s, the American film industry found itself on rocky terrain. Filmmakers reached out for any buoy they could grasp, producing countless films set in a fictive past in which things somehow seemed simpler and safer. Studios released biblical epics (which many scholars today read as parables for Cold War geopolitics), Westerns, (based on Manifest Destiny and the democratic origins of the nation), and turn-of-the-century family melodramas. In the face of great postwar demographic, cultural, and political changes, Hollywood clung to an imagined golden age (or golden ages) of constancy and security—a mass-produced and mass-consumed national fantasy.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ The few film appearances Garland made after leaving MGM, both musical and dramatic, were typically contemporary pieces, as in Warner Bros.' *A Star is Born* (1954), which many scholars see as possessing autobiographical elements.

⁹⁷ John R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 3-5; and Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992, 2000), Introduction to the 2000 edition. Steven Cohan draws insightful links between postwar Hollywood's "biblical cycle," national mythmaking, and history in *Masked Men*, Chapter 4: "The Body in the Blockbuster." Lynn Spigel offers interesting commentary on 1990s revivals of fifties mass culture, pointing out a baby boomers "nationalist sentiment" that craved a "return to a cold war past where nations still existed, and the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' were eminently clear." Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse*, 253-54. For more on Westerns and cultural nostalgia, see Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), Chapter 3: "The Western;" Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000); John Belton, *American Cinema/ American Culture* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1994), Chapters 10 and 14; and George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

Judy Garland similarly represented instability, both literally with her behavior at the studio and figuratively, with her refusal to conform to postwar femininity. MGM, like film industry writ large, relied on an imagined past to re-stabilize its leading musical lady. With gender norms seemingly unfixed, particularly for women encouraged to leave the home during the war but then forced back to the home upon the war's conclusion, it was all too tempting to look to the (Victorian) past for clarity about one's proper place. Garland was stuck "in-between" rigidifying feminine ideals, unable to "fit in anywhere." Metro tried to lay claim to her questionable womanhood by adopting familiar gendered tropes from the past. Her nostalgic musicals, however rooted in fantasy, were the studio's attempt at rescuing her from her feminine shortcomings. But her performances always seemed to resist these efforts—as *The Harvey Girls*' ill-fitting *mise-en-scène* proved.

The ensuing negotiation between embodying past forms of womanhood with her contemporary feminine failings, coupled with the studio's attempts to gloss over such flaws, ultimately translated into an ironic, self-reflexive cinematic signature bordering on self-parody. Musical and film scholars such as Richard Dyer and Jane Feuer situate this irony as the source of Garland's gay fandom. Dyer, for instance, contends that Garland's performances contained gay sensibilities that drew on disguise, impersonation, and performativity. These elements of artifice matched those employed when a person passed for straight, and hence formed a unique bond of co-identification between queer spectator and performer.⁹⁸ While such a reading is powerful and undeniable, particularly in her more androgynous numbers, I would instead focus on the ways in which her performative irony transcends sexuality to explore broader questions about the imagining, construction, and

⁹⁸ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 150.

presentation of postwar gender. For Garland, such enactment held an extra layer of meaning as she resisted the near total control the studio wielded over her body and life.

More than anything, her period musicals were steeped in the sentimentality of Americana in look, feel, and song. Most of these films offered a blend of long-familiar popular tunes from the golden days of Tin Pan Alley mixed with newer hits penned by those same acclaimed composers, such as Irving Berlin. With the Broadway success of *Oklahoma!* (1943), “it seemed as if postwar America wanted to celebrate its past in song.”⁹⁹ Then, too, Arthur Freed produced all but one of Garland’s postwar nostalgic musicals. Freed was a “sentimental man” who longed to recreate a nostalgic but mythical yesteryear; more than a quarter of all of his musicals were set in the past.¹⁰⁰ And, as a former Tin Pan Alley lyricist himself, he sought to produce the most lavish, most entertaining, and most tuneful postwar musicals in Hollywood. His films were some of the most expensive made at MGM at this time, but they were also the most widely acclaimed and, with one or two exceptions, solid box office hits. And they were nearly all made in rich Technicolor.¹⁰¹ Garland’s first film in the Freed Unit, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, was only her second Technicolor film. And of all her leading roles captured in Technicolor, only her final MGM work, *Summer Stock*, was a contemporary piece set in the 1950s. Technicolor was part of the fantasy; its bright and vivid colors enhanced the artifice of the nostalgic *mise-en-scène*. Likewise, Technicolor provided

⁹⁹ Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 196. See also Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), Chapter 4; and John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press/ University Press of New England, 2003).

¹⁰⁰ Fordin, *M-G-M’s Greatest Musical*, 91. Approximately thirteen of his forty-four musicals were period pieces; the bulk of which were produced in the postwar era.

¹⁰¹ Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 151. The best account of Arthur Freed, and his production unit, is Fordin, *M-G-M’s Greatest Musical*. For details about Technicolor, see Balio, *The American Film Industry*, 425-427 and Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 234-237.

Garland with yet another layer of costuming to create the illusion of womanhood. It was another thing for her to hide behind, a way to distract audiences away from her failings as a woman.

Her most fantastical postwar musical, *The Pirate* (1948), was also her most sumptuous film in terms of set, colors, and production numbers.¹⁰² Directed by husband Vincente Minnelli, and co-starring Gene Kelly, it was intended as a light-hearted and fanciful spoof of Hollywood's earlier swashbuckling films, but fell short at the box office despite generally positive notices.¹⁰³ Garland played Manuela, a romantic girl longing for adventure but promised in marriage to the rotund and unimaginative Don Pedro (Walter Slezak). Secretly, she dreams that the legendary pirate, Macoco, will come and rescue her from her dreary life. Under hypnosis by the minstrel actor Serafin (Gene Kelly), she admits her desire: "Someday he'll swoop down on me like a chicken hawk and carry me away. And I shall do his bidding, I shall follow him. Yea, to the ends of the world I shall follow him."¹⁰⁴ Serafin, convinced she loves him and not the pirate, discourages her fantasy, but she nonetheless protests. She screams, over and over: "Underneath this prim exterior there are

¹⁰² MGM boasted the elaborate and expansive set required, as well as the 5,065 antique props necessary for filming. "Colorful Caribbean Waterfront Reproduced on Huge 'Pirate' Set," M-G-M Press Book for *The Pirate* (1948), 9, PBC, no folder. Also located in *The M-G-M Record* 2, no. 88 (4 June 1948), n.p., GKC, Box 8, Scrapbook 5 (1948-1949).

¹⁰³ A sampling of favorable notices includes Review of *The Pirate*, *Box Office Digest*, 10 April 1948, 12, VMP, Folder #119: "The Pirate - pub. & reviews;" " 'Pirate' Slated to Steal Top Boxoffice Honors: MGM Tunefilm Is Brilliant Satire (review)," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 29 March 1948, n.p., VMP, Folder 119: "The Pirate - pub. & reviews;" and "Pirate Kelly," *Newsweek* 31, no. 23 (7 June 1948): 83. Red Kann published a far more lukewarm review, noting that "Production values are superb, but entertainment values never approach the same level," Red Kann, Review of *The Pirate*, *Motion Picture Daily*, 29 March 1948, 6, PCAR, Folder: "The Pirate [MGM, 1944]."

¹⁰⁴ *The Pirate*, Produced by Arthur Freed, Directed by Vincente Minnelli, Color, 102 min, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1948, Videocassette, Author's Collection.

depths of emotion, romantic longings.” She then begins to sing “Mack the Black,” still in a trance. Her song is a dream, and her dream has now become a song.

Pushing Serafin away, Manuela begins to vocalize Macoco’s many rumored exploits and “blazing trail of masculinity.”¹⁰⁵ The tempo quickly picks up and as it does, her neatly coifed hair tumbles down over her shoulders, signifying a loss of inhibition. Her first close-up, over the lyric “ladies go to pieces,” further stresses this release. Each verse builds in intensity, except for one dreamy interlude where Manuela, looking far off in the distance, croons, “I’ll be waiting patiently by the Caribbean or Caribbean Sea.” With the conclusion of her song, she collapses from exhaustion, still entranced by Serafin. Only a passionate kiss from the actor can revive her, breaking the spell that had “set them [the fictive audience] on fire.”

Douglas Pye argues that, “Her performance suggests that the last thing Manuela wants is to be submissive to a man; it is as though her real fantasy is not to be carried off by a pirate but to become one—to exercise the freedom and power that she can only consciously imagine as the preserve of the male buccaneer. Hypnosis leaves in place Macoco as the desired object but frees her body to express physically the energy latent in dream.”¹⁰⁶ And yet, despite the suggestion of release and freedom that her performance should carry, her delivery of Cole Porter’s song is rather flat and restrained. For someone whose inner desires has just been unleashed, she certainly does not execute the routine in this manner. Closer analysis of the scene reveals a stiff and uncomfortable appearance, even her vocalization seems to lack this “latent energy.” She affects the part of a quivering, helpless woman, but

¹⁰⁵ Which is brought to life in Gene Kelly’s “Pirate Ballet” towards the middle of the film, see Chapter Two.

¹⁰⁶ Douglas Pye, “Being a Clown: Curious Coupling in *The Pirate*,” *Cineaction* 63 (2004): 8-9.

her desire is too strong and thus the whole number is unconvincing. In fact, she seems far more comfortable and relaxed performing with Kelly in the final scene of the film, the reprise to “Be a Clown.”

This final sequence, out of place with the rest of the film, is quite jarring, since it totally disrupts the diegesis (despite the film’s overall integration). Indeed, it was something of an afterthought, added at a later point during production.¹⁰⁷ Serafin and Manuela, dressed in nearly identical clown outfits, perform an expressive, joyful, and exuberant song-and-dance routine that literally dissolves into their laughing embrace. Unlike the original “Be a Clown,” which Kelly performed with the Nicholas Brothers, this reprise seems timeless in its setting and costuming, far less fixed to the nineteenth century.

Rather than finding adventure and romantic involvement on the high seas with Macoco, Manuela has found her true calling, and her true love, as an actor in Serafin’s troop. This final song-and-dance number, then, confirms that which seemed so ill-fitted to Garland’s performance of “Mack the Black.” The trembling desire of a “pure soul” for a man of “blazing masculinity” is transmuted to an “asexual” pairing based on “mutuality and equality” without “sexual difference.”¹⁰⁸ The spell of Garland’s femininity is broken with her clownish performance with Kelly, himself the eternal youthful clown. The concluding number further exposes the limits of her gendered construction; not even an imagined Caribbean past can mask her feminine failings adequately. In the final analysis, and the final

¹⁰⁷ Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 30 October 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 53-54, HOHP, OH 112.

¹⁰⁸ Pye, “Being a Clown,” 5. For more on the importance of romantic coupling in musicals, see Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*; Patricia Mellencamp, “Spectacle and Spectator: Looking Through the American Musical Comedy,” *Ciné-Tracts* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 27-35; Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1981), Chapter 7, “The Musical”; Martin Sutton, “Patterns of Meaning in the Musical,” in Altman, *Genre: The Musical*, 190-96.

reel, she was much better suited to be a non-gendered actor rather than a full-fledged woman. Indeed femininity is more a dream, or fantasy, than a reality for Garland's Manuela. The temporal distance established through the sumptuous *mise-en-scène* diminishes but cannot hide the problem Garland poses as an actress caught in-between competing demands.

Garland's uncooperative behavior on the set contributed to her stilted performance. Shipman notes how suspicious and jealous Garland was of Kelly's working relationship with Minnelli. Anxiety that Kelly would upstage her, coupled with her own fears and self-doubt, drove her back to abusing pills, which she had briefly given up in 1945 while honeymooning with Minnelli in New York.¹⁰⁹ Freed Unit Music Coordinator Lela Simone, who was heavily involved in the filming of *The Pirate*, later recalled the difficulties Garland posed on the set. As Simone recalled, the young actress "lost her stabledness ... Judy was in pieces" during the production.¹¹⁰ "Judy was in such a [terrible] condition that every morning we never knew whether we were going to end the day filming," she related.

I remember one morning, for instance, she came in to the [sound] stage entrance ... and the extras were standing around in the door entrance, quite a few of them, and Judy tore into them and said, "Give me marijuana! Give me marijuana! Give me marijuana!" I mean, it was disastrous ... And it was so disastrous that finally Vincente very, for his manner, sharply took her by the wrist and threw her into a car. A studio car. And we did not shoot that day. We closed the set. So we had to send all these extras home ... It was in absolute chaos ... She was near to collapsing.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 189.

¹¹⁰ Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 25 October 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 28, HOHP, OH 112.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30 October 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 54-55, 57, HOHP, OH 112. See also Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 198-210.

Hugh Fordin argues that she was “at war with herself” on the set.¹¹² Her own recollections confirm this: “The studio had become a haunted house for me. Everyday when I went to work it was with tears in my eyes, resistance in my heart and mind.”¹¹³ Her agonizing experiences during filming for *The Pirate* translated into chronic migraines and increased drug use, both of which impacted her work.

Garland’s troubles on the set were clearly visible in “Mack the Black,” and, like “Get Happy,” explain the strained quality of her performance. Beyond the challenges she faced in production, the juxtaposition of “Mack the Black” and “Be a Clown” highlights her own contradictory and unpredictable behavior during production while hinting at another level of resistance. Just as her character sloughed off the trappings of traditional femininity in *The Pirate*, so too did her real life belie postwar expectations of womanhood. But because she was steeped in Minnelli’s self-conscious artifice and fantasy—the costumes, the artistic backdrops, the excessive colors—her resistance seemed muffled.

That same year, she appeared in *Easter Parade* with Fred Astaire, who had come out of retirement when her co-star, Gene Kelly, broke his ankle.¹¹⁴ With only a month’s rest after completing *The Pirate*, filming began on *Easter Parade* in November 1947. Set in 1910 New York, the film tells the story of song-and-dance man Don Hewes, who sets out to prove he can train any girl to dance after his own dancing partner (and love) deserts him. Hewes settles on barroom singer Hannah Brown (Garland) to transform into his next

¹¹² Fordin, *M-G-M’s Greatest Musicals*, 211.

¹¹³ *Judy Garland: By Myself*.

¹¹⁴ Fordin, *M-G-M’s Greatest Musicals*, 226. For first-hand accounts, see Erskine Johnson, “Fill-ins Add Drama to ‘Easter Parade’”, *New York World-Telegram & Sun*, 27 July 1948, n.p., AFC, Box 10, Folder: “Easter Parade Folder 3” and Unit Manager Al Shenberg’s Assistant Director Reports for *Easter Parade* for 13 October 1947 and 15 October 1947, CWC, Box 1, Folder: “Easter Parade” (bound scrapbook with script, vol. 2).

glamorous dancing partner, as he explains after purchasing her a sophisticated wardrobe befitting her new stage persona:

Hannah
I think these dresses are beautiful but...

Don
But what?

Hannah
Well, do you think they look like me? Like Hannah Brown?

Don
There is no more Hannah Brown. From now on you're Juanita.

Hannah
Well if you wanted a Juanita why did you pick me?

Don
Now don't get mad. This is business.
A girl dancer has to be exotic. She has to be a peach.

Hannah
I suppose I'm a lemon.

Don
No, no, here's what I mean.
When you walk down the street alone, do men try to catch your eye?

Hannah
Of course they do.

Don
Do they turn around and look at you?

Hannah
I don't know. I never turn around and look at them.¹¹⁵

He then asks her to walk ahead so he can test whether or not she is eye-catching. She offers huge smiles to the men passing her, but they do not seem to notice her. It is not until she

¹¹⁵ *Easter Parade*, Produced by Arthur Freed, Directed by Charles Walters, Color, 103 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1948, DVD, Author's Collection.

begins making strange and exaggerated faces (unbeknownst to Don) that men turn around to stare at her. Clearly, she is no Juanita, as her debut act demonstrates. In a purposeful spoof of Ginger Rogers in “Cheek to Cheek” from *Top Hat* (1935), “Juanita’s” blue-feathered dress sheds as she crashes into Don, steps on his feet, and turns the wrong way. The act, like Hannah Brown, is a lemon.

Quickly, Don realizes that Hannah Brown is no Juanita. He accuses her of “trying to be somebody else” and, when she points out that Juanita was his idea, he concedes: “Alright. I’ve changed my mind. From now on you’re going to be yourself. You’re going to be perfectly natural.” He continues: “You’re going to start right from the very beginning. There’ll be no more fancy dresses and la-de-da business. There is no more Juanita. From now on you’re just plain Hannah Brown.” She relents with a quiet smile, having won out in the end. They begin to rehearse a popular tune, “I Love a Piano,” which dissolves into a montage of Hannah and Hewes’ successful stage numbers: “Snookey Ookums,” “Ragtime Violin,” and “When the Midnight Choo-Choo Leaves for Alabam.”

She is obviously not a glamorous dancer in the tradition of Astaire’s former partners, great beauties such as Ginger Rogers and Rita Hayworth. While this is partly a comic plot device, it is undeniable that Garland was not meant to be a graceful ballroom dancer. It is only when she drops the costume and artifice in favor of fun and playfulness that she and Don find success as a vaudeville team.¹¹⁶ Unlike Manuela, though, Garland seems perfectly at ease as the simple Hannah Brown, a character also full of *in-between-ness* who does not

¹¹⁶ Giles, “Show-making;” Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Chapters 2-3, 7; and Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 77-85. For more on romantic coupling see Patricia Mellencamp, “Spectacle and Spectator: Looking Through the American Musical Comedy,” *Ciné-Tracts* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 27-35 and Virginia Wright Wexman, *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

quite “fit in anywhere.” Hannah knows elegant clothing do not become her, the only challenge is to convince Don of that truth.

Interestingly, like *The Pirate*, *Easter Parade* contains a cross-dressing duet. In “A Couple of Swells,” Garland and Astaire appear as bums, complete with oversized rags, disheveled wigs, sooty faces, and blackened teeth. A much more reserved routine than “Be a Clown,” “A Couple of Swells,” as yet another moment of performative androgyny, exposes the artifice—the fantasy and mask—of her femininity.¹¹⁷ She plays with her femininity throughout the film (as Astaire tries to mold it to his specifications), and thereby gestures to the fluidity of gender. Indeed, at the conclusion of the film, desperate to win back Astaire’s love, Garland adopts a male position and woos him, sending him flowers, an Easter bonnet (a top hat), and a bunny. When she arrives at his apartment, she begins to sing “Easter Parade” to him, kneeling down on one knee and pulling him down to sit on her. He restores the gender inversion quickly, and as they parade down Fifth Avenue, he surprises her with an engagement ring. When she attempts to put it on her own hand, he playfully slaps her, grabs her left ring finger, and places the diamond over her glove as the end credits appear.

More so than in her singing and dancing, Garland’s acting in this film embodies small moments of resistance in the self-parodying and ironic delivery of lines. This is particularly the case when she is first introduced to Juanita. Her caustic tone and sharp glances create a sense of self-distancing, calling attention to the ways in which she did not measure up. Don Hewes was trying to make her something she was not; likewise studio executives, producers, directors, choreographers, musical arrangers, and costumers tried to mold her into a new

¹¹⁷ *Newsweek*’s review of *Easter Parade* emphasized Garland’s clownish aspects at the expense of her femininity. She was contrasted to the more elegant Ann Miller, and her romance with Astaire was completely overlooked. In this way, she was set in contrast to the overly-feminine Miller, positioned more as a chum or pal than a proper woman. “Berlin, Astaire, Garland,” (review of *Easter Parade*), *Newsweek* 32, no. 1 (5 July 1948): 70, AFC, Box 10, Folder: “Easter Parade Folder 3.”

form that did not quite fit. Like Hannah, Garland tried her best to fulfill these expectations, but, just as there were mistakes in her dancing as Juanita, so too were there gaps in her screen performances. It was as if she was letting down her guard, inviting all to gaze at the part of her that studio publicists tried to hide and makeover.

Easter Parade is far less spectacle-driven than *The Pirate*, but it is steeped in much greater nostalgia—indeed, nearly all reviews noted the nostalgia factor.¹¹⁸ New York of the 1910s proved to be a well-designed place for Garland to play around with, and at times defy, postwar gender ideals (much like Kelly’s dancing). The filmmakers paid significant attention to the details of recreating a New York long gone; the nostalgic feel thereby obscured her *in-between-ness*, distracting audiences from the fissures and ironic tinges in her performance. There was something unnatural and forced about her appearance and demeanor as a proper Victorian woman, as the delivery of her dialogue and the ease with which she performed as a “man” indicated. But she could mask her faults with costumes, wigs, and makeup—those self-conscious articles of artifice clearly intended to approximate womanhood. Her failures, therefore, could be displaced in the *mise-en-scène*.

Ironically, Garland’s final period picture rendered this masquerade far more visible, especially considering the relatively minimal problems she experienced on the set, unlike her other postwar projects.¹¹⁹ *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949), a musical remake of *The*

¹¹⁸ Some examples include: “Berlin, Astaire, Garland (review of *Easter Parade*),” *Newsweek* 32, no. 1 (5 July 1948): 70, AFC, Box 10, Folder: “Easter Parade Folder 3;” William R. Weaver, review of *Easter Parade*, *Product Digest Section* (unidentifiable clipping), CWC, Box 1, Folder: “Easter Parade” (bound scrapbook with script, vol. 2); Review of *Easter Parade*, 29 May 1948, n.p., CWC, Box 1, Folder: “Easter Parade” (bound scrapbook with script, vol. 2); and Review of *Easter Parade*, *Box Office Digest*, n.d., n.p., AFC, Box 10, Folder: “Easter Parade Folder 3” (packet: “New York Reviews ‘Easter Parade’ ”).

¹¹⁹ Shipman notes how healthy and happy Garland was on the set. There were no production delays and shooting actually concluded ahead of schedule. Producer Pasternak claimed that, with the proper treatment, Garland, proved to be of no trouble (though this was hardly the case for their last film, *Summer Stock*). *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 231.

Shop Around the Corner, consisted of even less spectacle than *Easter Parade*, with no notable production numbers.¹²⁰ Set in turn-of-the-century Chicago, this film was “As nostalgic as a whiff of lavender, as gay as a carnival, as colorful as a carousel and as tuneful as a music box.”¹²¹ While the film enjoyed mixed notices, all reviewers commented on its nostalgic value. *The Hollywood Reporter* praised producer Joe “Pasternak’s nostalgic presentation [which] captures all the quaintness of the Currier and Ives era of the story” while Red Kann of *Motion Picture Daily* applauded the nostalgic feel for creating “what is required for wide appeal and wholesale popularity.”¹²²

Most notable about Garland’s performance was her recreation of Eva Tanguay’s famous “I Don’t Care,” which Kann cheered as “one of the best numbers she has ever done and is a highlight of the film.” The *New York Times* reported that this number, sung at a German Beer Garden, “brought a burst of applause, which is not a common tribute in a movie house.”¹²³ Wearing a bright red evening dress, Garland sings this as an encore to “Play That Barber Shop Chord,” that “old time song hit,” which she had just performed with “a typical 1905 barber-shop quartet complete to walrus mustaches!”¹²⁴ Her very presence in the traditionally all-male world of Barbershop establishes her as different and ungendered;

¹²⁰ Ivan Tors to Joe Pasternak, Inter-office communication, 9 June 1947, JPC, Folder: “In the Good Old Summertime.” *In the Good Old Summertime*, Produced by Joe Pasternak, Directed by Robert Z. Leonard, Color, 102 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1949, Videocassette, Author’s Collection.

¹²¹ “Highlights,” M-G-M Press Book for *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949), 2, PBC, no folder.

¹²² “ ‘Summertime’ Enchanting; ‘Lining’ Bright Musical” (review), *The Hollywood Reporter*, n.d., n.p. (clipping), JPC, Folder: “In the Good Old Summertime (Reviews/publicity);” Red Kann, Review of *In the Good Old Summertime*, *Motion Picture Daily*, n.d., n.p. (clipping), JPC, Folder: “In the Good Old Summertime (Reviews/publicity).”

¹²³ T.M.P. [Thomas M. Pryor], “ ‘In the Good Old Summertime,’ With Judy Garland, Feature at Radio City Music Hall, *New York Times*, 5 August 1949, 23, JPC, Folder: “In the Good Old Summertime (Reviews/publicity).” Also located in PCAR, Folder: “In the Good Old Summertime [MGM, 1948].”

¹²⁴ Caption to Still 1440-76, M-G-M Press Book for *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949), 2, PBC, no folder.

but unlike her cross-dressing numbers, her femininity was nonetheless emphasized with jewelry, makeup, high heels, and bare shoulders.

Her performance is brisk and airy, with bold yet comical flare. Her usual strong voice is even brassier as she belts the lyrics, swinging her arms, kicking her feet high, and twirling around a nearby lamppost. She proclaims with a wide, irreverent smile:

You see I'm sort of independent;
I am my own superintendent;
And my star is on the ascendant;
THAT'S WHY I DON'T CARE.

Like "Get Happy," it was quite bittersweet irony that she should sing of rising stardom near the close of her film career. Equally biting is her lyric assertion that she is in complete control of her life when in fact studio men strove to restrain her.

As an homage to Eva Tanguay, this routine does not just pay tribute to the glory days of Vaudeville. It is a direct comment on women's place on that stage, and the ways in which feminist sensibilities intersected with theatrical performances. According to Susan Glenn, Tanguay made a name for herself in the early 1900s through a "self-deprecating" style that "made a virtue of her negative qualities ... Her humor played on the idea that audiences applauded her in spite of and also because of her inadequacies." As one of the highest paid actresses of her day, Tanguay was hardly beautiful, and lacked a strong singing voice. But she was popular for her "verbal unruliness and her physical abandon," championed by suffragists for her liberated persona. "I Don't Care" (1902) was Tanguay's "theme song."¹²⁵ Indeed, when MGM proposed using this song in its musical, the Production Code Administration demanded the studio change the line "A lady should repulse a gentleman's

¹²⁵ Susan A. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 63-65.

attack” for being “offensively pointed.” The lyric was changed to: “A girl should know her etiquette, alas, alack.”¹²⁶

The parallels between Tanguay and Garland are striking. Tanguay enjoyed unprecedented freedom, but Garland’s independence was always being challenged. Yet both were considered un-glamorous and self-deprecating, though Tanguay accentuated this in her performances while Garland lamented it in hers. And even while trying to imitate Tanguay, Garland’s almost reckless vocalizations were still tuneful, in key, and ear pleasing. Ultimately, this song represents both female performers’ unwillingness to conform to social and gender standards as one verse confirms:

A girl should know her etiquette, (sung demurely)
Alas, alack (manly, with a hint of sarcasm)
Propriety demands we walk (demurely)
A narrow track; (demurely but with a hint of irritation)
When fellows used to blink at me;
I’d freeze ‘em and they’d shrink at me; (irreverently)
But now when fellows wink at me
I wink at them right back. (boldly and proudly)

Unlike Hannah Brown, too shy and timid to stare at men directly until egged on by Don Hewes, Garland’s singing of “I Don’t Care” refuses to play the part of the proper Victorian woman, which was part of Tanguay’s original appeal. The range of moods captured in this one verse gestures to the constant struggles Garland faced at MGM while trying to assert her own feminine independence. Here the nostalgic setting does not mask but enhances her resistance through its link to Tanguay. Perhaps it is fitting that this would be Garland’s final

¹²⁶ Joseph I. Breen, PCA, Hollywood, to L. B. Mayer, MGM, Culver City, 10 November 1948, typed unsigned copy, PCAR, Folder “In the Good Old Summertime [MGM, 1948].” A copy of the originally-proposed lyrics were also found in this folder. The PCA approved the revised lyrics on 17 November 1948, according to a letter from the same day sent from Breen to Mayer.

period performance at MGM. She had broken the spell Hollywood's brand of nostalgia had cast, refusing to remain bound to social conventions of 1902—and of 1949.

Just as her ultimate failure as an employee at MGM signified her failure as a postwar actress, so too did her on-screen performances hint at a larger failure—a defiant refusal to be the type of woman expected of her. Perpetually “in-between,” Garland's cinematic *oeuvre* suggests a confused but fluid approach to her own femininity, an approach that spoke directly to female audience members (as well as gay men) who themselves struggled to define their place in a changing and rigidifying postwar climate. Drawing on nostalgic tropes to help make sense of these transformations and competing demands, Garland's song-and-dance work enabled small acts of resistance.

Metro virtually owned her body, transforming her voice into a contested space in which the studio tried to map its vision of Garland and idealized postwar femininity onto her celluloid work. She fought back any way she could. On screen, she could be caustic, ironic, and self-reflexive for brief moments, forming cracks in her performances where she could articulate, perhaps only indirectly, her dissatisfaction and frustrations. Off the screen, her addictions, absenteeism, unseemly sexual appetite, and general ill temperament allowed her to lash out against men such as L.B. Mayer and Arthur Freed, though these rebellious acts ultimately destroyed her film career. But then again, perhaps that is what she had intended from the beginning. For it was not until she left MGM that she could (re)claim her voice, as well as her body. Her story highlights the possibilities and limitations available to postwar women across the nation who struggled to find and assert their own identities. Many were no more successful than she, but the very act of resisting was striking and important in itself.

Chapter 4

“And the history of my life is in my songs:” The Spectacle of Authenticity in *A Star is Born*

In 1963, just six years before her untimely death at the age of forty-seven, Judy Garland stepped out in front of film cameras for the final time. She portrayed American singer Jenny Bowman, returned to London for a singing engagement at the Palladium. While in England, Jenny unsuccessfully attempts to reclaim the illegitimate son, Matt (Gregory Phillips), she had abandoned to former lover David Donne (Dirk Bogarde). With its lack of major fantasy-laden song-and-dance routines and on-location shooting, the English production of *I Could Go on Singing* seemed oddly autobiographical for Garland.¹ Not only did it mirror her own concert career, both on the American and London stages, it hinted at some of her off-screen problems, particularly substance abuse, for which she was in part released from her MGM contract in 1950. Indeed, the musical numbers virtually collapse the character (Jenny) with the actress (Judy). Bowman stands in the wings at the Palladium, gearing up to walk onto the stage and begin performing. She looks nervous, but as the music builds, she lets it carry her off, and from backstage she begins shouting, “Go, go, go” to the conductor. Once the orchestral music has washed completely over her and she is totally in

¹ *I Could Go on Singing*, Produced by Stuart Millar and Laurence Turman, Directed by Robert Neame, Color, 99 min., United Artists, 1963, Videocassette, MRC. Richard Dyer provides an excellent analysis of this rarely-discussed picture, though he focuses on the film’s camp qualities, in *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 2d. ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 184-190.

the moment, she steps onto the stage and into the spotlight. This warm-up was identical to Garland's own method of preparing for concerts, as a recent PBS documentary has captured.²

At the climax of the film, she executes a wrenching performance, building off of her huge cache of personal pain, but assuring audiences (fictive and real) that she will persevere, that she will overcome, that she will "go on singing." Although the source of Bowman's wounded singing is her failure to win back Matt, Garland's own life nevertheless seeps through the performance, inflecting her singing with a deep emotive power. As she reveals in the preceding scene: "You know, there's an old saying—when you go on stage you don't feel any pain at all. When the light hits you, you don't feel anything." She laughs quickly and quietly, continuing, "It's a stinking lie."

In a telling conversation with David just prior to this scene, a distraught Garland/Bowman threatens to skip her Palladium show. She wearily, but angrily, informs him, "I'm just me. I belong to myself. I can do whatever I damn well please with myself and nobody can ask any questions." As David tries to coax her to go on with the show, she lashes back. "Can you make me sing?" she challenges. "I sing for myself. I sing when I want to, whenever I want to. Just for me. I sing for my own pleasure. Whenever I want."

These lines, delivered thirteen years after she had been forced out of Metro, resonated deeply with her old film career. She had spent nearly two decades at the studio struggling to gain control over her body; nowhere was this fight more visible than in her voice, which was the ultimate site of resistance against studio executives. Despite her efforts at subverting MGM's vision of what she should look and sound like, she was unable to fully articulate her

² *American Masters: Judy Garland: By Myself*, Produced and directed by Susan Lacy, 114 min., Color, Thirteen/WNET New York (PBS), 2004, DVD, Author's Collection. Included in the two-disc special edition of *Easter Parade*.

own desires until she left the studio. Then, as she reinvented herself with a concert career, and only then, was she able to (re)claim her voice.

That concert career, much like the one depicted in *I Could Go on Singing*, borrowed from the days when she lacked control over her voice, recycling old MGM material for the live stage. As had been the case while at Metro, Garland's personal life blurred with her public performances, whether on the stage or in the few Hollywood musicals she made after 1950. Her life became encapsulated and inextricably bound in her songs, and her songs could be mapped back onto her life. Because the division between her private and public selves was so murky, Garland's performances projected a sense of authenticity and realism, in spite of the obvious layers of artifice involved.

This chapter explores the construction and spectacle of authenticity through an examination of Garland's 1954 Warner Bros. musical, *A Star is Born*. Intended as her Hollywood comeback, she and third-husband Sidney Luft produced this musical remake to showcase both Garland's singing and dramatic abilities in a way that MGM never permitted. The film takes up the question of stardom, thinly veiling Garland's off-camera trials in its narrative and songs. The musical capitalizes on the blurring of her on- and off-screen personae to lend a sense of authenticity to Garland's performance. But in attempting to achieve an authentic performance, the film simultaneously uses artifice and nostalgia to obscure that performance by linking Garland's 1954 role to her past roles in Hollywood and vaudeville, and by connecting her to the entire history of popular entertainments in America.

A Star is Born, read in conjunction with her off-screen concerts, is not simply a self-reflexive film about the inner-workings of Hollywood or the nature of stardom. Because the film bleeds over into the singer's life, reiterating her MGM days and subsequent live

performances, the musical raises questions about the very nature and construction of authenticity. Though it obscured the processes of construction at work, the film nonetheless functioned as a model for performers and moviegoers who were struggling with the very same issues of authenticity in an era that contradictorily stressed individualism and conformity. As Americans navigated between their private and public selves, they could look to Judy Garland, who no longer struggled to keep the two sides of herself separate. Rather, she fused them together to form a performance style that audiences have since identified as authentic and honest.

Back on the Stage: Recycling and Reinventing Stardom

In an era when many Americans were uncertain about how to be authentic and true to themselves, *A Star is Born* proved instructive. The film's star was caught "in-between" her public and private lives, which had mixed together for two decades. Her successful concert career reinforced her liminality, transferring it from the big screen to the live stage but purposefully blending her various selves together into a cohesive performative image. The evolution of her concert career through the 1960s therefore provides a critical framework for reading her 1954 film.

After Garland was fired from MGM, she seemed at a loss for what to do next. With the encouragement of her soon-to-be third husband, Luft, she agreed to star in one-woman concert shows in London and New York. While she had occasionally stepped out on stages after arriving in Hollywood to appear in radio shows and wartime benefits, she had not performed live with any degree of regularity since her days as Baby Gumm of the Gumm Sisters. For these first shows in 1950-1951 she relied nearly completely on the sounds and

images that had made her a movie star. From her vocal repertoire to the costuming and choreography, Garland drew on the familiar, not yet ready to step completely out on her own and forge her own identity. She therefore banked on her previous stardom to ensure success at London's Palladium and New York's Palace Theaters. She sang her old MGM songs and even relied on MGM labor—Charles Walters staged her shows while her old mentor, Roger Edens, helped her with vocal arrangements and wrote new music for her.³

Much as he had penned “In-Between” in the 1930s, Edens wrote an “intro to the medley of film songs she performed after the show's opening number” for her 1951 performances:

For almost twenty years I've been a minstrel girl
Singing for my supper in the throngs.
And in that time my world has been a minstrel world
And the history of my life is in my songs—
Gay songs, sad songs,
Good songs, bad songs,
New songs, old songs,
Dusk songs, dawn songs,
Show-must-go-on songs,
Ever-so-smart songs
And oh, my broken heart songs.⁴

The song harkened back to her pre-Hollywood days as much as her work for Metro, and would presage Edens' “Born in a Trunk” medley she would film three years later in *A Star is Born*. In both cases, her biography becomes bound to the legacy of popular entertainment writ large; her songs and her life become interchangeable. In this way, her songs could stand in for her private life, and, in turn, when audiences heard her sing her old Metro hits, they felt

³ David Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend* (New York: Hyperion, 1992), Chapters 14 and 15. See also *Judy Garland: By Myself*; and Gerald Clarke, *Get Happy: The Life of Judy Garland* (New York: Random House, 2000), 288-304.

⁴ Quoted in Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 277.

they were witnessing an authentic outpouring of emotive singing.⁵ Added to this was her gradual incorporation of her private troubles, to which she would allude in the middle of songs if not directly reference in between numbers.⁶ Audiences by this time knew what had driven her from MGM, and she no longer needed to hide that. Indeed, her personal struggles became part of her repertoire, those “oh, my broken heart songs.”

While she would continue to sing songs from the Golden Age of the Hollywood musical (and not just her own songs) through the 1960s, she quickly moved on, dropping the elaborate staging, costumes, and choreography that echoed her MGM work. Her performance style became more intimate, more emotive, more open, as she would extemporaneously talk to audiences in between songs.⁷ And her voice developed a stronger depth and power than she had ever displayed in the Freed Unit; this new voice was audible by the mid-1950s in *A Star is Born*. Even as she maintained the songs of her past—“the history of my life”—she adopted a frank yet ironic, self-distancing, and perhaps even self-effacing, stance towards that musical history. This process of recycling and intensification, which Brian Currid has labeled *mise en abyme*, highlighted the ways in which her authenticity as a performer was just as constructed as her former Hollywood stardom.⁸

⁵ Both Dyer and Shipman chronicle audience responses to her stage performances, though Dyer tends to focus on her shows from the 1960s. Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*; and Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 274-277, 408, 495, 502.

⁶ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 148-150; Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 117-122; and Richard Dyer, “A Star is Born and the Construction of Authenticity,” in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: Routledge, 1991), 132-40.

⁷ My parents attended one of her shows in New York in the 1960s. They once described for me how Garland, who was just recovering from strep throat, seemed exhausted. She took off her shoes, sat down at the edge of the stage, and more spoke than sang her songs. The crowd was nonetheless enamored, delighted to see her live regardless of her state.

⁸ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 139-151; Brian Currid, “Judy Garland’s American Drag,” *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 46, no. 1 (2001): 129; and Wade Jennings, “Nova: Garland in ‘A Star is Born,’” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 4, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 326-327.

She had escaped the stifling world of the Hollywood studio musical, but remained a musical star. By recreating her old celluloid performances on the live stage, Garland redefined the musical, making it a living thing by returning it to the stage's "minstrel world." In turn, she altered notions of performance and spectacle. Over the course of the 1950s and early 1960s she eliminated the artifice, the *mise-en-scène*, the costumes, keeping only traces of her MGM stardom intact in her repertoire. The spectacle no longer emanated from camerawork, editing, or intricate choreography. The spectacle was in her seemingly authentic performance, the reiteration of her past stardom. As she sang, the history of her life was in her songs. But the converse was equally true for Garland; the history of American songs and musical theater could be mapped onto her life. Drawing on the nostalgia of these old times, her concert career not only solidified MGM's place as the source of the best postwar musicals, but helped her transcend her earlier stardom by building her into an agent of nostalgia that extended well beyond the limits of her MGM (nostalgia) musicals.⁹

Nowhere was the sense of authenticity in her performances more powerful than in the actual delivery of her songs. She had fought with Metro for fifteen years for control of her voice; throughout the 1950s she learned to shape and control her instrument independent of the studio system. As she gained the confidence to leave behind the dances and costumes of the "old Judy," so too did she remold her voice to fit her new (onstage) persona. By 1954, when she filmed *A Star is Born*, her new voice was already well developed. Her vocalizations in the picture represent a significant break from the influence of others; it was her musical assertion of independence, both literal and performative.

⁹ Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 117-122; and Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 139.

A Star is Born: Authenticity as Spectacle

A Star is Born captured Garland at a transitional moment in her life—four years after MGM fired her and in the process of re-establishing herself on the concert circuit. This film was intended to be her Hollywood comeback, the launching point for many future roles.¹⁰ She and husband-producer Sid Luft hand-picked this musical remake, with songs by Harold Arlen and Ira Gershwin.¹¹ They selected George Cukor, a novice to color pictures and musicals, to direct the picture. His well-established sensitivity to “women’s issues” proved him to be an ideal director for showcasing Garland’s immense talent. After its premiere, the film was cut by twenty-seven minutes; in 1983 most of the original footage was recovered; the restored version has become the standard for subsequent revivals and television airings.¹²

The film is noteworthy for its stellar performances, which earned Garland an Academy Award nomination, its great songs, and solid directing.¹³ The film was hailed for its realistic portrayal of Hollywood, though it is still considered a classic backstage musical

¹⁰ Accounts of the day, as much as subsequent scholarly work on the subject, repeatedly acknowledged Garland’s triumphant return to the big screen following her successful New York Palace comeback. See, e.g., “Campaign Catalog,” *Motion Picture Herald*, 23 October 1954, 58; Abel., Review of *A Star is Born*, *Variety*, 29 September 1954, reprinted in *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, vol. 9 1954-1958 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983), n.p.; S. P., “A Star Is ‘Reborn’,” *New York Times*, 10 October 1954, SM25, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹¹ The original nonmusical *A Star is Born* (1937), itself based on David O. Selznick’s 1932 film *What Price Hollywood?*, starred Janet Gaynor as Esther Blodgett and Fredric March as Norman Maine. It was produced by Selznick and directed by William A. Wellman. The film was remade for a third time in 1976, starring Barbra Streisand and Kris Kristofferson. See Richard Lippe, “Gender and Destiny: George Cukor’s *A Star is Born*,” *CineAction!* 3/4 (Winter 1986): 46-57; and Stanley Green, *Hollywood Musicals Year by Year* (Milwaukee, Hal Leonard Publishing: 1990), 188, 263.

¹² *A Star is Born*, Produced by Sidney Luft, Directed by George Cukor, Color, 176 min., Warner Bros., 1954, restored/reconstructed 1983, DVD, Author’s Collection.

¹³ James Mason did not receive a nomination for his portrayal of Norman Maine, but rather for his role as Captain Nemo in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. Thomas M. Pryor, “Hollywood Election Count,” *New York Times*, 2 January 1955, X5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Many, however, felt he should have received a nomination for *A Star is Born*. See, e.g., “James Mason to Retire as Actor,” *New York Times*, 14 October 1954, 37, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

based on the (sub-)genre's conventions.¹⁴ With a documentary-like feel to many of the scenes and a lack of the usual fantasy the majority of postwar musicals, particularly those from MGM, incorporated, *A Star is Born* was considered a groundbreaking musical, and like *Sunset Boulevard*, a frank insider's treatment of Hollywood. Its magic, though, rested squarely on its multiple links to Judy Garland's own story—to her days at MGM and beyond.

The film recounts the story of the declining alcoholic Hollywood star Norman Maine (James Mason), who discovers and then falls in love with singer Esther Blodgett (Garland). The film traces Esther's rising stardom under Norman's careful tutelage, from her nights singing in smoky clubs, to her first screen test, to her movie premiere and acceptance of her first Academy Award. In the process we witness her transformation into the musical film star Vicki Lester. Her rapid ascent is accented all the more by Norman's even more dizzying downward spiral into drunken oblivion resulting in his eventual suicide. The film seems in an eerily prescient way to have blended Judy's story with Norman's. His suicide, largely attributed to his alcoholism, foreshadowed Garland's own untimely death due to a lifetime of substance abuse. While she did not commit suicide, the parallels are nonetheless quite striking.

Similar to her concerts, *A Star is Born* incorporates her own life and career. In the most literal sense, the film uses her "real" biography as fodder for its script. Given the timing of this film's release—just four years after all of her troubles with MGM came to a head—this film seemed to profit off of Garland's "personal" life. "The parallels to Judy's own story are unmistakable," one documentary asserts. "But in real life, Judy Garland was

¹⁴ James Bernardoni, *George Cukor: A Critical Study and Filmography* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 1985), Chapter 5: "A Star Is Born (1954)," 67-94.

both Esther Blodgett and Norman Maine.”¹⁵ Audiences were undoubtedly aware of this likeness, given the recent and rather tawdry media coverage following Garland’s troubles at Metro as well as her drug addictions.¹⁶ The film “represented Judy’s search for truth. A Hollywood story—without a happy ending.”¹⁷ Indeed, as post-production accounts agree, director George Cukor pushed Garland to dig deep within herself when filming dramatic scenes. He urged her to draw on her personal life, specifically her ability to rise above private tragedy.¹⁸

Both narratively and stylistically, *A Star is Born* plays off of her old image while trying to incorporate her evolving stage persona. The film thus serves as a bridge, an “in-between” from her imprisoned stardom as MGM’s child to an independent adult in her thirties and forties with a successful concert career. This was most notable in her singing. She both drew on her Metro-styled songs while moving well beyond to use her new voice. Each musical number blended her two vocal forms together, thereby adding to the already authentic feel of the picture. Merging the two performative styles, at times at odds with each other, into one film, however, ultimately underscores the process of construction at work.

¹⁵ *Judy Garland: By Myself*, chapter 14. For more on the parallels of the film to Garland’s career and personal troubles, see Jennings, “Nova: Garland in ‘A Star is Born’;” Dyer, “*A Star is Born* and the Construction of Authenticity;” Currid, “Judy Garland’s American Drag;” and Brian Currid, “‘Ain’t I People?’: Voicing National Fantasy,” in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, eds. Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 113-44; Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, Chapter 3: “Judy Garland and gay men.”

¹⁶ An example of such coverage is Louella O. Parsons, “The Only Hope,” *Photoplay Magazine* (September 1950): 76. For more on Garland’s post-Metro media coverage, see Jennings, “Nova: Garland in ‘A Star is Born’,” 326-327; and Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 139. Press coverage, including accounts of production and critical reviews, made this same connection between Garland’s personal life and the film. See, for example, Abel., Review of *A Star is Born*, *Variety*, 29 September 1954, reprinted in *Variety Film Reviews 1907-1980*, volume 9: 1954-1958 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983), n.p.

¹⁷ *Judy Garland: By Myself*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* See also, Clarke, *Get Happy*, 318; and Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, 315-320.

Garland's performance, though made to *appear* authentic, is steeped in as much spectacle as her old work at MGM had been.

The multiple forms of self-reference that are central to the film are what Jane Feuer calls self-reflexivity, a standard convention of the genre in the postwar era. Self-reflexivity is a self-conscious and explicit stance which demands the audience's familiarity not simply with the tropes of the genre (character types, plot, recycled tunes, standard transitions between the diegetic world and the spectacle) but, in this case, with Garland's MGM career and personal life.¹⁹ Consider Fred Astaire's postwar MGM work, including *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), *Royal Wedding* (1951), and *The Band Wagon* (1953) (or even his infamously "bad" duet with Garland in *Easter Parade*). In all of these films his earlier stage work with sister Adele and film work with Ginger Rogers unabashedly became a major source of humor.²⁰ Self-reflexive films, typically backstage musicals, such as *The Band Wagon*, build off of previous films to create "inside" jokes for loyal moviegoers.

On a more figurative level, these films acknowledge and erase the production, or myth, of entertainment (makeup, rehearsals, dubbing). Musicals, song-and-dance routines in particular, seek to mystify the means of film production to lend the appearance of reality.²¹

¹⁹ Indeed, the film narratively plays with Garland's myriad personal failures while at MGM, as delineated in Chapter Three. Garland's character, Esther Blodgett, is unable to protect and save her marriage or her husband's life, which Richard Lippe cites as her larger "failure" in the role she undertook "... as mother/wife." Lippe, "Gender and Destiny," 55. Ironically, life could be said to imitate art, as costar James Mason announced his retirement from pictures just as the film was released, although he continued to appear in films well beyond 1954, including Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959). "James Mason to Retire as Actor," *New York Times*, 14 October 1954, 37, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. For more on self-reflexivity, see Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, Chapter 5 and Jane Feuer, "The Self-reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment," in *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman (London: Routledge/British Film Institute, 1981), 159-173.

²⁰ For more on the recycling of Astaire's older work in his postwar MGM films, see Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 113-17; and John Mueller, *Astaire Dancing: The Musical Films* (New York: Wings Books, 1985).

²¹ By the mid-1950s Hollywood musicals began to rely less on blatant fantasy for their production numbers. Additionally, Hollywood as a whole was increasingly influenced by new, more realistic, filming and acting styles, as typified by Method Acting in films such as Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954). Jane Feuer links the generic change to the end of the classic studio system. (*Hollywood Musical*, 87-88); I would argue

Normally, people do not suddenly break out into song.²² So when musical characters begin to sing and dance in perfect harmony and synchronization, it has to look like the most natural thing in the world. Feuer calls this *bricolage*, or film engineering to give the appearance of natural spontaneity.²³ This semblance of spontaneity obscures the careful choreography, long hours of rehearsal, and post-production dubbing of voices and tap steps. Self-reflexivity, combined with *bricolage*, produces a sense of the real, or authentic, because it is supposedly capturing true life. All of this depends on the moviegoers' complicity—they must willingly suspend their disbelief and accept the genre's trope of moving between diegesis/narrative and spectacle/song-and-dance. The "integrated musicals" of MGM's postwar years sought to aid audiences by smoothing these transitions, weaving plot and music into a single coherent narrative. Fifties audiences bought this—as test audiences frequently praised preview films for their "realism" or "lifelike qualities."

Thus, *A Star is Born* serves as a metaphor for the myth of authenticity. We think this is a *real* representation of Garland's "rebirth" as a star.²⁴ But we cannot forget the layers of performance, artifice, and spectacle at work here, sometimes subtly, sometimes explicitly, but always destabilizing any actual sense of authenticity.²⁵ Because the film *looks* real, few would question the fantasy underscoring the production. The initial sense of realism, inspired by the opening scene's documentary-style of rapid editing, is consistently

additionally that audiences increasingly desired a more "realistic" feel to their movies, including musicals, throughout the postwar period.

²² "Mad About Musicals" Promo, Turner Classic Movies, October 2004, Videocassette, Author's Collection.

²³ Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 3-15.

²⁴ See, for instance, S.P., "A Star is 'Reborn'," *New York Times*, 10 October 1954, SM25, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; and Bosley Crowther, "The Rebirth of 'A Star': Judy Garland Shines in a Showy Remake of a Famous Film," *New York Times*, 17 October 1954, X1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁵ Dyer, "A Star is Born and the Construction of Authenticity."

undermined in the film via the use of melodramatic tropes and Cukor's "highly self-conscious *mise-en-scène*."²⁶

A Star is Born thereby relies on the promise of authenticity to re-mask its artifice. The picture's illusion of authenticity extends beyond spectacle and even the nature of popular entertainment in America. This film points directly to one of the major concerns of the fifties—namely, how to remain “inner-directed” in a society that increasingly valued external conformity (“other-directedness”). In a political climate in which deviation from the center could result in suspicion and accusations, the need to “fit in” was not just a cultural or consumerist choice but a necessity of survival. The inability to achieve the norm, whether in private or out in the open, was a brutal reality for many Americans, such as homosexuals and African-Americans. For many, the only way to reconcile these two extremes was through an intricate posture of masking, passing, or covering.²⁷

From the opening musical number, we can see how *A Star is Born* collapses competing images of Judy Garland—vis-à-vis her voice—to subvert any sense of

²⁶ While Richard Lippe reads the film as more of a melodrama than a musical, the film's integration of song and narrative is, by and large, seamless. While musicals in the later 1950s and beyond limited their use of fantasy, these musicals were, nevertheless, not “realistic” the way that other fifties films, such as Elia Kazan's work, tried to be. Lippe, “Gender and Destiny,” 56. James Bernardoni praises *A Star is Born* for its adherence to generic integration, noting not only how the songs match the narrative, but how “plot, theme, and style approach complete integration.” He goes so far as to hail the film as setting “the standard for the integrated movie musical,” though many critics, and even George Cukor, would disagree, given the ill-placed “Born in a Trunk” medley. Furthermore, Bernardoni's analysis of the film makes note of the “parallel cutting between” Esther and Norman. This sort of “dual focus,” as Rick Altman has labeled it, is a central feature of the genre. Contradictorily, though, Bernardoni argues that this is fundamentally a uniquely realistic musical, particularly because of Garland's performance and Cukor's shooting style. Such a claim is clearly at odds with his positioning of the film as a standard of the genre. Bernardoni, *George Cukor*, 67, 69, 70, 76, 81.

²⁷ Kenji Yoshino distinguishes *covering*, which he borrows from sociologist Erving Goffman, from *passing*: “Passing pertains to the *visibility* of a particular trait, while covering pertains to its *obtrusiveness*.” People who pass attempt to hide an element of their identity, such as their race, religion, or sexuality, all of the time—and often from themselves—while those who cover do not hide that identity, but mute it in certain contexts. The classic example of covering is FDR, who did not want anyone to see him in a wheelchair though everyone knew he was disabled. Kenji Yoshino, *Covering: The Hidden Assault on our Civil Rights* (New York: Random House, 2006), 18-19.

authenticity, despite the realistic feel of the overall picture. Her first song, “You Gotta Have Me Go With You,” is at first glance a straight reiteration of her MGM work. But a closer inspection greatly complicates such a comparison.²⁸ On the surface “You Gotta Have Me Go With You” appears to echo her final MGM number, “Get Happy,” in costume, accompaniment, and style. In both routines she appears in a feminine version of a man’s tuxedo, contradictorily helping her to blend in with her male co-performers while showing off her legs to differentiate her femininity. In “Get Happy” she dances with eight men, vying with them to be the center of a routine intended to showcase her talent. In “You Gotta Have Me Go With You” she sings and dances with two men, backed up by an all-male big band. Here she sings in harmony and dances in step with these men, while she is at odds with the silent male dancers who threaten to overtake her in “Get Happy.”

Though both numbers are performed as part of variety shows on fictive stages before fictive audiences, Garland’s position on the stage varies significantly in each number. In “Get Happy” the camera follows her, with unvaried stage lighting throughout. But in “You Gotta Have Me Go With You,” the camera cuts between her and the commotion an inebriated Norman arouses backstage. Further, the scene begins with her completely in darkness. In “Get Happy” the chorus of dancers, rather than the lighting, obscure her from the camera’s line of sight. In the latter routine, it is not until the song begins and a spotlight focuses on her that we can make her out (similarly both numbers begin as male-only environments until Garland “appears”). But as “Gotta Have Me Go With You” progresses, she is forced in and out of the spotlight. When Norman stumbles on stage, he forces her to step into complete darkness to try to subdue him. This constitutes a literal break in her

²⁸ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 171 and Jennings, “Nova: Garland in ‘A Star is Born’,” 329.

performance, one that is both planned and narratively-driven. Likewise, before Norman actually steps on the stage, his noisy behavior backstage disrupts her performance. As in “Get Happy,” she actually stops singing, though in this case she actually laughs at the absurdity of the situation, rather than expressing anxiety or consternation.

Not until Norman distracts her are we granted our first close-up of Garland. The first shot of her in the film is a medium shot of her backstage just prior to this number. The camera starts out on her leg—that ultimate feminine marker—before we see the rest of her. The conventions of filming dance numbers at this time typically employed few if any close-ups; numbers with minimal dancing tended to incorporate more close-ups to emphasize the singer while downplaying the general lack of movement. And so it is curious that, like “Get Happy,” this routine limits its close-ups of its star despite her fairly sedentary performance. The lack of close-ups suggests an attempt to hide Garland, who did not execute control over her camerawork. It is equally telling that this initial close-up captures a moment in which Garland has paused in her song. In the preceding chapter I suggested that such a performative break signified a moment of resistance for a woman whose actions were almost completely controlled by the studio. But what to make of this later break, when Garland was no longer tied to a studio and, in fact, was co-producing the film with her third husband, Sidney Luft?

In his camera analysis of the film, James Bernardoni offers an alternate interpretation of this momentary break in “You Gotta Have Me Go With You,” one with equally unsettling implications for Garland. He argues that Esther’s attempt to incorporate the drunken Norman into the song-and-dance routine to save both of them from embarrassment, which the audience in the film cheers, actually constitutes a failure for her. “Esther,” he contends, “has

lost control of the camera, which throughout her number is centered on her and has faithfully followed her movements. So she has salvaged her performance, but just barely and not without loss.”²⁹ No longer under the grips of Metro, now collaborating with her producer-husband to orchestrate her big Hollywood comeback, her power is nonetheless still limited, which the rest of the number, indeed the film’s entire narrative, seems to suggest.

In stark contrast to “Get Happy,” Garland does not fully restore her position as the center of the number. Rather, she draws Norman into the dance to hide his drunken state from the audience. Treating him like a rag doll, she gets behind him, grabs hold of his arms, and moves them in time with her own choreographed moves. He joins in, attempting to follow her lead with his feet. But each time she tries to dance him gracefully off the stage, he resists, pushing the pair back into the center spotlight. If we are to think of Norman and Esther combined as the “real” Garland, this number suggests a real struggle between full public disclosure (which Norman signifies) and an attempt to hide her identity (symbolized in her efforts to lure him out of the spotlight). This reading could not have been possible in her earlier work, since MGM audiences had yet to learn anything about her troubles until her contract was prematurely severed. Though audiences were starting to read about her problems when *Summer Stock*, which featured “Get Happy,” was released, Garland *herself* had yet to openly talk about such deeply personal issues.³⁰ In this sense, “You Gotta Have Me Go With You” plays with her MGM image, distorting it in the process. Where the public side of Garland ends and the private side begins is anyone’s guess. The blurring of these two personae, itself a fictive dichotomy created by the Hollywood star system, renders

²⁹ Bernardoni, *George Cukor*, 70.

³⁰ It was not until 1952 that she began to talk about her troubles at MGM or beyond. Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 139 and Jennings, “Nova: Garland in ‘A Star is Born,’” 326-327.

uncovering the authentic Garland an impossible task, even as *A Star is Born* appears real and true to life.

The film's initial reliance on Garland's familiar MGM image "and the [audience's] acceptance of the star's past reality makes it possible to go on to new possibilities in a graceful fashion."³¹ Audiences were ready for a "new Judy" by 1954, a mature woman who, rather than hiding her personal pain, instead utilized it for more intense, more "authentic," performances. By the film's release, many audience members were well acquainted with this newer version of the star, whether from reading the Hollywood gossip columns and fan magazines, or seeing her live at the Palace. And yet, Cukor and Garland do not abandon fully her old Metro style. This stylized blend—her vocalization as well as Cukor's *mise-en-scène* and camerawork—smooth the transition between the older figure and newer version of herself, incorporating all sides of her star image. Even as she moved away from her old MGM persona on the stage, she never fully abandoned the songs of her studio days, and therefore she could not abandon her past side in this film. Thus, *A Star is Born*, in all of its song-and-dance numbers, constantly works and reworks these images of Garland, "in-between" images that were neither consonant nor fully at odds with each other. The film relies on the nostalgia of Garland and, more generally, musical theater to (re)establish Garland as a film star though she would only make three more movies in her lifetime.

Her vocalizations equally captured the liminal, ever transitioning, voice that she was now learning to yield on her own. Musically, "You Gotta Have Me Go With You" is not radically different from her previous work at MGM. As Wade Jennings pointedly notes, this

³¹ Jennings, "Nova: Garland in 'A Star is Born'," 329.

opening number is the sort of “verbal and musical fluff” abounding in her MGM numbers.³² And like her previous singing, it is remarkably restrained for such a big voice, even halting in the moments when she is trying to subdue Norman. For fifteen years MGM had controlled and manipulated her voice, never allowing her to realize her full vocal potential. “She was allowed only partial use of a voice that had become bigger and more emotionally charged in the years since she had sung ‘Over the Rainbow.’ ”³³ “You Gotta Have Me Go With You” clearly conforms to this old vocal style. But in her next song, “The Man that Got Away,” we see and hear a very different Judy emerging, which Cukor’s camerawork reinforces.

In some ways, this number, the second of the film, was no less conventional than “You Gotta Have Me Go With You,” or her previous MGM work, for that matter. Like the celluloid dances of Kelly and Astaire, it was filmed in “one long take,” rather than sewing together the perspectives of multiple cameras and camera angles.³⁴ The number is framed from the perspective of Norman, who is watching undetected as Esther and her band jam in an after-hours nightclub. Thus, we are seeing the performance through Norman’s point-of-view. However, there are no reaction shots or cuts back to Norman throughout the routine, despite this common editing practice in classic Hollywood filmmaking. Even though postwar musicals attempted to achieve a seamless look in the filming of their spectacles, directors actually employed minimal and largely undetectable editing for song-and-dance numbers. Shooting “The Man that Got Away” in a single, continuous take created an “in-

³² Bernardoni, unlike Jennings, does not see “You Gotta Have Me Go With You” as trite. Rather, he praises the song for its relevance to the film’s overall plot, which he sees symbolically as “the symbiotic union of Norman and Esther that is joined while it is being sung [and that] doesn’t require commentary.” Bernardoni, *George Cukor*, 70.

³³ Jennings, “Nova: Garland in ‘A Star is Born,’” 324.

³⁴ Bernardoni, *George Cukor*, 72.

between” effect that tried to achieve the look of the classic Hollywood musical but through very different techniques. The camerawork therefore plays off of Garland’s MGM image while moving beyond it to capture a more authentic performance.

The *mise-en-scène* enhances the number’s authentic feel. This is meant to be a “private” moment for Garland, who is unaware that she is being watched. She smiles at the pleasure of singing for herself, and her hand gestures imply a sense of naturalness. She twice runs her fingers through her hair, pushing her bangs back—gestures that would become embedded in her live performances and in *I Could Go on Singing*.³⁵ In this way, too, the number corresponds with her earlier style in its encapsulation of a seemingly spontaneous and natural moment, or *bricolage*. Such musical numbers obscure the pre-production work involved—choreography, rehearsal, pre-recording, dubbing—in their perfectly-executed performance. Thus the technology of performance is masked and the performance itself moves into the realm of the natural, a technique MGM repeatedly employed in this period.

What makes this rather conventional number stand out in the film, and apart from all of Garland’s previous work, is her vocalization. Wade Jennings has observed how, “After a few bars of introduction, her voice suddenly grows in power and depth, bigger and more urgent than Garland’s on-screen voice had ever been before.”³⁶ On the set of *A Star is Born*, she was no longer restrained as she had been at MGM, and sang “The Man that Got Away” in the unreserved and emotionally revealing way audiences would come to expect from her in the 1950s and 1960s. She later recalled that composer Hugh Martin implored her to perform

³⁵ Dyer, “*A Star is Born* and the Construction of Authenticity,” 138-39.

³⁶ Jennings, “Nova: Garland in ‘A Star is Born,’” 330.

the song “in my MGM style. I told him, ‘I can’t sing in that voice anymore. Can’t you see, I’m a woman now.’ ”³⁷ She was no longer content to sing like a little girl.

While Garland thought she had outgrown her childish MGM image, the press was not as quick to abandon that familiar construction. A *New York Times* photographic feature of Garland recording the soundtrack for *A Star is Born* recycled the same sort of language consistently used through 1950 in its headline: “Little Girl, Big Voice.” Likewise, another pictorial spread struggled to define the new Garland: “Garland reportedly retains most of the gamin quality of years past but reaches new maturity.”³⁸ Audiences seemed much more willing to accept this older, more mature Judy. Bill Roberson of Los Angeles recalled attending a preview of *A Star is Born* with a friend who worked at Warner Bros. The film was still quite rough, still in post-production, not yet cut, and ran just under four hours. But the audience did not mind. One “loyal Garland fan” gushed that he hoped the film would never end, he enjoyed it that much. When the lights came up and people realized Garland was in the theater, sitting just in front of Roberson in fact, she “got a rousing standing ovation. I am sure,” Roberson asserted, “that the ovation would have lasted as long as the film had not she and her party left. She was very pleased, smiling through tears.” He never saw the final, butchered, version of the film, saying “as far as I am concerned, that Monday night ... ‘a real star *was* born’.”³⁹

Her performance, with its vast emotional depth is what Richard Dyer and others have identified as the source of her authenticity as an entertainer in life and as Esther Blodgett in

³⁷ *Judy Garland: By Myself*.

³⁸ “Little Girl, Big Voice,” *New York Times*, 24 January 1954, SM50, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “A Star is ‘Reborn,’” *New York Times*, 10 October 1954, SM25, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³⁹ Bill Roberson, “A Star Was Shorn” (Letter to the Editor), *American Film* 9, no. 1 (October 1983): 8.

the film.⁴⁰ She sang with such “truth” that it appeared her songs opened a window into her soul. As producer and former lover Joseph Mankewicz pointed out, “She lived within her songs. Because her songs became the only access she had to a controllable emotion. An emotion that was returned to her.”⁴¹ The film thereby relies on Garland’s powerful voice, new to the big screen, to establish Esther’s authenticity as a character.

“The Man that Got Away” draws on the role of natural talent (always a part of the Garland cinematic persona) in creating a star. That is, the source of her stardom originates from deep within her soul and is supposedly naturally articulated in her songs without training or labor. Or, as *The Hollywood Reporter* reviewer Jack Moffitt explained it, Norman Maine “recognizes an usual quality in her voice—a quality that means stardom. The entire success of the picture depends upon the fact that Judy really has it.”⁴² This scene plays off of “Judy” (the off-screen Judy she would later personify in her concert performances through the 1960s), transcending all previous filmic versions of her to establish an innate “star quality,” which she then, in turn, lends to Esther Blodgett within the film’s diegetic world. Garland-as-star convinces us of Esther’s star potential.⁴³ The unedited tracking shot of her proves Esther’s star potential. “If Esther is truly a star, she will dominate her allotted space by the sheer force of her talent,” Bernardino reminds us. “So the camera tracks back, as if it is denying her any help in accomplishing her task, as if it is challenging her to prove her stardom. At the same time, the tracking-back of the camera ... signifies the instinctive

⁴⁰ Dyer, “*A Star is Born* and the Construction of Authenticity;” and Currid, “Judy Garland’s American Drag.”

⁴¹ *Judy Garland: By Myself*.

⁴² Jack Moffitt, “‘A Star is Born’ is Screen Triumph: Great Show; Great Judy Garland” (review), *The Hollywood Reporter*, 29 September 1954, 3. Bosley Crowther drew a similar link between Garland’s singing talent and her authenticity: Bosley Crowther, “The Rebirth of ‘A Star’” Judy Garland Shines in a Showy Remake of a Famous Film,” (review) *New York Times*, 17 October 1954, XI, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴³ Dyer, “*A Star is Born* and the Construction of Authenticity,” 138-139.

shrinking away of ordinary people from too-close contact with star power.”⁴⁴ Garland’s exquisite performance, which lives up to the difficult challenge of a singly and continuous long shot, earns her the right to be a star, both as Judy Garland and as Esther Blodgett/ Vicki Lester. And so her singing and stage presence underscore her “natural” raw singing and acting talent.

This routine signifies yet another shift for Garland. Because of her new, more adult, singing style, we might think of this number as a more complete performative break than what was possible in MGM numbers such as “Get Happy.” No longer forced to sing like a little girl, Garland unleashed a singing power heretofore unknown to her fans. In this sense, “The Man that Got Away” constituted an act of defiant independence for the actress. By drawing on Garland’s talent to lend credibility to Esther’s star quality, the number attempts to transcend the filmic world, relying on the “true” Garland (or at least a truer Garland), to reflect authenticity back into the film. This version of Garland is meant to be more authentic because it is not the product of her struggles with powerful studio men. It is, rather, meant to stand for the product of her unmitigated creative work. But in truth, a star was *made*, not born.

Garland-Esther’s stardom is wholly constructed, a notion that is further punctuated in two important moments of self-conscious artifice that follow “The Man that Got Away.” Norman convinces Esther to leave her band to break into the movies. Under his tutelage she lands a contract as a studio player, and thanks to his clever maneuvering, wins the lead in a musical motion picture. In an interesting and rather self-reflexive scene, she is sent down to makeup and wardrobe, where she is remolded into something more glamorous. Directly

⁴⁴ Bernardoni, *George Cukor*, 73.

echoing the problems MGM found with her figure—down to her pug nose which they insisted on remolding with putty in her 1930s films—makeup artists scrutinize every inch of her body only to determine that nothing is up to par. It is only after Norman forces her to take off the ill-fitted blonde wig and frilly pink dress, and wipes off the layers of makeup, that she can emerge as the star, Vicki Lester. His act of wiping off her makeup represents the removal of the (MGM) mask, but she is not the one to do it, and thus this scene references her lack of control during her tenure at MGM. But, to its 1954 audience, this moment also reinforces the process of unmasking begun in “The Man that Got Away.”

The second, and far more important, scene that uses artifice to destabilize the concept of authenticity is the oddly-placed production number, “Born in a Trunk.” Coming about midway through the film, this musical montage, consisting of six distinct songs, is a scene from the preview of Esther/Vicki’s first musical picture. We see the scene through Esther and Norman’s eyes, sitting alongside them in the fictive audience. We watch how the nameless character on the screen-within-the-screen (played by Judy Garland-as Esther Blodgett-as Vicki Lester) describes her rise in show business, culminating in her big break. This is the story of “Born in a Trunk.” As a film-within-the-film, it is the ultimate *mise en abyme*, for it contains concentric circles of stardom: the fading film star hoping for a comeback (Garland) playing the hopeful rising Hollywood star (Esther/Vicki) who, in turn, plays a rising stage actress (unnamed).

“Born in a Trunk”: Authenticity as Nostalgia

The montage begins *in medias res* of Judy-as-Esther-as-Vicki performing the end of “Swanee,” to which the montage returns full circle at its close. The curtain goes down on

Garland's character, and she steps out for a bow, sits down on the stage's apron, and launches into "Born in a Trunk," a half-sung, half-spoken, semi-autobiographical musical interlude (in the tradition of the *recitative*), which Rodger Edens wrote specifically for Garland's use in the film (in the vein of "In-Between" and her 1951 concert medley):⁴⁵

... [first verse, mostly spoken] ...

I was born in a trunk
In the Princess Theatre in Pocatella, Idaho.
It was during the matinee on Friday
And they used a makeup towel for my didee.
When I first saw the light
It was pink and amber
Coming from the footlights on the stage.
When my dad carried me out there to say hello
They told me that I stopped the show.

So I grew up in a crazy world of dressing rooms
And hotel rooms and waiting rooms
And rooms behind-the-scenes.
And I can't forget the endless rows
Of sleepless nights and eatless nights
And nights without a nickel in my jeans.

But it's all in the game and the way you play it
And you've got to play the game you know.
When you're born in a trunk at the Princess Theatre
In Pocatello, Idaho.

At first I just stood and watched from the wings
That's all my mom and dad would allow.
But as I got older, I got a little bolder
And snuck out for their second bow.
They kept me in the act because they needed me
To milk applause
Until one night, they did a crazy thing
They left me out there all alone

⁴⁵ The autobiographical feel of the song (much like "In-Between") is reinforced in the documentary, *Judy Garland: By Myself*, which opens with clips from the sequence with voiceover from Garland's own biographical reflections as recited by another actress. Jane Feuer argues that "Born in a Trunk" reflects back not only on Garland's pre-Hollywood days as Baby Gumm, as well as her MGM career, but also on her post-MGM days of performing at the New York Palace, all to the effect of sentimentalizing her. Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 119-20.

Mama said ‘you’re on your own!’
And Papa shouted ‘this is it kid, sing!’⁴⁶

After singing these five verses of “Born in a Trunk,” Garland’s character begins recounting her theatrical rise, beginning as a child in Vaudeville—paralleling her days as Baby Gumm. Through musical “flashbacks” she performs five numbers, with short *recitatives* of “Born in a Trunk” to unite the disparate songs into a single coherent narrative.⁴⁷ The final number bring us back full circle with the complete version of “Swanee,” where the entire montage had started. All six numbers are performed on a clearly-marked stage, with a proscenium arch (framed within the film’s proscenium arch), and unlike the rest of *A Star is Born*, there are no attempts to appear realistic. Rather, the montage is stylistically far closer to the sort of work that made Garland a star at MGM, such as the montage of duets with Fred Astaire in *Easter Parade* (1948) (“I Love a Piano,” “Snookey Ookums,” “Ragtime Violin,” “When the Midnight Choo-Choo Leaves for Alabam’ ”).

The entire “Born in a Trunk” montage is out of place with the rest of the picture, filmed without director George Cukor’s knowledge or participation.⁴⁸ Warner Bros. studio head, Jack Warner, insisted this far more traditional segment be added to the film to appease Judy’s fan base. As Wade Jennings explains, “It is a sentimental moment that [former MGM studio head L. B.] Mayer would have loved, but it contrasts markedly to the strongly realistic

⁴⁶ “Born in a Trunk,” Words by Leonard Gershe, Music by Roger Edens, 1954. Lyrics taken from the DVD and from <http://jgdb.com/column2.htm>. On the opening credits of *A Star is Born*, only Gershe is credited for the song. On Edens’ contribution, see Clarke, *Get Happy*, 319.

⁴⁷ While the *recitative* (sung dialogue) is a common operatic device, it was not often employed in musicals at this time. More contemporary stage musicals, such as the work of Andrew Lloyd Weber, tend to rely on minimal if any dialogue, using song for all forms of communication, as in the case of *Jesus Christ Superstars* or *Les Misérables*. Jane Feuer, though, does call the “Born in a Trunk” musical interludes a “recitative device” in *The Hollywood Musical*, 120.

⁴⁸ I use “Born in a Trunk” hereon to reference the entire twenty-minute production number, not just the *recitatives*. On the number’s misplacement, see Jennings, “Nova: Garland in ‘A Star is Born,’” 332.

tone of the rest of the picture. Warner was probably right about public reaction, however; it was the most favorably received part of the film when it was first reviewed, and it gave Garland material that she used for the rest of her life as a [concert] performer.”⁴⁹ Given the addition of this twenty-minute production number, the studio decided to cut out twenty-seven minutes of the final print in order to increase the number of daily exhibitions. Two musical numbers and some dramatic scenes were excised, again without Cukor’s involvement.⁵⁰

George Cukor was very dissatisfied with Warner Bros.’ decision to add this twenty-minute segment, which he felt came at the expense of better developed, more dramatic and emotional scenes between Garland and Mason.⁵¹ The director, along with many film scholars, lamented the addition of “Born in a Trunk,” pointing out how it, along with the original cuts to the film, produced a choppy and fragmented film. Many critics and fans believed that Garland was robbed of her Oscar because of the post-production excising.⁵² Richard Lippe, for instance, bemoans how “the complex emotional pattern Cukor creates through the interaction between song and narrative is jeopardized by the ‘Born in a Trunk’ number.” He sees *A Star is Born* as more than a conventional musical. While he does not deny the film’s adherence to particular generic conventions, he finds the film’s melodramatic

⁴⁹ Jennings, “Nova: Garland in ‘A Star is Born’,” 332.

⁵⁰ Thomas M. Pryor, “Warners to Cut ‘A Star is Born’: 27 Minutes Trimmed From 3-Hour Film – Revised Prints Will Be Released Nov. 1,” *New York Times*, 23 October 1954, 13, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Robert Osborne, “Rediscovered ‘Star’ Footage Inspires Film’s Reconstruction,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 13 April 1983, 1, 5. Audience-based accounts of the cuts include Dewitt Bodeen, “George Cukor” (Letter to the Editor), *Films in Review* 33, no. 4 (April 1982): 193 and Gene D. Phillips, S.J., “George Cukor,” (Letter to the Editor), *Films in Review* 33, no. 3 (March 1982): 130.

⁵¹ Gavin Lambert, *On Cukor* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1972), 48-52. See also Gene D. Phillips, S.J., “George Cukor,” (Letter to the Editor), *Films in Review* 33, no. 3 (March 1982): 130. Bernardoni refuses even to engage the montage in his scene-by-scene analysis of the film, justifying his decision because the scene “is easily detachable from the whole” of the film. Bernardoni, *George Cukor*, 81.

⁵² See, e.g., Dewitt Bodeen, “George Cukor” (Letter to the Editor), *Films in Review* 33, no. 4 (April 1982): 193. In a later interview, George Cukor likewise linked the film’s cuts to Garland not winning an Oscar that year. Lambert, *On Cukor*, 52.

elements far more compelling and important.⁵³ Interestingly, however, most reviewers at the time of the film's original release praised this montage, identifying it as one of the shining highlights of the film. Jack Moffitt, for instance, called it "one of the most ingenious musical montages ever placed on the screen."⁵⁴ An ironic twist on the self-reflexivity of the film, Garland incorporated this performance into her MGM-generated repertoire of songs she would continue to sing for the rest of her life.

It is precisely this break with "reality" both stylistically and diegetically that makes "Born in a Trunk" so fascinating and rich a segment to dissect. Whereas Richard Dyer asserts that "The Man that Got Away" is the film's critical scene because it establishes Garland's/Blodgett's/Lester's star quality, and hence her authenticity as a performer, I would suggest that "Born in a Trunk" is equally important for the ways in which it mystifies the construction of authenticity through its artifice.⁵⁵ Where the former number is seemingly devoid of spectacle, the latter is steeped in it—the stage within a stage/film within a film, the self-referencing to her days at MGM, and the borrowing of classic tropes of entertainment.

"Swanee," the starting and ending scene for "Born in a Trunk," is the ideal number for exploring the construction of spectacle, nostalgia, and authenticity. "Swanee" is not just the point in "Born in a Trunk" from whence Garland draws her authenticity through the link to "natural" talent; its legacy embodies the process of authentication through masking. This masking occurs on two interrelated levels: first, masking through spectacle, whereby the

⁵³ Lippe, "Gender and Destiny," 51, 54. For more on generic conventions, see Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981).

⁵⁴ Jack Moffitt, "'A Star is Born' is Screen Triumph: Great Show; Great Judy Garland" (review), *The Hollywood Reporter*, 29 September 1954, 3. Bosley Crowther does not go so far in his assessment of the number, but neither does he find the number out of place nor poorly filmed. Rather, he praises Garland's performance. Bosley Crowther, "The Screen: 'A Star is Born' Bows: Judy Garland, James Mason in Top Roles," (review) *New York Times*, 12 October 1954, 23, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁵ Dyer, "'A Star is Born' and the Construction of Authenticity," 138.

artifice employed in the production number obscures the acts of construction necessary for Garland as performer. But more importantly, this song—the crowning moment of fictive stardom for Judy-Esther-Vicki—relies on somewhat veiled linkages to the intersecting history of popular music, African-American culture, and blackface minstrelsy. These links make the process of authentication-through-spectacle possible and, ironically, hard to detect.

“Swanee” (1919) is a classic Tin Pan Alley song in the “tradition” of blackface minstrelsy. It was George Gershwin’s first and biggest hit, with lyrics by Irving Caesar. Caesar suggested the idea of “Swanee”—“a one-step with an American flavor. George ... saw the setting as ‘something like Stephen Foster’s “Swanee River’.” Foster had written about the Swanee River in his folk song of antebellum longing, “Old Folks at Home.” Gershwin sought to capitalize and build off of this imagery in his own song. When it was completed, Al Jolson, the famous blackface jazz singer of Broadway, liked the song and included it in his current running show. It was an instant hit—making Gershwin a commercial success and earning him his place as the premiere American composer of his day.⁵⁶ It was not until 1945, however, that “Swanee” made it onto the big screen, when Jolson filmed it for *Rhapsody in Blue*, Warner Bros.’ biopic about George Gershwin.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Gershwin’s music is typically positioned as the voice of America in the first half of the Twentieth Century. See, for instance, Robert Kimball and Alfred Simon, *The Gershwins* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), xxvi-xxvii. See also Philip Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley: A History of America’s Great Lyricists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 128; Gerald Mast, *Can’t Help Singing’: The American Musical on Stage and Screen* (New York: Overlook, 1987), 68. For more on the influence of “Old Folks at Home” on “Swanee,” see William W. Austin, “Susanna,” “Jeanie,” and “The Old Folks at Home”: *The Songs of Stephen C. Foster from His Time to Ours*, 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 330-1.

⁵⁷ *Rhapsody in Blue*, Produced by Jesse L. Lasky, Directed by Irving Rapper, Black and White, 139 min., Warner Bros., 1945, Videocassette, obtained through UNC Inter-library Borrowing. Jolson’s appearance in the film lent “a certain authenticity” to it, according to Green, *Hollywood Musicals Year by Year*, 131. Larry Parks performs a version of “Swanee,” in blackface, in *Jolson Sings Again* (Columbia 1949), a project in which Jolson was reported to have coached Parks down to the most minute movement, at least according to the movie’s own account. See Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Interestingly, Parks, who was married to MGM contract

From its inception, then, “Swanee” sat at the crossroads of major cultural forces: the appropriation, popularization, and commercialization of (African-American) jazz by (white) composers and performers in the musical theater and early days of radio, prior to the introduction of talking pictures.⁵⁸ The song, as much as the ways in which it has been performed, was laden with hidden meanings.

Scholars have long studied the prickly and complex relationship of African Americans to “mainstream” popular culture as enacted by whites. From the days of the early Republic, there was a white fascination with and appropriation of black culture, what Eric Lott has dubbed “love and theft.” Since the antebellum period, when T.D. Rice first “blackened up” with burnt cork, white performers have used blackface minstrelsy, one of the most popular forms of entertainment of the century, to assert a common identity—common for white working-class men to the exclusion of women and Blacks.⁵⁹ The blackened face, contrasted with the overly exaggerated lips (in perpetual smile) and eyes, ironically helped (re)assert one’s whiteness. The performance itself, like the face, was a caricature, a typically and falsely Northern vision of bucolic plantation life, rife with stereotypical slave dialect and an unvarying cast of characters: the dandy, the simpleton, the swindler, and so forth. But it was not simply white derision of blacks that drove blackface minstrelsy, as Lott and W. T.

player Betty Garrett of *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* and *On the Town*, was the first actor to admit his former Communist Party membership during World War II. See the Internet Movie Database for more details.

⁵⁸ This sort of white appropriation of black music was not limited to the first half of the Twentieth Century. Brian Ward demonstrates how whites appropriated R&B and rock-n-roll, while we see the same trend today with rap music. Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), particularly Part I: “Deliver me from the days of old,” 19-169.

⁵⁹ Indeed, Burlesque, which has its roots in the minstrel show, relies upon the convention of gender inversions, adapting the all-male minstrel’s form of cross-dressing to the all-female Burlesque, as Lydia Thompson’s troupe of blonde burlesquers typified in the 1860s. See Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). See also Susan A. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Lhamon Jr. argue. Rather, minstrelsy appeared at times of particular political and cultural strife as a way to reassure whites of their own social identities and positions. Both scholars identify blackface minstrelsy as an avenue of class formation for the white working class, or *lumpenproletariat*.⁶⁰ Michael Rogin extends this theory to Jewish immigrants in Hollywood.⁶¹ Blacking up, he maintains, allowed performers such as Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson, but also Anglo performers such as Fred Astaire and even Garland, to prove their successful assimilation into American culture.⁶² Andrea Most takes this argument even further by demonstrating how figurative blackface worked to create democratic communities in postwar Broadway musicals such as *Oklahoma!*.⁶³ Thus by appropriating and then differentiating oneself from African-Americans, white performers could enact their own identities as white (male) Americans.⁶⁴ Ultimately, minstrelsy (like burlesque which

⁶⁰ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), W. T. Lhamon Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). For more background on blackface minstrelsy, see Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). For more on blacks who performed in blackface, see Thomas L. Riis, *Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890-1915* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989) and Arthur Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical: Black Performance and American Musical Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁶¹ Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*.

⁶² Astaire blacked up in two movies: *Swing Time* (RKO, 1936) and *Holiday Inn* (Paramount, 1942). Garland appeared in blackface in her first Mickey Rooney-Busby Berkeley collaboration, *Babes in Arms* (1939). I have not seen any literal blackface performances in postwar Hollywood musicals, with the exception of the Al Jolson Columbia biopics of 1946 and 1949 (*The Jolson Story* and *Jolson Sings Again*, respectively), however whiteness was still asserted vis-à-vis black cultural forms through a less visible “love and theft” of black culture, namely white performers’ appropriation of black song and dance styles while eliminating or marginalizing black performers. See Carol J. Clover, “Dancin’ in the Rain,” in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London: Routledge, 2002), 157-173. Brian Ward offers an excellent account of how rhythm and blues became popular in mainstream white culture. In discussing the origins of rock & roll, for instance, he notes how whites masked, albeit unsuccessfully, the racial origins of rock in attempting to divorce it (at least nominally) from R&B, *Just My Soul Responding*, 43, 123-169.

⁶³ Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), Chapter 4: “‘We Know We Belong to the Land’: The Theatricality of Assimilation in *Oklahoma!*,” 101-118.

⁶⁴ Even African-American performers were often forced to black-up. See Riis, *Just Before Jazz* and Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical*, Chapter 3: “Indefinite Talk: Blacks in Blackface, Filmed.”

patterned itself after the minstrel cycle) relied on inversions of race, class, and gender. Nothing was what it seemed, and so who better than Judy Garland—the consummate confused actress trying to re-craft her star image—to pay homage to Jolson’s blackface “Swanee”? “Born in a Trunk” came at a time when the actress was trying to recover and redefine herself. It is no coincidence, then, that she would revert back to the tropes of blackface minstrelsy to obtain a sense of self-assurance.

At its core, “Swanee” is a song about the nature of authenticity, and the process(es) by which it is established. Written by a northern Jew, the song creates a sense of “Americana” through multiple forms of love and theft, or artistic passing. Like the original Foster tune, penned in 1851, this song was a nostalgic fantasy.⁶⁵ And despite its best intentions, similar to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, it nonetheless captured and perpetuated long-standing stereotypes about African-Americans.⁶⁶ The song uses inauthentic representations as its foundation for asserting its own popularity as an American song. “American culture,” then, becomes something rooted in processes of masking and re-authentication. It is established through the denial of its relationship to the Other, in this case to black culture. What we may now think of as a classic, even nostalgic, American song is, in fact, riddled with layers of artifice and inauthenticity. The concept of *an* “American culture” ultimately

⁶⁵ Stephen Foster’s minstrel-styled music was known for its romanticization and celebration of the antebellum South. Consider, for example, some of the lyrics to “Old Folks at Home”: “Sadly I roam, Still longing for de old plantation, And for the old folks at home, All de world is sad and dreary, Ebry-where I roam, Oh! Darkeys how my heart grows weary, Far from de old folks at home.” Lyrics taken from Richard Jackson, ed., *Stephen Foster Song Book: Original Sheet Music of 40 Songs by Stephen Collins Foster* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1974), 100-3. For more on Foster, see Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), Chapter 11: “Blacks, Whites, and the Minstrel Stage,” 196-220. See also Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 40-41, 184-185.

⁶⁶ For more on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), see Austin, “Susanna,” “Jeanie,” and “The Old Folks at Home,” Chapter 10: “Foster and Other Contemporaries of Uncle Tom,” 223-260; and Linda Williams, “‘A Wonderful, ‘Leaping’ Fish’: Varieties of *Uncle Tom*,” in *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White From Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 45-95. See, also, Chapter Five for a continued discussion of Tom Shows.

loses all meaning; there is nothing natural or authentic about that culture, other than the borrowing and blending of multiple, and often contradictory, cultures.

The fact that Jolson, the most renowned (blackface) vaudevillian of his day and a Jewish immigrant, made the song famous reinforces the contradictory embracing and denial of African-American culture in America. David Ewen notes in *The Life and Death of Tin Pan Alley* that getting Al Jolson to sing a song virtually guaranteed a hit. “The songs he sang,” Ewen continues, “became *Jolson* songs, so much so that any other performer singing them after that would find himself imitating Jolson’s mannerisms.”⁶⁷ Thus, “Swanee” was instantaneously associated in the public’s eye with Jolson; the two became virtually interchangeable. This complicated the layers of love and theft; not only was the tune originally written by a Jew hoping to break into mainstream popular entertainment, but it similarly became synonymous with a second Jew, who adopted racial blackface as his way of asserting an imagined Americanness.

A song such as “Swanee” claims its own cultural authority and dominance (i.e., widespread popularity) by obscuring the ways in which it taps into the formation of “American culture.” “Swanee” carries with it a long tradition upon which Garland could re-establish her tenuous Hollywood stardom. The double inclusion of “Swanee” in “Born in a Trunk” (as introduction to the montage and as its conclusion) overemphasizes its importance in establishing Garland/Blodgett/Lester’s film character’s authentic star quality. Because of its link to Jolson, Tin Pan Alley, classical Hollywood, and blackface minstrelsy, this number does far more than “The Man that Got Away” in asserting Garland’s talent as something

⁶⁷ David Ewen, *The Life and Death of Tin Pan Alley: The Golden Age of American Popular Music* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1964), 117.

natural, raw, and real. For the purposes of this analysis I will limit my discussion to the second (and complete) version of the performance.

It is an all-out production number, the kind MGM was known for in the late 1940s through the mid-1950s. Set against a blazing red background, it takes place on a Mississippi river boat, not unlike *Show Boat's* Cotton Blossom. There is a host of chorus singers and background dancers, all in quaint “plantation-styled” clothing. Much the way nineteenth-century blackface minstrelsy represented a version of southern plantation life imagined by a particular sub-set of Northerners, this version of “Swanee” similarly does not attempt to achieve authenticity in its depiction of the Old South; rather it is a stylized affectation intended for emphasis. On another level, like so many other films, it depicts the South the way Hollywood imagined the nation pictured the South.⁶⁸

The number begins with a medium-shot of Garland, in a burgundy tuxedo, top hat, and white gloves—“a stylized version of the Jolson attire.”⁶⁹ While she is not literally blacked-up, her makeup in this scene appears darker than in the preceding montage. Her white gloves, those ubiquitous props of the blackface minstrel, directly signal her membership in that tradition, and contrast with her darkened face, much the way whites-as-blacks needed to assure their audiences of their whiteness even as they blurred and transcended color lines.

As the scene progresses, Caucasian dancers dressed in colorful turn-of-the-century costumes appear, and the camera pulls away for longer shots of the stage. In the process of

⁶⁸ On the myth of the Southern box office see Thomas R. Cripps, “The Myth of the Southern Box Office: A Factor in Racial Stereotyping in American Movies, 1920-1940,” in *The Black Experience in America: Selected Essays*, eds. James C. Curtis and Lewis L. Gould (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970), 116-144. Chapter Five discusses this myth in greater detail.

⁶⁹ Currid, “Judy Garland’s American Drag,” 130.

tracking backwards we see, far off on stage right, a five-piece African-American brass band. The players are dressed in white, but their faces are clearly distinguishable as black. While it is hard to tell, we can assume they are not whites in blackface, given the political climate of 1954 and Hollywood's abandonment of literal blackface in Hollywood by the end of the Second World War. The black band is completely marginalized in the shot, much the way blacks had been and continued to be marginalized in Hollywood musicals.⁷⁰

After Garland finishes the first chorus of "Swanee" she begins to sing a variation that strays from Jolson's traditional one. Where he whistled, she sings in a soothing, lilting, feminine voice (in contrast to the raspier voice she adopts at the song's conclusion, again in homage to Jolson): "Swanee, swanee/ I am coming back to Swanee. Mammy, mammy/ How I love the old folks at home."⁷¹ At the moment she begins this "riff" (which is no way improvised, given the pre-recording and choreography), six "specialty" black dancers with banjos and tambourines enter the shot. While they are not in blackface, their costumes, dance steps, and instruments signal blackface minstrelsy in its most traditional form. "These dancers might well not be whites in blackface," Brian Currid points out, "but the dance moves they do behind Garland are clearly intended to be impersonations of vaudevillian

⁷⁰ This marginality could occur on two levels. First, the literal marginalization from camera shots, as we see here. But also, blacks have been marginalized in the types of roles they could get. In musicals, blacks were often cast as specialty dancers, such as the Nicholas Brothers in *The Pirate* (1948) or LeRoy Daniel (allegedly a real-life shoe-shine boy who was "discovered"), who danced as a shoe-shiner with Fred Astaire in "Shine on my Shoes," the opening number to *The Band Wagon* (1953). "Fred Astaire Discovers 'Band Wagon' Dancing Partner on Shoe-Shine Stand," M-G-M Press Book for *The Band Wagon* (1953), 4, VMP, Folder #13: "Band Wagon - pub & reviews." *High Society* (1956) offers an interesting twist on this pattern. While Louis Armstrong plays a relatively prominent role in the film, it is as himself: a band conductor and trumpeter. Blacks, even notable ones, were kept out of main roles, relegated to stereotypical positions as maids (*Easter Parade*, 1948) or performers. See Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical*.

⁷¹ Garland's lyrics taken from the film. Original lyrics reprinted in Peter Foss, ed., *The Music and Lyrics of George & Ira Gershwin*, Special Centenary Edition (London: Warner/Chappell Music Ltd., for Warner Bros. Publications, 1998; originally published 1987, revised 1991), 368-371. A copy of the lyrics can also be found at <http://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/bestofbroadway-americanmusical/swanee.htm>.

minstrels. Four of the dancers are playing large tambourines, and the other two are holding stylized banjos as they dance. Each of the dancers smiles their way through the number, to make the impersonation of minstrel performance practice complete.”⁷²

As the song builds to its conclusion, she continues to deviate from the original lyrics, singing:

I love ya Swanee!
How I love you, how I love you
My dear old Swanee.
I'd give the world if I could only be
Sittin' on my mammy's knee.
I love the old folks, I love the young folks
Oh my bunny, let me love ya more than Alabamy!
Mammy, mammy, my dear old mammy.
Your wanderin' child will wander no more
When I get to that Swanee shore.⁷³

These straying lyrics build off of the Jolson legend by combining “Swanee” with “My Mammy,” the final song of *The Jazz Singer* (1927), the first “talkie.”⁷⁴ While Garland’s “Swanee” does not directly repeat the lyrics of “My Mammy,” the references to mammy, inserted in the 1954 version of “Swanee,” were nonetheless a direct allusion.⁷⁵ Most audiences were sure to catch this link given Jolson’s crowning place in popular music and, to a lesser extent, Hollywood musicals.⁷⁶ Columbia Pictures had revived interest in Jolson by

⁷² Currid, “Judy Garland’s American Drag,” 130.

⁷³ Lyrics taken from the film and from <http://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/starisborna/borninatrunk.htm>.

⁷⁴ *The Jazz Singer*, Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck, Directed by Alan Crosland, Black and white, 89 min., Warner Bros., 1927, videocassette, Author’s Collection.

⁷⁵ Yet another link between Garland and Jolson is in the use of the “runway,” the stage extension which, according to *Jolson Sings Again*, Jolson introduced to Broadway when he first performed “Swanee.” While Garland does not use a runway for her rendition, the “Born in a Trunk” vocal narrative that weaves throughout the entire montage is set on the stage “apron,” or the piece of stage in front of the curtain that extends over the orchestra pit. Garland’s character sits on the apron as she sings about her rise to stardom. This can be read as an indirect reference to Jolson.

⁷⁶ He only appeared in six films, the latest of which was *Rhapsody in Blue*. Green, *Hollywood Musicals Year by Year*, 329, 131.

making two biopics about him, *The Jolson Story* (1946) and *Jolson Sings Again* (1949). Jolson re-recorded his classic hits for Larry Parks to lip-sync, and his songs were re-released on the radio, topping the billboards (at least as *Jolson Sings Again* asserts).⁷⁷ These films helped repopularize Jolson for a whole new generation of Americans.⁷⁸ Garland's "Swanee" taps into these long-standing musical theater traditions, including the very inception of the Hollywood musical (with the indirect reference to *The Jazz Singer*). According to Michael Rogin, "Although *A Star is Born*'s 'Swanee' must dispense with blackface, its compensatory self-referentiality is monumental. The number ... links George Gershwin to his brother, Ira, the lyricist of 'Born in a Trunk.' Garland singing 'Swanee' condenses into a single figure the history of American entertainment in burnt cork from Stephen Foster ('Old Folks at Home') through Al Jolson ('Swanee' and 'Mammy') to Garland's own blackface reprise of American entertainment, 'My Daddy Was a Minstrel Man,' in *Babes in Arms*, fifteen years before *A Star is Born*."⁷⁹

Given these intricate relationships, "Swanee," as a popular Tin Pan Alley song Hollywood (and Jolson) later recycled, contains a deep subtext of racial masquerade. Just as Garland's connection to Jolson is used to establish her own authentic star quality, Jolson's talent was asserted by his reliance on black culture. This translated into black music and dance as seeming somehow more raw, more real, more natural. Brian Ward challenges these

⁷⁷ *The Jolson Story*, Produced by Sidney Skolsky, Directed by Alfred E. Green, Color, 128 min., Columbia, 1946, videocassette, acquired through UNC Inter-library Borrowing. *Jolson Sings Again*, Produced by Sidney Buchman, Directed by Henry Levin, Color, 96 min., Columbia, 1949, DVD, acquired through UNC Inter-library Borrowing.

⁷⁸ Jolson film career had never been too stellar. *The Jazz Singer* was made, in fact, near the end of his career, and his subsequent films through the 1930s tended to be flops. See Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 81, 168-169, 190; and Most, *Making Americans*, 32.

⁷⁹ Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 203-4n.

assumptions, arguing that the claim of black culture as somehow more authentic only serves to essentialize and perpetuate racial stereotypes. As he explains it, in the case of R & B:

White enthusiasts routinely reduced ... Rhythm and Blues to a set of stock characteristics which they had—sometimes correctly, sometimes incorrectly, but invariably in deep ignorance of the realities of black life—associated with the unremittingly physical, passionate, ecstatic, emotional and, above all, sexually liberated black world of their imaginations. Paradoxically, in so doing, white fans of black music neatly fitted black music, style, and culture into much the same normative categories so dear to the most bigoted opponents of black music and black equality.⁸⁰

The Jolson legend, from *The Jazz Singer* to *The Jolson Story*, similarly rests upon naturalization of his talent—his singing was innate, untrainable (or not requiring training) and hence authentic. Likewise, Garland's entire career revolved around the claim of her natural ability, as mentor Roger Edens highlighted in his first impressions of the little singer (“Her talent was inborn ... What could I teach her?”).

The relationship of African-Americans and their cultural forms to “mainstream” (white) culture in *A Star is Born* is far more complicated than a simple “love and theft” model might initially suggest. “Swanee” borrowed directly from the blackface minstrelsy tradition, particularly with its banjo and tambourine players and stereotypical black dancers, relying on black culture to lend cultural authority to the performance. “Born in a Trunk” thereby underscores the important contributions African-Americans offered to larger American culture. However, the ways in which African-American performers were marginalized in this and other numbers in the film cannot be overstated. In both “Swanee” and “Lose that Long Face” (which was cut from the original film and later recovered and restored in 1983), black dancers appear sparingly and in limiting roles that reinforced racial

⁸⁰ Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 12.

stereotypes including the excessive grinning and simple expressions of naturally powerful dancers. But while in “Swanee” the black performers were meant to add to the overall authenticity of Garland’s performance, the two black children with whom she dances as a newsie in the equally stilted production number “Lose that Long Face” tend to emphasize Garland’s artifice. “Lose that Long Face” is a dress rehearsal for Vicki Lester’s next picture, and between takes she returns to her dressing room, where she movingly confesses her fears about Norman to studio head Oliver Niles (Charles Bickford). She then goes before the cameras, wiping away her tears and forcing a huge grin, to finish the shot. The contrast between the overly upbeat production number and Esther’s private agony, portrayed with seemingly uninhibited emotional release, place the value of authenticity squarely in the narrative interlude rather than the musical performance.⁸¹

Like “Lose that Long Face,” “Swanee” highlights just how much Garland, and by association Jolson, asserted her stardom in relation to black culture. Garland had not always hidden that appropriation as her various “torch” songs and blackface performance in *Babes in Arms* (1939) demonstrate; but by 1954 the complicated racial link was far more blurry. While not literally blacked-up, she did approximate blackface in her Jolson-like performance (itself used to establish her right to be a star within the film). Yet her vocalizations give off a far more *bluesy* feel than Jolson’s ever did. Even as he donned black face paint to claim his Americanness, he ironically distanced himself vocally from black culture despite his infatuation with jazz. Garland similarly disavowed the very association which had brought

⁸¹ For more on her dramatic performance see Bernardoni, *George Cukor*, 89-90. Reviews from the 1950s equally praised this dramatic scene. See, e.g., Jack Moffitt, “‘A Star is Born’ is Screen Triumph: Great Show; Great Judy Garland” (review), *The Hollywood Reporter*, 29 September 1954, 3. Prior to the film’s restoration, one fan recalled seeing “Lose that Long Face” at the film’s Hollywood premiere before Warner Bros. made the final cuts, noting how wonderful it was: Dewitt Bodeen, “George Cukor” (Letter to the Editor), *Films in Review* 33, no. 4 (April 1982): 193. For more on the restoration of the film, see Robert Osborne, “Rediscovered ‘Star’ Footage Inspires Film’s Reconstruction,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 13 April 1983, 1, 5.

her fame even as she attempted to incorporate it into her performative style. Garland's singing had always been a fusion that disrupted the dichotomies of race (white/black), gender (man/woman), and age (child/adult). Her impersonation of Jolson, both on the stage in London and New York and in this film, enabled her to reclaim her rightful place in front of Hollywood's cameras.⁸² But this was the ultimate blurring, an impersonation occurring on the multiple and intersecting levels of nostalgia, race, and gender.

First, the nostalgic impersonation: her singing of "Swanee" incorporates multiple senses of nostalgia. Singing a song that was itself a major hit from the Golden Age of Tin Pan Alley, the song conjures up those good old days even as it referenced the antebellum popularity of Foster's "Old Folks at Home." The number's setting on a stylized nineteenth-century stage reinforces that nostalgia while building upon it with its direct echoing of Garland's signature nostalgic Technicolor performances at MGM. Then, too, Jolson, the subject of her impersonation, was at this time himself a "central mnemonic for an imagined national past," as his life and career were breathed new life in the Columbia biopics. Currid reminds us that Garland, "was intimately associated with the nostalgia that this mnemonics guaranteed."⁸³ Jolson was definitively and iconically associated with the American musical film since its birth. Drawing on his legacy enabled Garland to reassert her own historic link to the genre.

The second form of impersonation—the racial masking—as we have already seen, helped Garland claim her own natural stardom. Her figurative blackface was established through the number's *mise-en-scène*, the song's link to blackface minstrelsy, and Garland's

⁸² Currid, " 'Ain't I People?': Voicing National Fantasy," 135.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

own stylization of Jolson's blackface performance of the 1910s and 1920s. Furthermore, Garland's perfected vocal style had always borrowed heavily from African styles in what Currid has termed "vocal blackface."⁸⁴ Richard Dyer contends that Garland's authenticity as a star was established through her natural talent. But this "natural talent" was fully cultivated, lifted from the supposedly natural talents of African-American singers around her. This became her claim to belonging, her assertion of having every right to appear once again on the Hollywood screen.

"Swanee" can be considered a variation on her MGM blackface performances because of its similar dependence on racial and gender transgressions. *Babes in Arms* (1939), the first in the Mickey Rooney-Judy Garland "let's put on a show" Busby Berkeley musicals, contained a traditional-styled blackface minstrel show.⁸⁵ Garland opens the scene singing Roger Edens' "Daddy Was a Minstrel Man," wearing a youthful dress but without black face paint. Her solo introduces the minstrel medley, in which the show's entire cast appears in blackface, with the exception of Mr. Interlocutor. Her solo venerates nineteenth-century minstrelsy, casting the popular entertainment form in highly nostalgic terms: "Gee I'd like to be a minstrel man ... and go once again down memory lane with an old-fashioned minstrel show."⁸⁶ She then disappears backstage to black-up as the Dixie Minstrels, "the pride of the

⁸⁴ Currid, "Judy Garland's American Drag," 129.

⁸⁵ The original stage production for *Babes in Arms* (1937), according to Andrea Most, featured a racially and ethnically diverse ensemble, including the Nicholas Brothers, then a young and fairly unknown dance team. The play, as much about race as it was about politics, did not contain a blackface performance, but Most acknowledges how, unlike Jewish (and other ethnic) performers' ability to perform beyond the boundaries of their ethnicity, the black actors were always bound within their race. Like blacks forced to adopt blackface, the Nicholas Brothers were always forced to perform their race. As she points out, they "are denied the mobility of the self-conscious performer—the performer who can change costume, ethnicity, and race at will." Most, *Making Americans*, 90-92.

⁸⁶ *Babes in Arms*, Produced by Arthur Freed, Directed by Busby Berkeley, Black and White, 97 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939, Videocassette, Author's Collection.

Southland,” march onto the stage and begin singing Stephen Foster’s “Susanna” (1847). Then, as a traditional minstrel show would do, Mr. Interlocutor sings questions to Mr. Bones (Rooney) and Mr. Tambo (Garland). Garland now appears in blackface, complete with wooly wig and white gloves, dressed identically to Rooney. But in the next number of the medley, she returns to sing “I’m Just Wild About Harry,” this time dressed as a girl, with noticeably lighter face paint (highly atypical in the blackface genre, which did not differentiate skin tones; indeed that was part of the stereotype). Her movement from a white woman to a black man to a mulatto woman reinforces racial stereotypes while upholding racialized standards of beauty.⁸⁷ In both *Babes in Arms* and *A Star is Born*, Garland’s racial and gender performances are firmly rooted in the nostalgia of minstrelsy.

Finally, her gender impersonation, which she had long-ago incorporated into her performance style both at MGM and in her concert appearances, went even further in her direct impression of Jolson, down to his costume and metaphorical blackened face. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, she adopted various feminine masks to assert a femininity that she herself could or would not maintain off-screen. Her cross-dressing performances, so common in her postwar MGM work, were later reincarnated in her initial concert life.⁸⁸ The use of cross-dressing in *A Star is Born* references that early incarnation of her career. Currid contends, “The crossing of gender that Judy’s drag performs stands in for the black face she is prohibited from putting on.”⁸⁹ Given the politics of the 1950s, at the

⁸⁷ On race, skin tone, and the feminine beauty myth, see Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 76-79 and Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), Chapter 7, “Shades of Difference.”

⁸⁸ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, Chapter 3; *Judy Garland: By Myself*; Currid, “‘Ain’t I People?: Voicing National Fantasy,” 135; Shipman, *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*, Chapters 14-15.

⁸⁹ Currid, “‘Ain’t I People?: Voicing National Fantasy,” 136.

dawn of the Civil Rights Movement, race could only be articulated through gender in this particular film.⁹⁰ Because literal blackface was out of fashion in postwar Hollywood, Garland substituted a gender impersonation for the racial impersonation Jolson had performed. But her rendition of this song—a definitive American song—is nonetheless an undeniable *homage* to Jolson. Thus, through her gendered “blackface” she asserts her link to Jolson and, in turn, her place in American popular culture. Her version of “Swanee” therefore draws on the history of her own songs as much as the history of popular songs, enabling her to prove her authentic (and natural) star quality through her relationship to that history.⁹¹

Garland’s dual impersonation of Jolson, who himself performed impersonations of African-Americans, along with the accompanying impersonation of the minstrel-styled dancers behind her, exposes the construction of authenticity that operated here. Americanness is not natural; it must be made and asserted. Currid observes how, “Americanness becomes, in other words, legible, audible as a resonant system of gender and race impersonation, by which certain subjects can ‘pass’ for national bodies.”⁹² But it is not simply Garland’s (and by association Jolson’s) national identity that *appears* authentic. The spectacle of construction at work in “Swanee” and “Born in a Trunk” underscores the myriad ways every element to Garland’s star image—as recycled and projected on the big screen in *A Star is Born*—was a self-conscious act of construction on her part. There was nothing

⁹⁰ That is not to claim that race was never discussed in postwar Hollywood. A slew of “social picture” films dealing with race, from *Pinky* (1949) to Douglass Sirk’s classic melodrama, *An Imitation of Life* (1959), tackled race and issues of passing head-on. See Jackie Byars, *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), Chapter 5: “Race, Class, and Gender: Film Melodramas of the Late 1950s.”

⁹¹ Currid, “‘Ain’t I People?’: Voicing National Fantasy,” 136-137.

⁹² Currid, “Judy Garland’s American Drag,” 131.

natural about Garland's "rebirth" as a star. It was wholly calculated. Garland drew on her old MGM images, as well as the minstrel tradition of Jolson's days, to lay claim to her authenticity as a performer. Relying on the established stardom of others allowed her to deny her own precarious position as a fading star.

A Star is Born was the first, and perhaps the only film, in which Garland controlled her own cultural production. Though she had help from her old MGM mentor, Roger Edens, her vocalizations represent her own voice rather than the power struggle her performances embodied while at Metro. Her singing, drawing on the familiar work that had originally made her star, transcended her initial stardom, capturing a new, more adult voice that she was already beginning to develop in her live performances. This film, in conjunction with her concerts, guaranteed her post-1950 stardom in the recreation of her voice, but ironically could only accomplish this through a visible link to those previous images. Her authenticity as a performer, and a star, therefore depended on her past performances and stardom, a stardom over which she had very little control.

In the final analysis, *A Star is Born*, through the metaphor of popular entertainment, serves as a microcosm for the very questions about authenticity circulating in postwar America. As it was for Judy Garland, authenticity was not something natural, it was something pliable, something that could be constructed and reconstructed. As the nation's politicians sought to differentiate their citizens from the mindless Soviet automatons, individualism was highly cherished. And yet, the consumerist culture, largely driven by the early Cold War, encouraged conformity. As Americans sought balance between inner- and other-directedness in their own lives, they could witness the very same exertion enacted on the big screen or at the New York Palace Theater in the form of Garland's stardom. Despite

her personal problems with substance abuse and failed relationships, Garland's very public disclosure, in her singing, film work, and on-stage behavior, ensured a more authentic experience for her fans. Thus she demonstrated how one could blur the boundaries of her various selves to construct and project a plausible, authentic self-image.

Chapter 5

Whiteface, Blackface, Yellowface: Voicing Race in Oscar Hammerstein's Musicals

You've got to be taught to hate and fear,
You've got to be taught from year to year,
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear—
You've got to be carefully taught!

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a different shade—
You've got to be carefully taught.¹

Thus begins “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught,” the strangely-upbeat number in the middle of Act II that delivers the central message of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein’s *South Pacific* (play 1949, film 1957).² Based on James A. Michener’s Pulitzer-prize winning collection of short stories, *Tales of the South Pacific* (1946), Rodgers’ and Hammerstein’s musical adaptation centers on the romances of two couples: Nurse Nellie Forbush, the “little hick” from Arkansas, and the French planter Emile De Becque; and Princeton-bred Lieutenant Joe Cable’s affair with Liat, the silent Tonkinese daughter of Bloody Mary. Both couples are plagued by the specter of miscegenation; for even though

This chapter could not have been possible without the incalculable assistance of Charlene Register, who not only took the time to discuss at length issues of African-Americans in Hollywood, but also generously allowed me access to her research on *Carmen Jones* and Dorothy Dandridge.

¹ “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught,” music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II (1949). Printed in Oscar Hammerstein II and Joshua Logan, *South Pacific: A Musical Play* (New York: Random House: 1949), 136.

² *South Pacific*, Produced by Buddy Adler, Directed by Joshua Logan, Color, 171 min., Magna/20th Century-Fox, 1958, Videocassette, Author’s Collection.

Emile is white, his two children from a former marriage are Polynesian.³ Both Nellie and Cable resist their respective relationships because of the social stigmas and American policy prohibiting mixed marriages, a concept foreign to Emile and Liat. Pushed for an explanation for their racial aversion, Nellie stammers, “I can’t help it. It isn’t as if I could give you a good reason. There is no reason. This is emotional. This is something that is born in me.”⁴

Emile cannot accept this, and Cable comes to agree, as the play’s original dialogue and stage directions emphasize:

EMILE

What makes her talk like that? Why do you have this feeling, you and she? I do not believe it is born in you. I do not believe it.

CABLE

It’s not born in you! It happens after you’re born . . .
*(Cable sings the following words, as if figuring this whole question out for the first time)*⁵

This exchange directly leads into Cable’s rendition of “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught.” As the core of the play and film, the song represented an important departure from commonly held (white) beliefs about race and racism in America at this time, a departure that would anticipate the groundbreaking *Brown v. Board* decision of 1954.⁶ In this song, Rodgers and Hammerstein asserted their belief that there was nothing natural about racism; rather it was a learned behavior. And if it was learned, it could be unlearned, as the play’s conclusion

³ Nellie actually refers to Emile’s Polynesian wife as “a nigger.” James A. Michener, *Tales of the South Pacific* (New York: Macmillan, 1946; reprint, New York: Fawcett/Ballantine, 1984), 138.

⁴ Hammerstein and Logan, *South Pacific*, 135.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶ On the importance of “You’ve Got to Be Taught” see *Broadway: The American Musical* (PBS Documentary), Directed by Michael Kantor, Color, 360 min., Ghost Light Films, 2004, Videocassette, Author’s Collection; and Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2004), 153-182.

upholds with the reunion of Nellie and Emile. Nellie has learned to overcome her provincial prejudices, and embraces Emile's interracial children as her own.

In the postwar era's newfound awareness for racial and ethnic tolerance—lessons learned from the Holocaust, African-American heroism in Europe, and Japanese internment in the Western United States—*South Pacific* made perfect sense. Here was a musical that challenged audiences to question their distrust of “people whose eyes are oddly made/ And people whose skin is a different shade.” This musical motion picture fit into the immediate postwar Hollywood preoccupation with social issues. Films such as *Crossfire* (1947) and *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) tackled anti-Semitism while pictures like *Pinky* (1949) sought to depict African-Americans in a more sympathetic light. Along these lines, *South Pacific* can be considered a fairly progressive musical, one that offers a critique of racism in America as part of the larger project to win the hearts and minds of the third world.⁷ But, like all films, it was very much a product of its own time, circumscribed by the predominant racial views even of liberals such as Oscar Hammerstein. Just because Hollywood devoted a modicum of time and energy to so-called “social pictures” following the end of the Second World War did not mean that the nation—or Hollywood for that matter—was ready for full-blown racial tolerance and integration.

A closer look at *South Pacific*'s love affair between Cable and Liat suggests the postwar limits of a liberal stance towards race and racism. Unlike Nellie and Emile, who are reunited at the end of the story, Cable is killed in action, his ultimate union with Liat dashed.

⁷ As a film critical of racism in American society, *Pinky* ran counter to the film industry's prevailing stance towards race, and the PCA warned Twentieth Century-Fox that Southern censors would block a film that advocated racial tolerance. One Texas town denied the film an exhibition license. An exhibitor showed the film anyway and was arrested. The ensuing case went all the way to the Supreme Court, and together with the 1952 *Miracle* case, helped end censorship of motion pictures. See Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 103-105.

As an inter-racial couple, his love with the Tonkinese girl could not be fulfilled, since miscegenation was still illegal in parts of the United States at the time the play opened on Broadway.⁸ While the Production Code was revised in 1956, just one year before the film was made, to permit the depiction of miscegenation (left to the director's discretion), anti-miscegenation laws were not deemed unconstitutional until *Loving v. Virginia* (1967).⁹ The Production Code Administration was quite adamant that *South Pacific*'s filmmakers not include any references to Cable and Liat's sexual liaison; the PCA's general squeamishness about the affair remained unmitigated despite the suggestion that the script be revised to promise marriage for the two.¹⁰ While as a rule the PCA balked at illicit sexual encounters of any kind, the inter-racial nature of this particular relationship most likely heightened their anxiety. But the problem of race did not end with miscegenation.

The character of Liat, the beautiful and mysterious Tonkinese girl, sharply illustrates the challenges of sensitively handling racial minorities in film.¹¹ Though a sympathetic

⁸ Miscegenation was not a new theme for lyricist Oscar Hammerstein. His 1927 collaboration with composer Jerome Kern on a musical adaptation of Edna Ferber's *Show Boat* similarly centered around the specter of miscegenation posed by the "tragic mulatto," Julie who, while passing for white, marries a white man. For more on *Show Boat*, see, e.g., Lauren Berlant, "Pax Americana: The Case of *Show Boat*," in *Cultural Institutions of the Novel*, eds. Deidre Lynch and William B. Warner (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 399-422.

⁹ The Production Code was "eased" in 1956 as a result of the 1952 *Miracle* Supreme Court case which extended first amendment rights to motion pictures, though it should be noted that under the Code, miscegenation most directly referred to relationships between Caucasians and African-Americans, as the preliminary Code (the List of 'Don'ts and 'Be Carefuls') suggested. Gerald Gardner, *The Censorship Papers: Movie Censorship Letters from the Hayes Office, 1934 to 1968* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1987), Appendix II, 213. On the easing of the Code, see "Old Movie Taboos Eased in New Code For Film Industry," *New York Times* (12 December 1956): 1, 51. See also Richard S. Randall, "Censorship: From *The Miracle* to *Deep Throat*," in *The American Film Industry*, rev. ed., ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 510-536.

¹⁰ J.A.V. [Vizzard], Memo for the Files Re: SOUTH PACIFIC, 27 March 1957; Geoffrey M. Shurlock, PCA, Hollywood, to Frank McCarthy, 20th Century-Fox Film Corporation, Los Angeles, 4 June 1957; Geoffrey M. Shurlock, PCA, Hollywood, to Frank McCarthy, 20th Century-Fox Film Corporation, Los Angeles, 21 June 1957; J.A.V. [Vizzard], Memo for the Files Re: SOUTH PACIFIC, 1 August 1957. All memos and correspondence located in PCAR, Folder: "South Pacific [20th-Fox, 1957]."

¹¹ Andrea Most offers an insightful analysis of Liat in Chapter 6 of *Making Americans*, 153-182.

character, she is nonetheless fetishized as an exotic Other—a silent woman reduced to using her hands to communicate the simplest of emotions (“Happy Talk”).¹² Unlike Nellie, who is identified through her singing voice, Liat is a racial foil—Lieutenant Cable’s “own special island.”¹³ Indeed it is in his first visit to Bali Ha’i that he meets his lover. The concept of paradise—one of the central themes of the film—collapses into the form of Liat.¹⁴ Paradise in this story is an island of perpetual springtime, and that island is Liat, who is herself, in Cable’s words, “younger than springtime.”¹⁵ Ironically, Cable meets his death on another island. Because of the specter of miscegenation, he cannot end up with Liat; his death on a “lonely island” underscores the impossibility of their romance.

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Liat is trapped by Orientalist stereotypes which thereby complicate, if not undermine, the authors’ larger message of racial tolerance. They attack

¹² Bloody Mary sings this song to the young lovers. But because she is an older woman, she escapes fetishization. In contrast to her daughter, Liat, Mary is positioned as grotesque, alongside the shrunken human heads that she sells. But she is not erotic, as Leslie Fiedler suggests in *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1978), Chapter 5: “Beauty and the Beast: The Eros of Ugliness,” 137-53.

¹³ Voice—as represented by contrasting singing styles—is an important theme to *South Pacific*, which was devised as a star vehicle for Mary Martin. Andrea Most convincingly argues how Martin/Nellie’s voice is ultimately overpowered by Ezio Pinza/Emile’s, since the play ends with her singing his operatic “Some Enchanted Evening” while privileging him with the last line. The movie replicates these patters. Most, *Making Americans*, 165, 178-182.

¹⁴ Paradise is reiterated in the songs “Some Enchanted Evening,” “Bali Ha’i,” “Younger than Springtime,” and “This Almost Was Mine.” Michener’s original book similarly emphasizes the idea of paradise. Consider the exotic longing in his opening passage: “I wish I could tell you about the South Pacific. The way it actually was. The endless ocean. The infinite specks of coral we called islands. Coconut palms nodding gracefully toward the ocean. Reefs upon which waves broke into spray, and inner lagoons, lovely beyond description.” Michener, *Tales of the South Pacific*, 9. These words are reiterated in the song “My Girl Back Home,” cut from the original stage production but restored to the film version and sung as a duet by Nellie and Cable. The original Broadway Cast Album contains a Bonus Track from 1951 of Martin singing this rather bucolic song.

¹⁵ Judith Williamson demonstrates how advertisements position exotic women as mysterious, passive objects to be consumed (conquered) by a colonizing society. “Woman is an Island: Femininity and Colonization,” in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 99-118.

racism through Cable's voice, yet Liat's silence squelches the critique.¹⁶ Though Cable ultimately decides to abandon "his girl back home" to remain with Liat on their special island, his untimely death further limits the possibility for liberal change. Liat's place within the larger musical is emblematic of the sort of issues racial minorities raised in postwar musicals. While racial marginalization and exclusion, long-standing problems in pre-war musicals, continued after 1945, the postwar attacks on racism and Jim Crow compounded these cinematic problems. Though literal blackface was a thing of the past, figurative and vocal blackface continued well into the early 1960s.

This chapter examines the possibilities and limitations of tackling questions of race in two Oscar Hammerstein musicals, *Carmen Jones* (1954) and *The King and I* (1956). Hammerstein was a liberal who for decades had used his songs and plays to offer social commentary. But to what extent could his lyrics articulate his vision of tolerance and cultural sensitivity? How far did liberal filmmakers really want to go in transferring his vision of equality to the big screen? Whether through the use of dubbing, make-up, costumes, lyrics, or musical styles, these two films highlight the ways in which even the most forward-thinking liberal visions could be stymied as much by the studio system as by personal prejudices. These films, both adaptations of stage productions, which were themselves adaptations of other art forms, promised the authentic flavor of black and Asian cultures. But there was little that was realistic in these depictions save what they revealed about the racial imaginations of the filmmakers. Ultimately, these two musicals

¹⁶ Liat's lack of voice is additionally punctuated by the subjectivity in the lyrics to Bloody Mary's song, "Bali Ha'i": Here am *I*, your special island," "come to *me*, here am *I*," "you'll hear *me* call you," and "if you'll try, you'll find *me*" [emphasis mine].

unquestioningly relied upon the intersecting categories of art, race, and gender to promote a universal humanity that adhered to a decidedly white standard.

Blacks in Hollywood

The position of African-Americans in Hollywood musicals, as much as in the larger history of the American cinema, serves as an excellent microcosm for the problems blacks faced in America writ large. The birth of film, after all, coincided with the codification of Jim Crow in the groundbreaking 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision.¹⁷ It is no coincidence that the first major narrative film, D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), which celebrated the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan as protector of American (white) values, employed racist stereotypes while refusing to employ black actors; white actors blacked up with burnt cork according to the nineteenth-century minstrel tradition.¹⁸ As Arthur Knight reminds us, when Hollywood learned to talk in Warner Brothers' *The Jazz Singer* (1927), it was through the singing mouth of Al Jolson in blackface.¹⁹ The very first musical motion picture relied on the sounds (jazz) and images (Jolson blacked up) of blackness without acknowledging actual black contributions. This film established the long-standing pattern of the marginalization and erasure of blacks in musicals.²⁰

¹⁷ On the early history of the cinema, see Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage, 1975); and Tino Balio, ed., *The American Film Industry*, rev ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

¹⁸ On *The Birth of a Nation*, see John Hope Franklin, "Birth of a Nation—Propaganda as History," in *Hollywood's America: United States History Through Its Films*, eds. Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts (St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1993), 42-52.

¹⁹ Arthur Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical: Black Performance and American Musical Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 2.

²⁰ Carol J. Clover, "Dancin' in the Rain," in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London: Routledge, 2002), 157-73

As in other genres, blacks were most typically cast in the roles of servants or other “lowly” laborers in musicals. Black performers were further marginalized when employed as “specialty acts”—singers and dancers whose performances were completely detached from the rest of the narrative, despite the film’s overall integration.²¹ The Nicholas Brothers’ appearance in *The Pirate* (1948), dancing along side Gene Kelly in “Be A Clown,” provides an apt illustration of just this sort of marginalization. Rather than incorporate their characters into the entire film’s story, the film draws them in only to perform this specialty number; indeed while the Nicholas Brothers enjoyed prominent billing, they were nevertheless listed simply as “Specialty Dance.” Likewise MGM’s press book devoted a mere two paragraphs to the dancing brothers, as compared to the numerous feature-length articles about Gene Kelly, Judy Garland, and even composer Cole Porter.²² The Nicholas Brothers’ contribution to the film is all but erased with the reprise of “Be a Clown.” In the second version, Garland and Kelly perform a different dance, one that references neither the costumes nor the dance steps of the original and far more acrobatic rendition Kelly had executed alongside the black dancing team in the preceding scene.

Erasure could occur on another level, as scholars from Eric Lott to Carol J. Clover maintain, when a white performer borrowed the style of a black performer.²³ When the American Film Institute saluted Gene Kelly in 1985, the Nicholas Brothers waxed nostalgic for their appearance in *The Pirate*. According to the script, Fayard Nicholas ended by joking,

²¹ In her letter to the film editor, Lili R. Hirsch similarly complained that black specialty numbers in musicals were “hermetically sealed from story, plot, leading role or fellow actors, the colored performer performs, and is whisked away.” Hirsch, “Postman Rings Thrice for ‘Carmen Jones’ ” (Letter to the Screen Editor), *New York Times*, 7 November 1954, X5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²² M-G-M Press Book for *The Pirate* (1948), PBC, no folder, also located in GKC, Box 9, Scrapbook 7 (c. 1945-1948).

²³ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

“Gregory Hines, don’t worry about stealing Gene Kelly’s steps, because he stole them from us. (LAUGH).”²⁴ While this was intended in good humor, it was nonetheless tinged with bittersweet irony, coming from the lips of a phenomenal dancer whose career had been severely limited because of the color of his skin. This irony was all the more perceptible because a white man wrote this line for Fayard to deliver.

Despite African-Americans’ marginalization and erasure, Knight asserts that blacks were inextricably linked to music in all film genres, not just musicals—an echo from nineteenth-century minstrelsy.²⁵ There was an assumption, on the part of filmmakers and industry press alike, that blacks were natural singers and dancers, that they channeled something primitive and savage in their music—something straight from Africa. Blacks were cast in stereotypical and reductive ways, depicted as little more than smiling, docile performers here to entertain their white superiors. With the exception of archetypal roles, such as Mammy in *Gone With the Wind* (1939) and musical performers, there was an obstructive color barrier for African-Americans, both on the stage and in Hollywood.²⁶ African-American writers, leaders, and press all lamented the dearth of opportunities, and decried the ways in which this cultural color barrier was part of a larger epidemic of race relations in America. Indeed, when Marian Anderson—whom the Daughters of the American Revolution barred from appearing at Constitution Hall but who subsequently sang

²⁴ Script for “The American Film Institute Salute to Gene Kelly” (Kelly’s copy of the broadcast script, sent to him by George Stevens, Jr.), script dated 19 May 1985, GKC, Box 11, no folder.

²⁵ W. T. Lhamon Jr. traces the link between blacks and music to colonial times, when blacks danced for eels in New York City’s Catherine Market. *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

²⁶ I follow Karla Rae Fuller’s lead in the use of “archetype” rather than “stereotype.” Karla Rae Fuller, “Creatures of Good and Evil: Caucasian Portrayals of the Chinese and Japanese during World War II,” in *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, ed. Daniel Bernardi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 298n.

“America” on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1939—became the first African-American singer to appear with the Metropolitan Opera in 1954, black intellectuals simultaneously celebrated her success and bemoaned it as tokenism.²⁷ As Prof. Doodle, a cartoon character of the *Chicago Defender*, scorned, “Just to think the world’s greatest singer has been kept from long hairdom’s most cherished place thru nothing but downright bias until the opera’s diminishing prestige [*sic*] caused the door to be opened to her ... True ‘better late than never’ but also shame to the barrier supporters.”²⁸

In large part, Hollywood hid behind the market, claiming that it was necessary to kowtow to Southern moviegoers’ racial beliefs or risk diminished box office receipts. In doing so, they avoided topics that would offend Southerners, such as miscegenation, while perpetuating minstrel-like stereotypes of blacks. One New York filmgoer captured the heart of the dilemma in a letter to the *New York Times*. Lili R. Hirsch bemoaned that, “The problem is not that there are too few Negro roles; or that not enough roles are created for Negroes.” As she saw it, “The tragedy is that colored actors are allowed to act, in white casts, only as stereotyped Negroes, not just as ‘people’; they may be Mammies, or chauffeurs, or cooks; sharecroppers, riverboat-men, or naïve rural ministers; may sing spirituals or be song and dance men; but may never function as just plain ordinary people

²⁷ Marian Anderson, *My Lord, What a Morning*, with an introduction by Nellie Y. McKay (New York: Viking Press, 1956; reprint, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) and Keith D. Miller and Emily M. Lewis, “Touchstones, Authorities, and Marian Anderson: The Making of ‘I Have a Dream’,” in *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement*, eds. Brian Ward and Tony Badger (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1996), 147-161.

²⁸ Prof. Doodle, “An Angry ‘Prof Doodle’ Hits Rob Roy’s Claims for ‘54,” *Chicago Defender*, 8 January 1955, 14; written in response to [Rob Roy], “Warning to 1955: Your Predecessor Was On The Ball,” *Chicago Defender*, 1 January 1955, n.p., CRC, Folder: “Carmen Jones (1 of 2).” Arthur Knight identifies Doodle not as a real person but as “a character from one of the *Defender*’s cartoons!” Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical*, 160.

integrated in a normal American community.”²⁹ Interestingly, the PCA claimed to ensure that non-whites were depicted “sympathetically.” Each film assessment the PCA compiled contained a section on the “portrayal of ‘races’ and nationals.”³⁰ Yet stereotypes abounded. And when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) pressured Hollywood to excise such limited roles, “Negro bit players” complained. According to one New York African-American newspaper, “These players claim that the militant organization has caused the movie heads to stop casting them as ‘loving mammies,’ comic servants and eye-rolling characters who fairly jump out of their skin at the sight of a ghost, and smack their lips at the sight of a watermelon.”³¹ Some, it seemed, were willing to play those roles if it meant working. Hollywood continued to limit black roles, all the while claiming this was the way to keep white Southerners in the theaters.

But as Thomas Cripps convincingly argues, the Southern box office was little more than a myth—an excuse and justification on the part of Hollywood to marginalize African-Americans.³² In fact, black newspapers in the 1950s decried the notion that the South posed a substantial financial threat for films that did not conform to Jim Crow standards, arguing that the few films to feature blacks in major roles typically did well at theaters throughout the

²⁹ Lili R. Hirsch, “Postman Rings Thrice for ‘Carmen Jones’ ” (Letter to the Screen Editor), *New York Times*, 7 November 1954, X5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³⁰ See, for instance, Production Code Administration, “Analysis of Film Content – SOUTH PACIFIC,” 30 December 1957, PCAR, Folder: “South Pacific [20th-Fox, 1957].”

³¹ Unidentified clipping from the *New York Amsterdam News*, from January or February of 1955, CRC, Folder: “Carmen Jones 1 of 2.”

³² Thomas R. Cripps, “The Myth of the Southern Box Office: A Factor in Racial Stereotyping in American Movies, 1920-1940,” in *The Black Experience in America: Selected Essays*, eds. James C. Curtis and Lewis L. Gould (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970), 116-144.

country, including the segregated South.³³ *Chicago Defender* critic Hilda See offered a scathing critique of the so-called Southern box office when she wrote, “Hollywood will be Hollywood and good old ‘Dixie’ will, it seems, continue to influence its plans for production. Some say this is true but others, many of whom we choose to believe[,] charge the film colony’s official family with hiding behind this stereotyped story.”³⁴ In 1956, two years after the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Rob Roy, the optimistic critic for the *Chicago Defender*, rosily predicted the end of the Southern box office’s reign when he shouted, “Yes, it looks as though Hollywood and Broadway have decided to take a page from national politics and value the Negro’s buying (or voting) powers in the north much higher than the threats of boycott a few dissenting Dixieites can promise.” He then soberly reflected on the myth of the Southern box office, pondering, “One of the mysteries to this corner in the past was figuring how the smaller and fewer picture fans in certain sections of Dixie could outweigh the strength of Negro theatregoers in major cities like Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Boston and others boxoffice wise. Apparent [sic] it doesn’t anymore.”³⁵

The fear of offending white Southerners was not the only factor contributing to the proliferation of racial stereotypes. Immigrant moguls and actors, such as Al Jolson, relied upon such stereotypes to assert their own place in Hollywood. Blackface, in particular, enabled performers to mask their ethnic/religious differences by drawing upon the long-

³³ See, for instance, “Hollywood [illegible] On ‘Carmen Jones’ Film,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 24 July 1954, 20, CRC, Folder: “Dandridge 1 of 2;” “Carmen Jones Breaks Everything But Bias In Nation’s Theatres,” *Chicago Defender*, 18 December [1954], 6, CRC, Folder: “Carmen Jones 2 of 2.”

³⁴ Hilda See, “There Are Two ‘Oscars’ Among Our Records Unaccompanied Because of Hollywood Bias,” *The Chicago Defender*, 1 May 1954 (city edition), 15, CRC, file: “Dandridge 1 of 2.” Knight identifies See as a critic for the black newspaper. Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical*, 165.

³⁵ Rob Roy, “Interracial Love No Longer Taboo,” *Chicago Defender*, 15 December 1956, 28, CRC, Folder: “Dandridge 1 of 2.” According to Knight, Roy was a critic for the black newspaper. Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical*, 165.

standing “American” cultural form of minstrelsy. “Outsiders” could erase their own differences and lay claim to their Americanness by adopting a constructed, if not wholly fictive, whiteness—signified by the act of blacking up. In essence, such entertainers relied upon racial stereotypes to launch themselves from the margins of the entertainment industry and into the mainstream.³⁶ The myth of the Southern box office, combined with the need of “outsiders” to fit into America by buying into America’s racist beliefs, translated into a racist film industry that gave little more than lip-service to minorities.

Of course, there was a smattering of “race” films before the Second World War, in addition to a flickering moment in the immediate postwar period when Hollywood studios produced “social pics” decrying racism and segregation. But even these films were guilty of marginalizing and erasing African-Americans. *Pinky* (1947) is a vivid example of liberal intentions gone awry.³⁷ *Pinky* is a black woman who tries to pass for white. When she returns to her Southern hometown to care for a sick relative, she falls in love with the white doctor, but of course their love cannot be realized because it would constitute miscegenation. On the surface, this would seem an ideal film to critique racist attitudes in postwar America, and indeed the film did offer many excellent roles for African-American actors, including Ethel Waters. But the lily white Jeanne Crain was selected to portray *Pinky*, despite the abundance of qualified black actresses. This casting choice might seem odd at first, but given the cultural and legal taboo of miscegenation, it begins to make sense. *Chicago*

³⁶ Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

³⁷ *Pinky*, Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck, Directed by Elia Kazan, Black and white, 102 min., Twentieth Century-Fox, 1949, Videocassette, MRC. Both Zanuck and Kazan committed themselves to making films about social issues throughout the 1950s, including Kazan’s *On the Waterfront* (1954) and Zanuck’s *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956). Douglas Sirk’s 1959 melodrama, *Imitation of Life*, like *Pinky*, did not cast an African-American actress in the role of Sarah Jane, who attempts to pass for white. As the daughter of a Mexican and a Jew, the Academy Award nominated Susan Kohner, however, was not as unequivocally “white” as *Pinky*’s Jeanne Crain.

Defender's Hilda See spelled this out unequivocally: "Certainly we could have nominated dozens of talented Sepia actresses to play the lead in 'Pinky' but the studios preferred to hand the part to Miss Crain, an okay actress and leave the facts to the imagination ... Reason for this, one feels, is that Hollywood preferred to [not] have a Negro girl falling into the embraces of a white man which is what the story is all about."³⁸ Whether motivated by private prejudices or the potential ire of white Southerners, racially-liberal filmmakers were limited in their attempts to realistically and sympathetically address "the race problem" in movies at the dawn of the modern Civil Rights Movement and the birth of desegregation.³⁹

It is all the more curious, then, that at precisely the moment when the nation, or at least the Supreme Court, was beginning to change its views on Jim Crow segregation and racism, Hollywood did not increase its production of "race" pictures. There had only been a handful of major studio films featuring all-black casts, in addition to "shorts" and independently-produced works by filmmakers such as Oscar Micheaux, in the 1930s and 1940s, but black production dropped strikingly after the War's end. The number of black musicals was even smaller, despite the link Hollywood had been making between African-American culture and music since the introduction of talking pictures. Between 1927 and

³⁸ Hilda See, "There Are Two 'Oscars' Among Our Records Unaccompanied Because of Hollywood Bias," *The Chicago Defender*, 1 May 1954 (city edition), 15, CRC, Folder: "Dandridge 1 of 2."

³⁹ The "modern" Civil Rights Movement did not begin with the sit-ins of 1960. The postwar period witnessed a significant period of racial progress, beginning with Jackie Robinson's symbolic 1947 breaking of the color barrier in Major League Baseball. Then a series of court cases and executive actions started the process of dismantling Jim Crow segregation in the American South: desegregation of the Armed Forces (1948) (involvement in Korea accelerated integration); *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954-1955); the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955); and black students desegregated the high school in Little Rock, Arkansas, backed by Presidential enforcement (1957). Much of the Civil Rights action through the 1950s was judicial and top-down; not until 1960 would it become a massive and national student youth movement.

These early events carried over to Hollywood, not just inspiring movies such as *Pinky*. When the Production Code was revised in 1956, it allowed for the depiction of miscegenation, though it was still illegal in some parts of the country. Inspired by this, Wanda See cautiously cheered the implications for black actresses: "It could mean the end of Hollywood stars being asked to darken their skins to appear what they aren't in a film that offers as its main theme interracial romances and even marriage." Wanda See, "Island in Sun Defies Old Rule With Dot, Justin," *The Chicago Defender*, 2 February 1957, 11, CRC, Folder: "Dandridge 1 of 2."

1960, there were eight major studio-backed all-black musicals; only three of which were produced in the postwar period.⁴⁰ There were two black musicals in 1943, *Cabin in the Sky* and *Stormy Weather*, but it would be another eleven years before another African-American enjoyed a lead role in a musical. While blacks were limited primarily to musical roles, there were few if any musicals that included decent roles for blacks.

An “American Idiom”: Vocalizing Race in *Carmen Jones*

But in 1954, independent producer Otto Preminger brought before the camera the first all-black musical since *Stormy Weather*. Adapted from the 1943 Billy Rose Broadway hit, *Carmen Jones* was a retelling of Georges Bizet’s 1875 operatic translation of Prosper Mérimée’s *Carmen*. Lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II modernized H. Meilhac and L. Halévy’s libretto, bringing it into the wartime American South with an all-black cast. The film starred singers Dorothy Dandridge as Carmen and Harry Belafonte as Joe (Don Jose). Both were dubbed because they were not classically trained opera singers (West Coast DJ Joe Adams was similarly dubbed, but he was not a professional singer). Supporting actresses Pearl Bailey and Olga James, a Julliard-trained singer, performed their own songs, as did most of the other principal actors. *Carmen Jones* proves to be a racially complicated film for its depictions of race and its dubbing practices.

The musical motion picture, as much as the original opera, is riddled with racialized and Orientalist undertones. Bizet’s score fetishized “exotic” Spanish bohemian/gypsy culture, drawing on nineteenth-century racialized visions of the Other as a source of

⁴⁰ Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical*, 123.

entertainment.⁴¹ While the original opera was not well-received in Paris in 1875, it subsequently became canonical.⁴² With its Spanish-inflected rhythms and chords, *Carmen* did not simply bridge racial divides between elite “white” and lesser non-whites; the opera also straddled cultural divides between high and low art, forming what Ann Davies has called a cultural hybridity, or what in the United States would be considered the fusion into middlebrow culture.⁴³ While adhering to the form and structure of the opera genre (though Bizet’s work abandons the traditional *recitative* for spoken dialogue), “*Carmen* does not have the feel of grand opera produced by composers such as Verdi or Wagner, and its tunes are dangerously popular and perhaps too accessible to less refined and more bourgeois tastes.”⁴⁴

Carmen Jones continues this tradition of cultural hybridity by expanding on the popular feel of the songs. With a lyricist who penned some of the most memorable (and singable) tunes of the 1950s, re-writing *Carmen*’s libretto in a modern American setting was a way to make opera, even one as popular and accessible as *Carmen*, more palatable for the

⁴¹ Evelyn Gould likens the original Mérimée story of *Carmen* to an imagined Bohemian community rather than a realistic portrait Bohemian or gypsy life. Evelyn Gould, *The Fate of Carmen* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 2-4. Interpreting Francesco Rosi’s 1984 film adaptation, Ann Davies notes how the appearance of authentic Spanish is “a concept of rural Spain in the nineteenth century, an image with which modern Spain has increasingly little to do. The modern audience is looking at an idea of what a region of Spain was like according to the French Romantic vision that inspired Mérimée’s story.” Ann Davies, “High and Low Culture: Bizet’s *Carmen* and the Cinema,” in *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film*, eds. Phil Powrie and Robunn Stilwell (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 52. See also Robert L. A. Clark, “Local Color: The Representation of Race in *Carmen* and *Carmen Jones*,” in *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries*, eds. Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Downing A. Thomas (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 218.

⁴² Anthony Burgess, trans., introduction to *Carmen: An Opera in Four Acts*, Music by Georges Bizet, Libretto by H. Meilhac and L. Halévy, based on the story by Prosper Mérimée (London: Hutchinson, 1986), vii. On the canonization of *Carmen*, see, for instance, Davies, “High and Low Culture: Bizet’s *Carmen* and the Cinema,” 46-56, and Howard Taubman, “The ‘Best’ Operas—A Critic’s Choice,” *New York Times*, 7 November 1954, SM24, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴³ Lawrence W. Levine delineates the “sacralization” of opera in America into an elite art form in *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 85-104.

⁴⁴ Davis, “High and Low Culture: Bizet’s *Carmen* and the Cinema,” 48, 49.

masses. In essence, Hammerstein transformed it into the ultimate product of middlebrow culture.⁴⁵ As an adaptation of a canonical opera, it claims cultural authority through the preservation of Bizet's score, even though Hammerstein dropped many of the original songs. Vincent Canby of the *Motion Picture Herald*, for instance, celebrated the Hammerstein-Preminger adaptation as one that would attract opera fans throughout the nation. "The picture should not fail to be a box office bonanza in the larger urban areas," he predicted. "Exhibitors in outlying territories may find too that varied exploitation will turn up opera fans where, in fact, none has ever before existed." He concluded with a note to exhibitors who might have been reluctant to show the film: "If opera is a scare word, remember this one is essentially a drama with music."⁴⁶ Hammerstein's re-visioning of Bizet transformed the opera into a more democratic cultural form, one in which all Americans—but particularly black Americans—could enjoy and participate.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Hammerstein explained in his introduction to *Carmen Jones* how he wanted to make opera more accessible. Oscar Hammerstein II, *Carmen Jones*, Based on Melhac and Halévy's Adaptation of Prosper Merimé's *Carmen* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), xiii-xvii.

On the popularity of Hammerstein's lyrics, a product of his collaboration with Richard Rodgers beginning with *Oklahoma!* in 1943, see Most, *Making Americans*, Chapters 4, 6 and Coda; and John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 123-160. Cristina Klein explains the popularity of their lyrics in the following terms: "Rodgers and Hammerstein's songs achieved a level of ubiquity in the late 1940s and early 1950s that few contemporary songwriters could match... The infectious quality of the Rodgers and Hammerstein songs also opened them up to popular participation. Designed to be sung by as many people as possible, they invited listeners to sing along with their catchy tunes and rhyming lyrics. This singability allowed audience members to step out of their role as passive observers and temporarily join in the process of community formation that was taking place on stage or on screen." Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 193. On the popularity and accessibility of Bizet's *Carmen*, see Taubman, "The 'Best' Operas—A Critic's Choice."

⁴⁶ Vincent Canby, Review of *Carmen Jones*, *Motion Picture Herald* 197, no. 2 (9 October 1954): 18. This same review also appeared on 16 October 1954 on page 179.

⁴⁷ Many critics and scholars, such as Andrea Most, praise the Broadway musical since *Oklahoma!* as a democratic art form which celebrates Americana and community. The *New York Times* Music Editor extended this argument to opera. Howard Taubman, "Why More and More Like Opera," *New York Times*, 8 March 1953, SM18, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

MTV re-adapted *Carmen/Carmen Jones* in 2001 in Robert Townsend's *Carmen: A Hip Hopera*. The action was transferred to Philadelphia/Los Angeles, but the story remains remarkably true to the original. Indeed, the filmmakers retain Bizet's *Habanera* (as Carmen Brown's theme) and *La Danse Bohéme* to a large

But black participation was neither simple nor clear-cut. For one thing, concerns about a Southern boycott of an all-black film help to explain the more than ten-year delay in transferring the stage production to the big screen. Despite earlier attempts to bring the story to Hollywood, Broadway producer Billy Rose repeatedly dropped the idea. It was not until Otto Preminger signed on to produce and direct the picture that serious consideration of making an all-black film re-surfaced in Hollywood. But up until one month before rehearsals were scheduled to begin, black newspapers still reported rumors that Preminger intended to use a white cast (even though the three major principals—Dorothy Dandridge, Harry Belafonte, and Pearl Bailey—had already signed on to the project).⁴⁸ Since an all-black film had not been produced in Hollywood in over ten years, filmmakers were undoubtedly uncertain as to the box office potential of *Carmen Jones*. The black newspaper, the *New York Amsterdam News*, acknowledged Preminger's "courage in producing the first all-colored film to come out of Hollywood in many years."⁴⁹ *The Chicago Defender* similarly pointed out Preminger's resolve in producing and directing an all-black film, revealing that

extent. For a discussion of this latest adaptation, see Clark, "Local Color," 233 and Jeff Smith, "Black Faces, White Voices: The Politics of Dubbing in *Carmen Jones*," *The Velvet Light Trap* 51 (Spring 2003): 41. *Carmen: A Hip Hopera*, Produced by Michael Elliot and Loretha Jones, Directed by Robert Townsend, Color, 88 min., MTV Productions/New Line Cinema, 2001, DVD.

⁴⁸ "Plan To Produce 'Carmen Jones' With Non-Sepia Cast Ruled Out," *Chicago Defender*, 15 May 1954, n.p., CRC, Folder: "Carmen Jones 2 of 2." On the casting and production schedule, see Thomas F. Pryor, "Pearl Bailey Set in 'Carmen Jones'," *New York Times*, 22 April 1954, 37, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. As of April 30, the *New York Times* reported that Dandridge was "under consideration," though rehearsals were to begin June 3. Thomas F. Pryor, "Belafonte Signs to Star in Film," *New York Times*, 30 April 1954, 28, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Curiously, as early as December of 1953, the *New York Times* reported that Preminger was to employ an all-black cast: Thomas M. Pryor, "'Carmen Jones' Set For Cinemascope," *New York Times*, 23 December 1953, 22, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. In her autobiography, Dandridge described how she initially declined the role of Carmen, despite the lengths to which she had gone when auditioning for Preminger. Dorothy Dandridge and Earl Conrad, *Everything and Nothing: The Dorothy Dandridge Tragedy* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1970; reprint, New York: Perennial/HarperCollins, 2000), 166-169 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

⁴⁹ "Honor Movie Cast Of 'Carmen Jones'," *New York Amsterdam News*, 30 October 1954, 25, CRC, Folder: "Carmen Jones 1 of 2."

he “met with all sorts of opposition during the planning days for ‘Carmen Jones.’ Some called him crazy, others just knew the guy had blown his top.” The paper recounted how, “For 11 years Hollywood, although tempted, by-passed a production of ‘Carmen Jones.’ Too much of a risk, a challenge, was the opinion. It remained for Preminger to accept the dare.” As the anonymous author cheered, “The gamble paid off ... the [critical and popular] response has been astounding.”⁵⁰

Hammerstein was equally resolved to showcase black talent and to present African-Americans in a sympathetic—yet realistic—light. Widely known as a left-leaning (if not Communist-sympathizing) liberal, and board member of the NAACP, the Broadway lyricist wielded his art to fight prejudice. In the postwar years he loudly decried racism, both in his lyrics (such as “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught”) and in his political activities. His 1945 essay, “The Myth That Threatens America” for the “communications industry” begged radio writers, producers, and advertisers “to avoid inadvertently perpetuating racism through the use of racial and ethnic stereotypes.”⁵¹ But his plea to his peers can only be read ironically; he himself often deployed racial stereotypes, as in his characterization of Liat in *South Pacific*.⁵²

His own racial assumptions shaped his lyrical depictions of African-Americans. As early as *Show Boat*, which he adapted from Edna Ferber’s novel with composer Jerome Kern in 1927, Hammerstein’s sympathy for non-whites translated into a highly troubling depiction

⁵⁰“The Man Who Dared-It’s Real Story of Preminger’s Film ‘Carmen Jones’,” unidentifiable clipping but most likely from the *Chicago Defender*, n.d., n.p., CRC, Folder: “Dandridge 1 of 2.”

⁵¹ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 179-182. Andrea Most similarly explores Hammerstein’s anti-racist artistic stance in *Making Americans*, Chapter 6: “‘You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught’: The Politics of Race in *South Pacific*,” 153-182. See also Hugh Fordin, *Getting to Know Him: A Biography of Oscar Hammerstein II* (New York: Random House, 1977).

⁵² Most takes Hammerstein to task for what she sees as a limited and highly problematic racial message in *South Pacific* because the show is trapped by its own racist assumptions. *Making Americans*, 157-162.

of them. *Show Boat* contains two categories of songs: those sung by white characters and those performed by black characters. The white songs are as we might expect: upbeat, with clear narratives and proper grammar, about the loves and labors of performers on a Mississippi steam boat. The black songs—“Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man,” “Misery’s Comin’ Around,” and “Ol’ Man River”—are far more complicated.⁵³ “Ol’ Man River,” which Paul Robeson’s portrayal of Jo, made famous both on Broadway and in the 1936 film, draws upon the legacy of slave field songs in its tone and lyrics. Audiences and reviewers at the time, in fact, believed the song to have been culled from the antebellum South, rather than a contemporary number written by the son of a German immigrant.⁵⁴ The content of the song, as much as the supposedly “authentic” lyrics of a Negro spiritual, perpetuated the very racial stereotypes Hammerstein would deplore in 1945:

You an’ me, we sweat an’ strain,
 Body all achin’ an’ racked wid pain—
 Tote dat barge!
 Lif’ dat bale!
 Git a little drunk,
 An’ you land in jail...
 Ah git weary
 An’ sick of tryin’;
 Ah’m tired of livin’
 An’ skeered of dyin’,
 But Ol’ Man River,
 He jes’ keeps rollin’ along.⁵⁵

⁵³ “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man” might be considered a “cross-over” song since it is initially sung by Julie, the mulatto who passes for white, before her white pupil, Magnolia, sings it. However, the song functions more as an aural cue about Julie’s true race than as an example of a popular song that transcends racial categories. With its use of slave dialect and depiction of shiftless black men, it is a song that only blacks sang, according to Queenie. Lauren Berlant uses this number as a point of entry to discussing issues of race and sentimentalism. Lauren Berlant, “Pax Americana.”

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 422n.

⁵⁵ Oscar Hammerstein II, *Lyrics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949), 161-162. Interestingly, unlike the original lyrics, this version does not contain the word “Niggers” (it uses “colored folks”). Dyer describes how Robeson substituted “Darkies” in 1928. Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 2d ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 101. Arthur Freed’s 1951 version completely eliminates the refrain to avoid the offensive language. A more recent British recording of the soundtrack restores the original 1927 lyrics,

Jo's words invoked images of slavery, while the slave dialect tapped into nineteenth-century literary devices.⁵⁶ The song depicted blacks not only beaten down and dehumanized by slavery, but responding to their situation with self-destructive and criminal behavior. Paul Robeson's complicated relationship to the song he made famous—as much as it made him famous—further underscores the song's racialized problems. He resisted Hammerstein's depiction of African-Americans by frequently changing lyrics and rejecting the so-called slave dialect for “proper” English (that is, “the” instead of “de;” “that” rather than “dat”). He objected to the theme of “resignation” to black oppression, opting instead to paint a picture of racial struggle.⁵⁷ “Ol’ Man River,” now virtually synonymous with the controversial Robeson, encapsulated Hammerstein's racial assumptions in the stereotypes upon which he drew, despite his best intentions to paint African-Americans in the most human of terms.⁵⁸ Thus, his lyrics ultimately undermined his liberal intentions.

including “niggers”: Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II, *Show Boat: Original Broadway Score*, London Sinfonietta and Ambrosian Chorus, John McGlinn, Recorded June-August 1987 (London), CDC 7 49108 2 EMI.

⁵⁶ I follow the lead of Tiffany Gilbert, who observed that Harry Belafonte's rendition of “Dis Flower” in *Carmen Jones* is “discreetly slavish ... A member of a prison gang assigned to cut brush in the hot Florida sun, he looks more like a work-weary slave than the dashing, rule-abiding soldier he was trained to be.” Tiffany Gilbert, “American Iconoclast: Carmen Jones and the Revolutionary Divadom of Dorothy Dandridge,” *Women's Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2005): 243.

⁵⁷ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 101; Berlant, “Pax Americana,” 414; Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical*, 23. For more analysis on the song, arguably the most famous to come out of the show, and its relationship to “black” music, see Philip Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley: A History of America's Greatest Lyricists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 184-186; Gerald Mast, *Can't Help Singin': The American Musical on Stage and Screen* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1987), 59-64; and Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 188-190.

⁵⁸ In a disturbing racial inversion, Frank Sinatra sang this song in what Stanley Green calls the “ludicrous finale” in *Till the Clouds Roll By* (1946), the biopic about composer Jerome Kern. Sinatra appeared in a white suit floating against a white background, a symbolic racial erasure. Equally interesting, Lena Horne was cast as Julie in the beginning of the film, singing “Can't Help Lovin' dat Man.” However the song is detached from the show's narrative so that those unfamiliar with *Show Boat's* story would not know that the character was a mulatto passing for white. Both the 1936 and 1951 Hollywood versions of *Show Boat* cast definitively white women—Helen Morgan and Ava Gardner, respectively—as Julie, because the idea of a black woman *actually* passing for white could not possibly be filmed, particularly because it would too closely suggest miscegenation.

The relationship of black culture to Americana, as typified in this and other Hammerstein songs, is equally troubling. Lauren Berlant notes how, “African American history comes to stand for American history itself,” in *Show Boat*, and how subalternity is erased in the show.⁵⁹ This same process is at work in *Carmen Jones*. Reviewers and journalists alike frequently mentioned how Hammerstein updated the Bizet opera by translating it into an “American idiom.” But accounts similarly referred to the lyrics as a “traditional Negro idiom.”⁶⁰ “Negro” and “American” thus became interchangeable; one could stand in the other’s place. While this was perhaps shorthand reference for the historical and cultural legacy of the antebellum American South, the collapse of two distinct idioms erased blackness in the construction of an all-encompassing American melting pot, a melting pot in which 1950s African-Americans still had faith and to which they still wanted to belong.

Like *Show Boat*, Hammerstein’s lyrics for *Carmen Jones*, as minstrel racial longings, romanticized black culture by building on long-standing literary and cultural stereotypes. Consider, for instance, “Dat Ol’ Boy,” one of Carmen’s last songs. Drawing the nine of spades (the card of death), Carmen belts out her defiance of death, just as she had brushed off the warning of the buzzard’s feather on her grandmother’s porch. The song, tapping into the

Stanley Green, *Hollywood Musicals Year by Year* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Publishing, 1990), 57, 141, 164. *Till the Clouds Roll By*, Produced by Arthur Freed, Directed by Richard Whorf and Vincente Minnelli (George Sidney uncredited), Color, 137 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1946, Videocassette, MRC.

⁵⁹ Berlant, “Pax Americana,” 402-403.

⁶⁰ Catherine de la Roche of *Sight and Sound* described the lyrics as being “composed in the traditional Negro idiom.” Catherine de la Roche, Review of *Carmen Jones*, *Sight and Sound* 24, no. 4 (April 1955): 198. Additional references to the “Negro idiom” include Bosley Crowther, “Negroes in a Film: ‘Carmen Jones’ Finds American Types Singing a Foreign Opera Score,” *New York Times*, 31 October 1954, X1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Examples of reviews that labeled Hammerstein’s lyrics as an “American idiom” include Review of *Carmen Jones*, *The Catholic World* 180, no. 1077 (December 1954): 221 and Review of *Carmen Jones*, *Motion Picture Herald* 197, no. 2 (9 October 1954): 18.

original gypsy theme of the opera, similarly relies on a portrait of blacks as superstitious and, by implication, backwards:

De nine!
Dere he is-de ol' boy,
Plain as kin be!
Death got his han' on me....

It ain't no use to run away f'um dat ol' boy
Ef he is chasin' you.
It's bes' to stan' right up an' look him in de face
When he is facin' you.
Y' gotta be puhpared to go wid dat ol' boy,
No matter what de time.
So I won't fill my pretty eyes wid salty tears—
Cux I ain' got de time!
I'm gonna run out ev'ry secon' I got lef'
Before he t'rows me down.
I'm gonna laugh an' sing an' use up all my bref
Before he mows me down;
While I kin fly aroun' I'll do my flyin' high—
I'm gonna keep on livin'
Up to de day I die.

(*She looks down at the nine of spades.*)

De nine! ... Hello, ol' boy—hello!⁶¹

The words, as much as the picture they paint, create a caricature of blacks that claims connection to black folk culture. The use of slave dialect establishes a historical legacy reaching back to colonial times (hence the collapsing of American and Negro culture).

But this dialect is no more authentic than that of nineteenth-century minstrelsy, as some critiques of *Carmen Jones* noted. John McCarten of *The New Yorker*, for instance, did not appreciate the reliance on dialect when he wrote, “It is Mr. Hammerstein’s cloudy notion that Negroes—and the cast of this movie is entirely Negro—can speak fairly good English up to the moment they break into song, but then instantly abandon syntax, substitute ‘d’s for ‘th’s, and indulge themselves in an old-fashioned minstrel show. As an anthropological

⁶¹ Hammerstein, *Lyrics*, 204-205.

treatise, his ‘Carmen Jones’ is highly suspect,” though he did concede, “but as a piece of entertainment, it is pretty diverting.”⁶² And African-American writer James Baldwin, in his scathing account of the film, lambasted the lyrics as “tasteless and vulgar in a way, if not to a degree, which cannot be called characteristic of Negroes.” Baldwin revisited the lyrics and dialogue as a whole, charging, “even Negro speech is parodied out of its charm and liberalized, if one may so put it, out of its force and precision. The result is not that the characters sound like everybody else, which would be bad enough; the result is that they sound ludicrously false and affected, like ante-bellum Negroes imitating their masters.”⁶³ The notion that Hammerstein’s lyrics were in any way traditionally or authentically black, an idea which was more often accepted than scrutinized, captures the dilemma of bringing blackness to the screen.

While some reviewers—black and white—took Preminger and Hammerstein to task for their inability to transcend the racial attitudes of the day, most unquestioningly accepted the stereotypes embedded within *Carmen Jones*. The African-American paper, *The New York Amsterdam News*, surprisingly applauded the film because it “avoided use of the traditional stereotypes which have for so long inhibited the development of Negro talent.”⁶⁴ *New York Times* film critic, Bosley Crowther, despite his own racial assumptions, noted with some irony that Hammerstein’s adaptation, “is in the rich nostalgic folklore of the American Negro in the South. But here it is not so much poignant as it is lurid and lightly farcical, with

⁶² John McCarten, “The Current Cinema: Hammerstein’s Folkways” (review of *Carmen Jones*), *The New Yorker* 30 (6 November 1954): 181.

⁶³ James Baldwin, “Life Straight in de Eye: *Carmen Jones*: Film Spectacular in Color,” *Commentary* 19 (January-June 1955): 74, 75. Arthur Knight describes Baldwin’s piece as “the first widely disseminated film review by a black intellectual of national stature.” Knight, *Disintegrating the Musical*, 160.

⁶⁴ “Honor Movie Cast of ‘Carmen Jones’,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 30 October 1954, 25, CRC, Folder: “Carmen Jones 1 of 2.”

the Negro characters presented by Mr. Preminger as serio-comic devotees of sex.”⁶⁵ Baldwin extended this critique of racial stereotypes, accusing the filmmakers of re-inscribing racism in their attempt to dismantle it. Discussing the film’s *mise-en-scène*, he scoffed that the sets “could easily have been dreamed up by someone determined to prove that Negroes are ‘clean’ and as ‘modern’ as white people and, I suppose, in one way or another, that is exactly how they *were* dreamed up.” To him, this was little more than the “quite helpless condescension with which Hollywood has always handled Negroes.”⁶⁶

The lyrics, as much as the sets, troublingly underscored the racial tropes Hammerstein employed when writing the musical. “Dat Ol’ Boy” used dialect to present blacks as innately superstitious, and by implication, less civilized. This, in turn, fed into white impressions of blacks as savages, extending all the way back to Salem’s Tituba and through literary portraits of the “dark continent” of Africa.⁶⁷ *Time Magazine*’s review of *Carmen Jones* bought into this image, noting how the film’s passionate dance “is a ring of savages in firelight, jumping any way the devil pulls the strings, terrible and beautiful and simple as God’s chillun without their wings.”⁶⁸ This overly simplistic, biologically-determined account captured, to borrow from Philip Roth, “the biological sophistication of a good segregationist.”⁶⁹ Though released just a few months after *Brown v. Board*, the film nonetheless stoked the fires of racial exaggeration.

⁶⁵ Bosley Crowther, “Up-dated Translation of Bizet Work Bows” (review of *Carmen Jones*), *New York Times*, 29 October 1954, 27, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁶ Baldwin, “Life Straight in de Eye,” 75.

⁶⁷ Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and Edgar Rice Burroughs’s *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914) are excellent examples of the construction of dark and savage Africa.

⁶⁸ Review of *Carmen Jones*, *Time Magazine* 64, no. 18 (1 November 1954): 98.

⁶⁹ Philip Roth, “‘I Am Black But O My Soul...’” (review of *Island in the Sun*), *New Republic*, 29 July 1957, 21, CRC, file: “Dandridge 2 of 2.”

While Hammerstein never intended to depict blacks as wild savages, he relied upon such caricatures when creating his lyrics. African-American musical talent had long been perceived to be inborn and natural, as the lyricist confirmed. “I want to establish that my choice of Negroes as the principal figures in the story was not motivated by any desire to pull an eccentric theatrical stunt. It is a logical result of my decision to write a modern American version of *Carmen*,” he explained in the introduction to his 1943 play. “The nearest thing in our modern American life to an equivalent of the gypsies in Spain is the Negro. Like the gypsy, he expresses his feelings simply, honestly, and graphically. Also as with the gypsy there is rhythm in his body, and music in his heart.” Hammerstein recognized a raw quality in blacks, a natural propensity to sing and dance.⁷⁰

Likewise, many of the film’s reviewers struggled with these same racial assumptions. Crowther, for instance, while dissatisfied with the lack of opportunities for blacks in Hollywood, claimed that Bizet’s music was ill-fitted for “a race of people as wholesomely endowed with talents for singing and dancing as the Negro people are.” He concluded by exclaiming, “Bizet’s music, equipped now with idiomatic words, [is not] expressive of the native impulses and poignant passions these people would have.”⁷¹ Like Hammerstein, Crowther wanted to see black talent showcased, but his argument could not transcend his own prejudices. And he was not the only one; numerous reviewers commented on the so-called natural abilities of Black actors without scrutinizing the racial construction at work in

⁷⁰ Hammerstein, *Carmen Jones*, xviii. For more on Hammerstein’s racial essentialism, see Clark, “Local Color,” 221.

⁷¹ Bosley Crowther, “Negroes in a Film,” *New York Times*, 31 October 1954, X1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

such a statement.⁷² In his attempt to praise the performances in *Carmen Jones*, Jack Moffitt of *The Hollywood Reporter* reified racial assumptions, thereby encapsulating the race problem. He glowed, “One of the delights of the film is the absence of any racial self-consciousness in the performances of these three principals [Dandridge, Belafonte and Olga James]. They tell the story with the uncomplicated emotional directness of their race and they never make the mistake of trying to act like imitation white people.”⁷³

James Baldwin wryly pointed out the dilemma of bringing African-American themes to the big screen in *Carmen Jones*—filmmakers could not avoid the naturalizing stereotypes that had floated throughout the country for over a century even as they sought to dispel racial myths. The movie’s creators therefore found themselves in a hypocritical, if not impossible, position. He complained that “the implicit parallel between an amoral Gypsy and an amoral Negro woman is the entire root idea of the show; but at the same time, bearing in mind the distances covered since *The Birth of a Nation*, it is important that the movie always be able to repudiate any suggestion that Negroes are amoral.” He took this one step further by noting how this contradictory stance actually served to erase color from the film.⁷⁴

The challenges of portraying blacks in film, it seems, were compounded because of the subject material of this particular musical. Transforming a European opera with its own racialized currents into an African-American cultural form was not just a project in forging middlebrow culture. Preminger and Hammerstein, in their attempt to celebrate black talent and culture, re-constituted race by mapping this racialized story onto black bodies and

⁷² See, for instance, Catherine de la Roche, Review of *Carmen Jones*, *Sight and Sound* 24, no. 4 (April 1955): 198.

⁷³ Jack Moffitt, “‘Carmen Jones’ Rich, Lusty, Artistic Entertainment” (review of *Carmen Jones*), *The Hollywood Reporter*, 28 September 1954, 3.

⁷⁴ Baldwin, “Life Straight in de Eye,” 74.

voices. They self-consciously gestured to a larger postwar stance that sought to prove to a post-colonial world that America was a racially tolerant society.⁷⁵ But re-imaging *Carmen*'s racial dynamics, Hammerstein's lyrics ultimately collapsed cultural and racial hierarchies; high art became the stuff of white culture while low art was attached to non-white culture.⁷⁶ Thus he did not so much transform the cultural and racial hierarchy of the nineteenth-century opera as recreate those very hierarchies by transposing them to the American South. His lyrics, as much as Preminger's direction, fetishized more than celebrated black acting in their circulation of long-standing minstrel caricatures and stereotypes.

The Strange Career of Dorothy Dandridge: De-Vocalizing Race in *Carmen Jones*

Preminger's decision to separate the principal actors' voices from their bodies further objectified their otherness. Rather than casting classically-trained African-Americans, he chose three rising stars who, as he argued, could not sustain the vocal rigor of opera, an ironic decision given the supposedly "natural" ability of black singing.⁷⁷ The use of dubbing, although not an uncommon practice in Hollywood, set the actors apart from the rest of the cast as non-opera singers.⁷⁸ In a musical, silence is the equivalent of a loss (or theft) of

⁷⁵ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press: 2000) and Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves*, Chapter 5: "From Isolationism to Idealism in the Cold War Years," 161-201.

⁷⁶ Smith, "Black Faces, White Voices," 32.

⁷⁷ Of course, opera draws upon meticulously crafted, well-trained voices rather than raw innate talent.

⁷⁸ While dubbing in various forms had been employed since nearly the inception of "talkies," most often the technology was utilized to pre-record and then re-synchronize an actor's image and voice in the final print. Marsha Siefert, "Image/Music/Voice: Song Dubbing in Hollywood Musicals," *Journal of Communication* 45, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 44-64. Lela Simone, Music Coordinator in the Freed Unit at MGM, spoke in great detail of the process of pre-recording and dubbing in her oral history with Rudy Behlmer, OHP, Lela Simone (Call Number OH 112), Herrick Core Collection.

Dubbing in musicals was quite common when dancers were cast in song-and-dance roles, as was the case of Cyd Charisse in *The Band Wagon* (1953). Likewise, many producers selected big stars rather than singers in order to raise box office receipts, as was the case with Natalie Wood and Richard Beymer in *West*

identity, as was the case with *Liat*. In a film with an all-black cast, the white filmmakers still managed to marginalize black participation. The combination of supposedly authentic idiomatic lyrics with racial stereotypes and vocal dubbing muted race completely. “Just as most of the performers in this film do not sing in their own voices,” James Baldwin argued, “so also they do not appear, so to speak, in their own skins.”⁷⁹

The dubbing practices in *Carmen Jones* were racially uneven and therefore suspect. Preminger and the musical director, Herschel Gilbert, determined that the three leads—Dorothy Dandridge (*Carmen Jones*), Harry Belafonte (*Joe*) and Joe Adams (*Husky Miller*)—lacked the necessary vocal abilities and training to sing their parts. While this was undoubtedly true for Adams, who was by no means a singer, both Belafonte and Dandridge had first made names for themselves singing in nightclubs. Yet in her autobiography, Dandridge (1922-1965) denied her own vocal potential, admitting, “Though I sang with sultriness, I privately took lessons with a well-known vocal coach, Florence Russell, in some effort to develop a semioperatic voice, which never did happen. I was doomed to that narrow range of sound,” she conceded. She seemed resigned to this limitation, adding, “and that may have been best for my type of singing.” Unlike Judy Garland, who struggled for fifteen years to control her voice, Dandridge did not appear to fight for her voice. Her admission is striking in the way it echoes Preminger’s own assessment of her talents; the fact that they were having an affair during and well beyond the film’s production surely must have shaped

Side Story (1961), or Audrey Hepburn in *My Fair Lady* (1964), who had sung her own songs in the less vocally-challenging *Funny Face* (1957).

⁷⁹ Editor’s Introduction to Baldwin’s “Life Straight in de Eye,” 74.

her own self-appraisal, especially given his rather controlling and paternalistic treatment of her.⁸⁰

While Hollywood frequently relied on dubbing in musicals, *Carmen Jones*'s dubbing stands out for two reasons. First, and quite unusually, the opening titles, soundtrack, and publicity all acknowledged the dubbing. Typically studios preferred to conceal the "true" voices of the singers, in part to preserve the seemingly realistic continuity between sound and image.⁸¹ But in *Carmen Jones*, the three ghost singers' names were boldly included in the film's opening credits, listed at the end of the cast list as: "and the voices of..."⁸² Likewise, most media accounts acknowledged, if not celebrated, the dubbing. Moira Walsh, reviewing the film for *America*, pointed out how the dubbing was "used to achieve the kind of ideal esthetic synthesis which nature, unaided, very seldom provides" while an account in the *Chicago Defender* reported rather matter-of-factly the reliance on "vocal alteregos" for the leads.⁸³

It is unclear when the actors learned they would be dubbed and how they felt about it, though it is easy to imagine that Adams, as a non-singer, was most likely relieved. Dandridge was relatively silent on the topic in her autobiography. She described the production process in detached terms: "I hardly slept through the twenty-one days of the

⁸⁰ Dandridge, *Everything and Nothing*, 161-162, 173-195.

⁸¹ *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), while in many ways a satire of classic Hollywood, illustrates the myriad of reasons for masking the technology of dubbing. For critical explanations of the film and these processes, see Clover, "Dancin' in the Rain," 157-173; and Brian Currid, "'Ain't I People?': Voicing National Fantasy," in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, eds. Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 113-129.

⁸² *Carmen Jones*, Produced and Directed by Otto Preminger, Color, 105 min., 20th Century-Fox, 1954, DVD, Author's Collection.

⁸³ Moira Walsh, Review of *Carmen Jones*, *America* 92 (6 November 1954): 165; and "The Man Who Dared-It's Real Story of Preminger's Film 'Carmen Jones'," unidentifiable clipping but most likely from the *Chicago Defender*, n.d., n.p., CRC, Folder: "Dandridge 1 of 2."

shooting. The voice of a trained opera singer, Marilyn Horne, was dubbed in for mine. In the cutting room where the dubbing took place, I was told that I was handling my end of it, the synchronization, with no trouble.”⁸⁴ Belafonte was equally quiet. His unauthorized biography merely mentioned it in passing: “Now, for the first time, he had a dramatic role in a major production, something for which he had been hungering ... Interestingly enough, Harry did no singing in *Carmen Jones*. Levern [*sic*] Hutcherson, one of the Broadway Porgy’s in *Porgy and Bess*, dubbed in the exciting music while Harry mouthed the lyrics.”⁸⁵ And *The New York Times* reported that, “Neither [Belafonte nor Dandridge], it seems, was dismayed at having stronger, opera-trained voices ‘dubbed’ off-screen ... for each claims greater creative satisfaction from acting.”⁸⁶ Dandridge and Belafonte were doubly silenced in this film, since both were denied the use of their singing voices, and did not (or could not) speak out against this silencing in the press. The widespread publicity of the dubbing might even be considered a third form of silencing.

Secondly, and far more compellingly, the film’s “integrated” soundtrack, in contrast to its segregated visuals, relied upon black *and* white voices.⁸⁷ When the casting calls were announced for the leads, Preminger and his musical director did not feel constrained by racial boundaries. To them, color was only skin deep. Marilyn Horne, the white singer who dubbed for Dandridge, cheered in her memoir that the “color barrier” of the operatic world did not apply to *Carmen Jones*, “There was no color barrier either—whites could apply.”

⁸⁴ Dandridge, *Everything and Nothing*, 176.

⁸⁵ Arnold Shaw, *Belafonte: An Unauthorized Biography* (Philadelphia: Chilton Company, 1960), 135.

⁸⁶ “On the ‘Bright Road’ of ‘Carmen’ and ‘Joe’,” *The New York Times*, 24 October 1954, X5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁸⁷ Smith, “Black Faces, White Voices,” 31.

Horne's inversion of the color barrier is unsettling, despite her celebration of the film as "a godsend because it gave blacks an opportunity to perform in something other than occasional character roles. The barring of blacks from the cultural world was an American tragedy."⁸⁸ She failed to interrogate and complicate her own role as a white woman silencing an African-American actress. She reduced the racial politics of the film to nothing more than a matter of blacks breaking down barriers. But in suggesting that she, too, was breaking down color barriers, she did not acknowledge her own power as a white woman who would go on to enjoy a notable operatic career.

Even stranger, not a single account of the dubbing, whether in mainstream or African-American newspapers, addressed these racial politics. Virtually everyone, even James Baldwin, was silent on the use of white voices in the film. The closest anyone came to discussing the race of the actual singers was a June 1954 account of the film's production from the *Chicago Defender*. Charles Pierce, reporting on Preminger's decision to dub, recounted how, "During the early days of the auditioning, a number of well known Negro singers were called in. Everyone was given a brush-off although some had actually been in the Broadway show and knew the score. Well known competent operatic singers—photogenic and capable—were shunted aside in the rat race for names." He suggested here that these well-deserving black singers had not been cast because they were not box office draws. But, in a somewhat optimistic turn, he continued, "It is highly probable that the same singers who weren't considered for parts in the picture will be called in and their splendid

⁸⁸ Marilyn Horne with Jane Scovell, *Marilyn Horne: The Song Continues* (Fort Worth, TX: Baskerville Publishers, 2004), 64.

voices dubbed in for the principals.”⁸⁹ Of course, his prediction proved partially unfounded, as a white singer was employed for the lead. Equally interesting, none of the black papers decried the use of white voice(s) in the film, which begs the question of whether anyone knew that Marilyn Horne, a still unknown singer in California, was even white. Indeed, Robert L.A. Clark recounts how one reviewer actually believed Horne to be black.⁹⁰

Similar to Horne’s account, film scholar Jeff Smith wants to locate optimism in the film’s dubbing practices. The mid-1950s, after all, was a time of hope for blacks—a time before the violence of the 1960s, and the subsequent loss of faith in the possibility (much less the desire) to fully and equally belong to American society. There was little reason as of yet to question the potential of desegregation and integration. Smith contends that, “By severing the ‘natural’ link between black bodies and black voices, the dubbed voices in *Carmen Jones* appear to question the very categories of race that were circulating in American culture in the 1950s.”⁹¹ But he fails to take full advantage of hindsight to problematize the film’s skewed power dynamics on both its visual and acoustic planes. Furthermore, he neglects to interrogate the gendered politics also at work in the dubbing process.

Of the three featured singers—Le Vern Hutcherson, who dubbed for Belafonte, Marvin Hayes, who dubbed for Adams, and Marilyn Horne (billed incorrectly in the film as Marilyn), who dubbed for Dandridge—only Dandridge’s “voice” was white.⁹² The

⁸⁹ Charles Pierce, “Thinks ‘Carmen Jones’ Pix Cast From Wrong Side of ‘Music Fence’,” partially unidentifiable clipping from *Chicago Defender*, 19 June [1954], n.p., CRC, Folder: “Carmen Jones 2 of 2.”

⁹⁰ Clark, “Local Color,” 223.

⁹¹ Smith, “Black Faces, White Voices,” 31.

⁹² It has been very challenging to establish the race of the other two singers. I suspect that Hutcherson was black because he had toured as Porgy in *Porgy and Bess*. And according to the Internet Movie Database, Hayes toured with Wings Over Jordan, an African-American gospel choir, during World War II. Hayes was a fairly-renowned opera singer in the 1950s and 1960s, but none of the articles I found in the *New York Times* (ProQuest Historical Newspapers) mentioned his race either way. On Hutcherson, see Horne, *Marilyn Horne*,

identities of the background singers are unknown, though Horne's autobiography implies that the chorus most likely was mixed race.⁹³ But in terms of lead "singers," only Dandridge's voice was replaced with a white one. In contrast, both Pearl Bailey (Frankie) and Julliard-trained Olga James (Cindy Lou) were allowed to sing for themselves, though Bailey's "Beat Out Dat Rhythm on a Drum" (*Danse Bohéme*) was transposed into a key/register better suited for her.⁹⁴ Jeff Smith argues that the politics of who could and could not sing for themselves were bound in the racial-cultural hierarchy that associated lighter skin with high art (he can only make this claim by overlooking James, herself a very light-skinned African-American). As he asserts, Bailey's voice was used because of the darker shade of her skin. "She, more than any other character," he informs us, "must bear the burden of *Carmen Jones*'s construction of racial identity." Between the dark color of her skin and the so-called primitive savagery of her song—the Gypsy Song of the original opera—Bailey, as he suggests, establishes the racial authenticity of a film that, as we have already seen, is far from a realistic depiction of black life or culture. Bailey's voice links her dark body to the "indigenous tradition of African-American musical performance."⁹⁵ Indeed, James Baldwin located in Bailey's performance "the authoritative ring of authenticity." While he lamented the ways in which Preminger "reduced" Bailey to a caricature, particularly in "Beat Out Dat

66; and Review of *Carmen Jones*, *Newsweek* 44 (15 October 1954): 102. On Hayes, see <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0371144/bio> (24 October 2006); for Wings Over Jordan: <http://www.africanamericanspirituals.com/newwings.htm> (12 October 2006).

⁹³ When relating her audition, Horne explained how "I hadn't realized that the audition actually was for the soloists' soundtrack—not just the background music in which the chorus goes 'ahhhh, ohhhhh, ahhhh, ohhhhh' while the credits flash by. Instead, everything was up for grabs, including the 'singing voices' of Harry Belafonte and Dorothy Dandridge." Horne, *Marilyn Horne*, 64.

⁹⁴ Smith, "Black Faces, White Voices," 33. On Olga James, see "Olga James, Carmen star, appearing at Casino Royal," *Washington Afro-America*, 5 February 1955, 14, CRC, Folder: "Carmen Jones 1 of 2."

⁹⁵ Smith, "Black Faces, White Voices," 36.

Rhythm on a Drum,” he nonetheless conceded that the “murderously amused disdain” with which she delivered her lines gave the distinct impression “that she is commenting on the film.”⁹⁶

Cultural hierarchies similarly become mapped on to Bailey’s body/voice—the darker the skin tone, the less operatic the voice, at least when it comes to the women of the film. Dandridge and James, both quite light-skinned, perform (or lip synch in Dandridge’s case) in the formally-trained voices of opera singers, while Bailey not only sings the lusty, exotic gypsy song, but does so with a “vocal growl, a musical gesture that ... references a particular jazz and blues singing style.” Her performance in “Beat Out Dat Rhythm on a Drum,” Smith concludes, “functions to establish the exoticism and Otherness of African-American culture that lies at the heart of Hammerstein’s project.”⁹⁷ The fact that this exoticism is situated on a black woman, in contrast to the lighter-skinned/whitened voice of Dandridge’s sultry Carmen, places gender at the bottom of intertwined racial and cultural hierarchies. Dandridge and Bailey’s voices are equally exoticized, though Dandridge’s is completely displaced. As with the case of Liat, otherness collapses into gender so that Woman comes to stand in for Other, as much as the Other is a feminized object. Such fetishization of women is therefore fully wrapped in the cloak of skin tone, and in the case of *Carmen Jones*, this is reinforced by a cultural hierarchy of high and low art. Bailey’s jazzier singing style, perhaps expected of a woman of such dark complexion, cannot be tolerated in Dandridge, whose own voice was too exotic (non-white) to sing the lead. Baldwin picked up on this, sardonically remarking how “the color wheel in *Carmen Jones* is very important.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Baldwin, “Life Straight in de Eye,” 74-75.

⁹⁷ Smith, “Black Faces, White Voices,” 35.

⁹⁸ Baldwin, “Life Straight in de Eye,” 76. See also Smith, “Black Faces, White Voices,” 38-39.

It is the greatest irony, then, to consider Marilyn Horne's voice within the context of these multiple and overlapping hierarchies. When Horne originally auditioned, she employed a traditional operatic vocal style, complete with original French lyrics. But she quickly realized that, to win the part, she would have to alter her voice to fit the role. She recalled how she begged the musical director, Gilbert, for a second chance, asserting, "You know, I can sing low, too!" He asked her to sing the *Habanera* ("Dat's Love"), and as she tells the story, "I'm embarrassed to say I tore into those lyrics with the most blatant imitation of darky dialogue this side of Catfish Row. Of course, the score was written that way."⁹⁹ Thus, she only secured the role once she abandoned her "full bodied tone" for a "thin, reedy sound ... [and] deliberately sloppy fashion, smearing tones rather than articulating the tune's vocal ornamentations."¹⁰⁰ In short, she won the part by blackening her voice. In the process, she upheld the notion that black talent (like that of Garland's) was innate and untrainable, and therefore inferior to elite white culture. Horne's successful audition thereby reaffirmed the racial-cultural hierarchy at work in *Carmen Jones*.

Though she never sang with the same sort of jazzy growls that Pearl used, Horne maintained this sloppier singing style in her attempt to match sound to image. She wanted her voice to be as believable as possible, and thus she tried to sound as black as possible:

I worked closely with Dorothy Dandridge, listening carefully to her speaking and singing voice in order to match the timbre and accent so that when I recorded the songs, I had a little bit of Dandridge in my throat. She sang in a register comfortable to her; then I mimicked her voice in the proper key. Later on, she filmed her scenes with my recorded voice blasting from huge loudspeakers. The tendency in dubbing is to overdo your mouth movements but Dandridge didn't—she was sensational. The sound technicians pieced music and film

⁹⁹ Horne, *Marilyn Horne*, 64-65.

¹⁰⁰ When she went on to play *Carmen* on the stage, Horne returned to her training to employ the full and meticulous range of operatic voice. Smith, "Black Faces, White Voices," 37.

together and the result is a seamless performance by Dorothy Dandridge and (the voice of) “Marilynn” Horne.¹⁰¹

The fact that Horne did not use her full range, choosing instead to mimic Dandridge’s own voice, plays into racial stereotypes and mutes race. But just as race is destabilized through the disconnectedness of Dandridge’s voice and body, blackness is incongruously reified by being placed at the bottom of a racial-cultural hierarchy. *Carmen Jones*, in the words of Smith, becomes “an all-black musical that ‘mimes’ the voice of white, European culture ... In essence, the split between visual and aural registers in *Carmen Jones* [*sic*] reveals how Bizet’s famous music masks the sound track’s construction of ‘whiteness’ by placing it under the rubric of musical ‘sophistication.’”¹⁰²

In *Carmen*’s first song, “Dat’s Love” (*Habanera*), Horne seems hesitant, beginning in a reedy whisper that takes several verses before she sounds poised and self-assured. She punctuates her singing with bluesy affectations, incorporating syncopated pauses and half-speaking breathiness, in order to authentically match Dandridge’s speaking style. But by the time she sings her fourth solo, “Dat Ol’ Boy” (one hour and twenty minutes into the film), Horne’s voice is strong, confident, and less operatic. She sings in a slightly lower register, her voice huskier and sultrier than before. Horne consistently tried to sound black in each song, but her vocal interpretation of Hammerstein’s dialect was far more pronounced here than in any of her other songs.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Horne, *Marilyn Horne*, 67. *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge* beautifully illustrates the filming of “Dat’s Love,” with Horne’s original recording blaring from the speakers as Halle Berry-as-Dorothy Dandridge mouths the words. *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge*, Produced by Larry Y. Albucher, Directed by Martha Coolidge, Color, 115 min., HBO Home Video/HBO Pictures, 1999, DVD.

¹⁰² Smith, “Black Faces, White Voices,” 37.

¹⁰³ Interestingly, when Dandridge draws the death card, she says, “*The nine of spades*” [emphasis mine] while Horne sings “De” according to Hammerstein’s specifications.

“Dat Ol’ Boy” vividly illustrates the interwoven hierarchical constructions of race, culture, and gender. Feeling trapped in the little Chicago slum she has been sharing with her AWOL lover, Joe, Carmen escapes to the hotel suite of boxer Husky Miller to visit her friend Frankie. Frankie uses a deck of playing cards to read Carmen’s fortune. After drawing the nine of spades—the card of death—Carmen begins to sing powerfully, almost in a drunken stupor or trance. As we have already seen, the superstition of fortune telling is highly racialized, not just in its link to the Gypsy theme of the original story, but also in its implicit connection to black culture, particularly that of voodoo in the deep South. But Horne’s singing, doubled by Dandridge’s powerful lip-syncing, enhances this racialized performance.

Beyond the difference in vocal styles, “Dat Ol’ Boy” is notable for its singular use of close-ups, rather than the far more static use of medium- and long-shots Preminger had used earlier in “Dat’s Love.” Horne’s intonation of the idiomized lyrics is equally magnified, with a more discernable articulation of slave dialect, particularly in the first half of the song:

De nine!
Dere he is-de ol’ boy,
Plain as kin be!
Death got his han’ on me....

It ain’t no use to run away f’um dat ol’ boy
Ef he is chasin’ you.
It’s bes’ to stan’ right up an’ look him in de face
When he is facin’ you.
Y’ gotta be puhpared to go wid dat ol’ boy,
No matter what de time.¹⁰⁴

Horne’s pronounced lyrics, coupled with the near-constant close-up of Dandridge, produced a striking racialized effect. Horne’s vocalization stands out here as far more “black” in its sound than compared to her other songs. Of course, this is the dramatic turning point for the

¹⁰⁴ Hammerstein, *Lyrics*, 194-195.

story, but that cannot be the only reason for the heightened aural power. The song, steeped in an imagined African-American culture of the minstrel legacy, might be considered the answer to Bailey's "Beat Out Dat Rhythm on a Drum." Both songs play upon gypsy and black caricatures, relying on racial tropes and stock characters.

"Beat Out Dat Rhythm" is discernibly and undeniably black in both visual and vocal styles. In this scene, Dandridge is little more than a marginalized spectator, sitting at the edge of the proscenium arch as she watches Bailey and the chorus sing and dance their way into a "savage" frenzy. Her distance from the action separates her, marking her as less black. But in "Dat Ol' Boy" we are shown a very different picture of Dandridge—one that is unequivocally black in sight and sound. Horne "blackens" her voice more than in any preceding song as she lirts about Carmen's superstitions. Aurally, then, the number reinforces racial stereotypes, placing Carmen at the bottom of a cultural-racial hierarchy. At first glance, the camerawork undermines this construction by privileging Dandridge with close-ups. But these close-ups emphasize Dandridge's silence, which like Liat, reduces her to a sexualized Other; indeed she had used her body rather than her voice to win the role.¹⁰⁵ In the final analysis she is more object than subject.

This seeming contradiction between subject and object can be explained by Dandridge's odd status, both in Hollywood as a light-skinned woman of color, and in *Carmen Jones*, as the only leading character and woman with a white voice. Dandridge herself confessed to being something of an "in-between" figure in Hollywood, much like Judy Garland's screen personae. "What was I?" she pondered:

¹⁰⁵ Dandridge essentially seduced Preminger to get the role, though they did not begin their affair until after she had been offered and refused the part. Her nightclub act similarly relied upon a heightened sexuality, though it was one in which she still maintained control over her voice and subjectivity. She did admit that her sexy stage persona often overshadowed, the "serious creature offstage." Dandridge, *Everything and Nothing*, 161-164, 166-168, 172-173.

That outdated “tragic mulatto” of earlier fiction? Oddly enough, there remains some validity in this concept, in a society not yet integrated. I wasn’t fully accepted in either world, black or white. I was too light to satisfy Negroes, not light enough to secure the screen work, the roles, the marriage status available to a white woman. I had been catapulted from a primarily Negro environment high up into white-peopled studios and salons. Subtly, while experiencing what seemed to be a full acceptance, I encountered not-yetness.¹⁰⁶

Carmen Jones denied and reconstituted Dandridge’s position as a black woman in Hollywood. It attempted to downplay her race, just as it tried to do with every other actor in the film, but by employing a white voice, the film succeeded in doubly calling attention to her racial otherness. Not only was she not white, like the rest of the cast, but she was also not black, unlike the rest of the cast. Then, Horne’s attempt to sound authentically black reinforced Dandridge’s racial liminality. She was complicit in Horne’s vocal blackface; in turn Horne’s attempts to sound black underscored how Dandridge aspired to figurative whiteface.

While many scholars champion Dandridge as the first black diva, she lacked the sort of power one normally associates with this status.¹⁰⁷ She became the first black woman to be nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actress, competing with Judy Garland for *A Star is Born* and losing out to Grace Kelly. Dandridge’s nomination was an honor that would not be realized for an African-American woman until 2001, when Halle Berry won for *Monster’s*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

¹⁰⁷ On Dandridge’s status, see Gilbert, “American Iconoclast: Carmen Jones and the Revolutionary Divadom of Dorothy Dandridge;” Karen Alexander, “Fatal Beauties: Black Women in Hollywood,” in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed., Christine Gledhill (London: Routledge, 1991), 45-54; Marguerite H. Rippey, “Commodity, Tragedy, Desire: Female Sexuality and Blackness in the Iconography of Dorothy Dandridge,” in *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, ed. Daniel Bernardi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 178-209; Marguerite H. Rippey, “Exhuming Dorothy Dandridge: The Black Sex Goddess and Classic Hollywood Cinema,” *CineAction* 44 (July 1997): 20-31; Robert K. Lightning, “Dorothy Dandridge: Ruminations on Black Stardom,” *CineAction* 44 (July 1997): 32-39; Walter Leavy, “The Real-Life Tragedy of Dorothy Dandridge,” *Ebony* 41, no. 11 (September 1986): 136-137, 140-142, 146, CRC, Folder: “Dandridge 2 of 2.”

Ball.¹⁰⁸ *Carmen Jones* made Dandridge a star, and yet, like Garland, she was unable to translate box office success into real Hollywood clout. Despite the critical acclaim Dandridge received for her performance, she was stuck. “I was to reach a high and also the beginnings of a decline inevitable for a Negro actress for whom there was no place else to go, no higher or better role to play, no new story available, no chance to play roles meant for white only.” In her autobiography, Dandridge bemoaned how the African-American community, many of whom already saw her as a sell-out for her interracial relationships, might be uncomfortable with her portrayal of a black hussy.¹⁰⁹ She was truly in a delicate and powerless position. The hybrid voice she embodied in *Carmen Jones* symbolized her larger *in-between-ness* in Hollywood as a black actress aspiring to receive the privileges of a white woman.¹¹⁰

Dandridge’s racial liminality, reinforced by Horne’s attempt to pass as black, was all the more striking in a film with a notable visual absence of whiteness. Just as most postwar musicals lacked—or worse yet, erased—blackness, *Carmen Jones* contained no white actors, with the exception of Marilyn Horne’s “hybrid” voice. Ann Davies suggests that, “Whiteness reinscribes itself through its very absence on the screen, but also through an unseen presence that can nonetheless be deduced.” She perceives this as “white cultural haunting,” which she traces all the way back to Bizet’s original work.¹¹¹ This haunting did not go unnoticed by the film’s critics. James Baldwin was quick to point out that the lack of

¹⁰⁸ Ironically, Berry portrayed Dandridge in *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge*. See Smith, “Black Faces, White Voices,” 40.

¹⁰⁹ Dandridge, *Everything and Nothing*, 180, 168-169, 175-177.

¹¹⁰ Tiffany Gilbert refers to Dandridge’s cross-over appeal as “hybrid status” in “American Iconoclast,” 237.

¹¹¹ Davies, “High and Low Culture,” 50.

white actors “sealed the action off, as it were, in a vacuum in which the spectacle of color is divested of its danger. The color itself then becomes a kind of vacuum which each spectator will fill with his own fantasies.”¹¹² Indeed, other black writers sardonically noted that the film surprisingly passed Southern censors precisely because it was all-black. “How else, we thought,” *The Chicago Defender* mused, “without hesitating, would brother ‘Twinkletoes’ [Lloyd T. Binford, Memphis and Shelby County Board of Censors Chairman] okay it showing in theatres in his district.”¹¹³ The NAACP president, Walter White, did not support the film because, while there was nothing particularly racially objectionable in his eyes, the film “deviated from his organization’s integrationist agenda.”¹¹⁴

Robert L.A. Clark suggests an alternate interpretation of the all-black casting. “It is also possible to read the total racial segregation in the film,” he argues, “as a subtle indictment of the racial realities of American culture in the 1940s and 1950s.” He contends

¹¹² Baldwin, “Life Straight in de Eye,” 75.

¹¹³ “Jim Crow Trains, Fight Crowds Get ‘Carmen’ By Memphis Censors,” *The Chicago Defender*, 4 December 1954, n.p., CRC. Folder: “Carmen Jones 2 of 2;” “Negro Film Approved: Memphis Censors Pass and Praise ‘Carmen Jones’,” *New York Times*, 19 November 1954, 19, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Tennessee seemed to have a particularly pernicious censor board, though most state censor boards exercised relatively little power in the postwar period. The Production Code Administration only collected data on Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts, Kansas, and Maryland boards, which suggests that those were the only regularly active boards. Though when it came to issues of race, Tennessee seemed quite vigilant. In 1950, the Motion Picture Association (MPA, later MPAA) appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the state’s ban on *Curley*, a film in which white and black children were shown playing together. This would be a forerunner to the Court’s 1952 overturning of its ruling in *Mutual Film Corp. v. Ohio* (1915) that movies did not fall under the purview of the First Amendment. “Supreme Court Rule to Be Asked: Racial Ban on Film Will Be Appealed,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 18 January 1950, 14. On censorship, see Randall, “Censorship: From The Miracle to Deep Throat,” 510-536. Evidence of the PCA’s contact with state censor boards can be found in their “Confidential Reports from Local Censor Boards,” which are included in the files for each movie the PCA reviewed, PCAR.

¹¹⁴ Smith, “Black Faces, White Voices,” 29. Hammerstein’s version of the Toreador Song (*Chanson de Toréador*), “Stan’ up an’ Fight,” I would argue, does smack of the sort of racial agenda the NAACP would have supported. While ostensibly the song is about prizefighter Husky Miller’s persistence in the ring, it can also be read as a mantra for African-Americans to keep fighting for equal rights, perhaps informed by the Double V Campaign of World War II: “Stan’ up an’ fight until you hear de bell, Stan’ toe to toe, Trade blow fer blow, Keep punchin’ till you make yer punches tell, Show dat crowd watcher know! Until you hear dat bell, Dat final bell, Stan’ up an’ fight like hell!” Hammerstein, *Lyrics*, 199-201.

that the *mise-en-scène* (the wartime parachute factory in Jacksonville, Florida) calls attention to the roles blacks played in WWII. The 1943 stage play therefore “is indicative of the state of affairs in the 1940s, when the armed forces were segregated. The film is set in the same period, but was made after President Truman’s executive order abolishing segregation in the armed forces.” Clark even points out the possibilities of reading the film against the *Brown v. Board* decision.¹¹⁵ Jeff Smith likewise cautiously praises the film for its integrationist vision. While he acknowledges how the film was visually segregated, he holds that the mixing of white and black voices on the soundtrack produced “a space without color barriers, one in which members of different races interact in harmony, both literal and figurative. While that viewpoint may seem naïve and Utopian,” he concedes in his conclusion, “it nonetheless speaks to certain political aspirations that existed at the time of the film’s release.”¹¹⁶

Regardless of such racial optimism, the film is undeniably problematic in its attempts to advance a liberal agenda. Dandridge’s precarious position both in the film and Hollywood writ large highlights the limits of depicting racial issues and characters in the Hollywood musical. The specter of miscegenation haunted her on-screen performance as much as her desires to marry Preminger.¹¹⁷ Reduced to mimicry like Liat, Dandridge is equally voiceless. Horne’s voice becomes the primary mode for identifying Carmen, which, as much as Dandridge’s light skin, signifies a racial crossover. Thus, Marilyn Horne’s white voice

¹¹⁵ Clark, “Local Color,” 230.

¹¹⁶ Smith, “Black Faces, White Voices,” 40.

¹¹⁷ This specter of miscegenation similarly haunts the film’s end, when Joe (Belafonte) strangles Carmen. If she is, at least vocally, white, then he, as a black man, has committed the ultimate act of sexual violence possible, or so Lost Cause mythology claimed. As the last song, indeed the last sounds, of the film, he sings, “String me high on a tree, So dat I soon will be, Wid my darlin’, my baby.” These concluding lyrics undeniably conjure the image of lynching, so typically enacted upon black men for sexual transgressions against white women. Hammerstein, *Carmen Jones*, 139.

pushes Dandridge's character outside the film's color vacuum, twisting her relationship with Joe and Husky Miller into an inter-racial possibility. And this could not be allowed in 1954, when Jim Crow was only just beginning to crumble.¹¹⁸

“The Small House of Uncle Thomas”: “Hollywood Siamese” in *The King and I*

After her stunning success in *Carmen Jones*, Dorothy Dandridge signed a three-year contract at Twentieth Century Fox, earning an unprecedented seventy-five thousand dollars per year per film. Shortly thereafter, she was offered the role of the Burmese slave, Tuptim, in the film adaptation of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I* (1956).¹¹⁹ The film was based on their canonical 1951 Broadway hit, the fourth-longest running Broadway show between 1927 and 1957 with 1,246 performances.¹²⁰ The show, in turn, was a musical adaptation of Margaret Landon's 1944 book, *Anna and the King of Siam*. And Landon's book was actually a fictionalized adaptation of Anna Leonowens' two-volume account of her time as a governess to the children of King Mongkut of Siam (Thailand), published in 1870 and 1873. After the successful filmic adaptations of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* (1955) and *Carousel* (1956), Darryl F. Zanuck of 20th Century-Fox set his sights on *The King and I*. Critics and audiences alike adored the film version, which broke both domestic

¹¹⁸ Even after the 1956 easing of the Production Code allowed for the depiction of miscegenation in certain cases, Hollywood was still squeamish about the subject, as accounts of *Island in the Sun* (1957) reveal. See, for instance, Philip Roth, “‘I Am Black But O My Soul...’” (review of *Island in the Sun*), *New Republic*, 29 July 1957, 21, CRC, Folder: “Dandridge 2 of 2.” Jesse H. Walker of the *New York Amsterdam News* attacks the racial-gender double standard promoted in the film's handling of the two inter-racial couples: “The everlasting color problem was not settled, unless you accept the idea that it's okay for a white man and a Negro woman to marry and settle down but for a white woman and a Negro man—NEVER.” Jesse H. Walker, “Theatricals,” *New York Amsterdam News* (city edition), 22 June 1957, 14, CRC, Folder: “Dandridge 1 of 2.”

¹¹⁹ Dandridge, *Everything and Nothing*, 184-185.

¹²⁰ Geoffrey Block lists *The King and I* as one of the canonical twelve Broadway musicals. Geoffrey Block, “The Broadway Canon From Show Boat to West Side Story and the European Operatic Ideal,” *The Journal of Musicology* 11, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 531-532.

and foreign box office records, with the seventh-highest domestic receipts of any musical of the period.¹²¹

Against her better wishes, Dandridge followed Otto Preminger's advice and refused the part, which she later came to believe prevented her from being cast in any major films until 1957's *Island in the Sun*. Part of the appeal of the role, as she saw it, was that she would *not* be playing a black woman. She could never have hoped to portray a white woman, unlike Jeanne Crain's inverse portrayal of Pinky in 1949. Yet Preminger thought the role too secondary for the actress who had played Carmen. But, despite all of the power he held in Hollywood, he could not fully grasp that no matter how big a star Dandridge was or ever would be, there were few leading roles for a woman of color in postwar America.¹²²

The part was eventually given to Rita Moreno, a then rather unknown young actress who had mostly appeared in bit parts. As *The Chicago Defender* mourned, this role, like other non-white roles Dandridge had turned down, went to “ ‘corked’ up non-Sepians.”¹²³ This observation not only revealed the limiting casting choices available to actresses of color, but more to the point, underpinned Hollywood's complicated and problematic approach to depicting non-whites. Rather than employ actors of the appropriate race or ethnicity, Hollywood tended to favor “blacked-up” Caucasians, particularly before the Second World War. In the postwar era, more non-white actors were able to secure employment, but often only as non-white characters.¹²⁴ The ways in which Hollywood created categories of white

¹²¹ Stephen Watts (London), “Observations on the British Screen Scene: ‘King and I’ Cracks Movie Releasing Pattern,” *New York Times*, 18 November 1956, 139, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹²² Dandridge, *Everything and Nothing*, 185.

¹²³ Hilda See, “Island in the Sun Defies Old Rule With Dot, Justin,” *The Chicago Defender*, 2 February 1957, 11, CRC, Folder: “Dandridge 1 of 2.” For Moreno's filmography, see <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001549/>.

¹²⁴ Bernardi, *Classic Hollywood: Classic Whiteness*, *passim*.

and non-white, however, were quite unsettling. Filmmakers typically lumped all non-whites together under the umbrella of “Other,” so that one non-white could be substituted for another.

In the case of *The King and I*, Moreno, as a Puerto Rican woman, was made-up to look Burmese. And she was not the only one. Whites and non-whites alike were cast in the various Siamese (Thai) roles, and all were equally “yellowed-up” to conform to Hollywood’s Orientalist vision.¹²⁵ Edward Said’s analysis of the West’s use of the “Orient” helps explain why and how this process occurred. The Orient, he reminds us, is a set of discourses with multiple meanings, and the ways in which the Orient is depicted often says more about the West than the East. Thus all of Orientalism stands forth and away from the Orient,” Said asserts.

That Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, ‘there’ in discourse about it. And these representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient.¹²⁶

This process of racial construction became visible in the yellowed-faces, affectations, indeed the entire set, of *The King and I*, in what Hollis Alpert of the *Saturday Review* dubbed “Hollywood Siamese.”¹²⁷

While Hollywood claimed to be greatly concerned about the depiction of “ ‘races’ and nationals” in its pictures, filmmakers’ attempts to be culturally sensitive were undeniably

¹²⁵ The 1951 stage production was even more egregious in its melting pot use of actors, as Christina Klein describes in Chapter 5, “Musicals and Modernization: *The King and I*,” in *Cold War Orientalism*, 191-222.

¹²⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 1-3, 21-22.

¹²⁷ Hollis Alpert, “SR Goes to the Movies: The Expensive Look” (review of *The King and I*), *The Saturday Review* 39 (21 July 1956): 31.

misdirected.¹²⁸ As in the case with “Negro” subject-matter, Hollywood’s efforts to handle Asian material resulted in a fetishization of the Orient, complicated all the more by “yellow peril” preceding World War II, the sudden vilification of the Japanese after Pearl Harbor (coupled with Hollywood’s attempts to draw distinctions between our Asian allies and enemies), and the subsequent postwar fascination with Asia, particularly after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Opportunities for Asian actors, like African-Americans, had always been severely limited. After the war, an increasing number of Asian roles became available, along with a newfound willingness on the part of filmmakers to employ Asians. However, casting choices were frequently insensitive to ethnic or national differentiation. Any Asian actor could play any Asian character.¹²⁹

It is all the more striking, then, that the role of Tuptim was first offered to an African-American woman before landing in the lap of a Puerto Rican woman. In the eyes of producer Darryl F. Zanuck, one non-white woman was no different from another. Race was thus fully mutable in Hollywood, it could be manufactured or erased with the help of a good make-up artist.¹³⁰ Race, then, becomes Spectacle, it is as much a part of the *mise-en-scène* as

¹²⁸ In the case of *The King and I*, the Production Code Administration (PCA) ruled that most of the “races” depicted were sympathetic depictions, though they did feel that the King (Yul Brynner) and his Prime Minister (Martin Benson) were both sympathetic and unsympathetic. MPAA/PCA, “Analysis of Film Content – The King and I,” 1 March 1956, PCAR, Folder: “King and I, The (20th Century-Fox, 1956).”

¹²⁹ Fuller, “Creatures of Good and Evil,” 281-300. For a more general discussion of Hollywood Orientalism, see Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, eds., *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997). For a discussion of the orientalism in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Asian musicals—*South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song*—see Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*; Most, Chapter 6 in *Making Americans*; Philip D. Beidler, “*South Pacific* and American Remembering; or, ‘Josh, We’re Going to Buy This Son of a Bitch!’,” *Journal of American Studies* (Special Issue: American Art and Music) 27, no. 3 (December 1993): 207-222; Bruce A. McConachie, “The ‘Oriental’ musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the U.S. war in Southeast Asia,” *Theatre Journal* 46, no. 3 (October 1994): 385-399; and Sheng-mei Ma, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s ‘Chopsticks’ Musical,” *Literature Film Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2003): 17-26. On Orientalism/exoticism in *The King and I*, see also Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity*, 261-268; and Most, *Making Americans*, 183-196.

¹³⁰ The case of African-American actress Juanita Hall clearly illustrates the fluidity of race in the film industry. She reprised her stage role of the Tonkinese (North Vietnamese) Bloody Mary in the film version of *South*

the costumes, set, or even “exotic” music.¹³¹ Indeed, critics of *The King and I* almost universally commented on the lush, lavish, expansive sets used in the film, all the more noticeable thanks to the use of DeLuxe Color and the recently-developed CinemaScope 55.¹³² It was reported that the film cost 6.5 million dollars, an exorbitant amount for an era when production costs were being slashed.¹³³ The *Hollywood Reporter*, for instance, cheered the film’s “exotic values of unfamiliar foreign charm ... [and] sensual magnificence” while Sherwin Kane of *Motion Picture Daily* warmly praised the beauty of “the elaborately planned and luxuriously executed production” which he felt lent the film an “authentic atmosphere and the color and rich pageantry of both the Orient and the palace of a bygone semi-enlightened despot.”¹³⁴ The East was not simply exoticized, it was turned into an object of nostalgia, just as Garland-as-Jolson was an agent of nostalgia in *A Star is Born*.

Pacific (1958). In 1961 she appeared as the Chinese Madame “Auntie” Liang in the film version of *Flower Drum Song*.

¹³¹ Sheng-mei Ma attacks Rodgers’ music for its reliance on racialized/ Orientalist tropes, which she calls left-handed “Chopsticks.” “To borrow from the metaphor of the six-year-old’s piano lesson, the weaving of ‘Chopsticks’ motif into the ‘real’ music from the right hand is the extra stuff that enlivens otherwise mediocre compositions, like carbonated fizz transforming ordinary sugar water to a soft drink.” Ma, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s ‘Chopsticks’ Musicals,” 17.

¹³² On the development of CinemaScope, which 20th Century-Fox pioneered, see Balio, *The American Film Industry*, 430-433; and Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 241-244. See also Thomas M. Pryor, “Warners Adopts Fox Film Process: Will Use CinemaScope in Move to Standardize Industry, Studio Official Says,” *New York Times*, 23 October 1953, 20, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹³³ MGM, for instance, began making salary cuts in 1956, the first time since the Depression, in an effort to keep production costs down. Dore Schary was ruthless in his refusal to continue making “big” pictures with lavish production sequences. This was effectively the end of the so-called golden age of MGM musicals, since Schary was so unwilling to approve the type of musical numbers for which MGM had been known. Oscar Godbout, “Hollywood Vista: The New Order of Economy at M-G-M,” *New York Times*, 15 July 1956, 69, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹³⁴ Review of *The King and I*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 29 July 1956, n.p., PCAR, Folder: King and I, The (20th Century-Fox); Sherwin Kane, Review of *The King and I*, *Motion Picture Daily*, n.d., n.p., PCAR, Folder: King and I, The (20th Century-Fox). Hollis Alpert wryly remarked that, despite the visual impressiveness of the film, “I left with the memory of a remark made by a man sitting behind me. He said, in the middle of what should have been an affecting scene: ‘Guess we’ll have to redecorate our apartment now.’” Hollis Alpert, “SR Goes to the Movies: The Expensive Look” (review of *The King and I*), *The Saturday Review* 39 (21 July 1956): 31.

Very few reviewers critiqued the Orientalist stylization of the film, with the notable exception of *The New Yorker*. John McCarten cautioned his readers, “you may find this quaint view of the East just a trifle too extensive.” But, echoing his appraisal of *Carmen Jones* in 1954, he admitted, “At any rate, it’s all pretty harmless.”¹³⁵ While the film was undeniably entertaining, as audiences agreed, dismissing it as “harmless” belied the possibility of reading the musical from within the context of the burgeoning, post-colonial neo-imperialistic, Cold War. In the growing fight over the third world, America had to prove it was racially tolerant or risk losing Asia and Africa to Communism. The lavish and colorful sets were not authentically Siamese, but rather, represented Hollywood’s vision of the East. To dismiss the weight of the spectacle therefore denied the fetishizing of the East. The beauty of Tuptim’s love song, “We Kiss in a Shadow” was no different than Lieutenant Cable’s “Younger than Springtime.” Liat and Tuptim were equally exoticized; though Tuptim/Moreno was privileged with the use of her own singing voice (unlike Deborah Kerr’s Anna Leonowens, who was dubbed by Marni Nixon).¹³⁶ The East—resting on the yellowed-shoulders of Moreno—becomes a special island unto its own.

¹³⁵ John McCarten, “The Current Cinema: Whale, King, and Boxer,” (review of *The King and I*), *The New Yorker* 32 (14 July 1956): 84.

¹³⁶ While some reports did acknowledge Kerr’s dubbing, even to the extent of naming Marni Nixon as the source of the singing voice, still other articles denied the process of dubbing completely. Examples of reviews that denied the process of dubbing include *The Hollywood Reporter*, 29 July 1956 and Charles S. Aaronson, Feature review of *The King and I*, *Motion Picture Herald* 203, no. 13 (30 June 1956): 21. Those that do acknowledge the dubbing, and even cite Nixon’s contribution, include *Time Magazine*’s review from 16 July 1956, page 90; and Bosley Crowther, “Screen: ‘The King and I’ ” (review), *New York Times*, 29 June 1956, 15, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Moira Walsh of *America* claims Kerr managed her own singing, but was provided “with a little help in the difficult passages from an anonymous singer.” Moira Walsh, Review of *The King and I*, *America*, 14 July 1956, 372. Obviously, there were no racial politics involved in this film’s dubbing. Kerr was dubbed for the more typical reason that she did not possess a strong singing voice; indeed Nixon dubbed for her again in the following year’s *An Affair to Remember*. Marni Nixon also dubbed for Natalie Wood in *West Side Story* (1961) and Audrey Hepburn in *My Fair Lady* (1964). See Marni Nixon with Stephen Cole, *I Could Have Sung All Night: My Story* (New York: Billboard Books/ Watson-Guption Publications, 2006), Chapters 5, 7, and 8.

But just because Moreno-as-Tuptim was allowed to sing, unlike Liat and Dandridge's Carmen, it did not follow that all non-whites in this film possessed their own voices. Indeed, the chorus of "Siamese" children perform only one song (excepting the snippets we hear them hum as they walk to and from school). The King's wives sing even less; only Terry Saunders as Lady Thiang sings ("Something Wonderful," a solo). The children are introduced in "The March of the Siamese Children," an instrumental early in the film. As Christina Klein argues, they are not allowed to have voices because they have yet to be exposed to Western ways. It is not until Anna has begun to instruct them that they begin to gain voices, in the form of "Getting to Know You." But Klein is right to point out that this number "work[s] through mimicry:"

The use of sound effects in the original stage version marks the profound nature of their transformation: up to this point, the women and children's voices have been represented by orchestral sounds, and it is only as they learn English in this scene that they begin to speak lines of intelligible dialogue. On the one hand this can be seen as an attempt at cultural verisimilitude, an effort to avoid misrepresenting the Siamese as already speaking English. On the other hand, however, it suggests that only through Westernization do the Siamese acquire the markers of full humanity, the ability to speak and to represent themselves.¹³⁷

The silencing of others, first seen with Liat and continuing with Dandridge up through the wives and children in *The King and I*, results in their objectification into fetishized and exotic Others.¹³⁸

Equally problematic was Hammerstein's message of universal brotherhood and tolerance, which ostensibly erased cultural and racial differences. The *New York Times* pointed out how the film "gives us an opportunity to observe the charming and universally

¹³⁷ Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 203.

¹³⁸ Hammerstein's emphasis on educating the King's children reflected his personal efforts to help postwar Japanese orphans. See, e.g., Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, Chapters 4-5, *passim*.

recognizable characteristics of the individual kids. If ever there was a movie with a message of global amity, it is ‘The King and I’.”¹³⁹ Despite the efforts of the filmmakers to preach cultural acceptance through collective humanity, racial differences ultimately became re-mapped on the actors’ bodies through the tropes and practices of classical Hollywood. By using a mix of white and non-white actors, all done up to appear the same, the “Siamese” characters are set apart as exotic and different—more a fantasy of the East than the reality.¹⁴⁰

Nowhere is this cultural imagining more pronounced than in the fifteen-minute ballet, “The Small House of Uncle Thomas,” the Siamese version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Early in the film, Anna gives Tuptim a copy of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s antislavery novel, which Tuptim adapts into a Siamese play. When British emissaries arrive in Bangkok, Tuptim presents her play as part of the banquet designed to prove to the West that King Mongkut is not a backwards barbarian in need of “protection.” Tuptim’s version of the novel is part of a long tradition of minstrel “Tom Shows” that began to circulate almost immediately after the novel’s publication in 1852 and continued through the 1940s.¹⁴¹ Marcus Wood, in delineating the evolution of the story over the course of one hundred years, muses, “Uncle

¹³⁹ Bosley Crowther, “Midsummer Night Films: Continuing and New Attractions Offer Enticing Screen Entertainment” (review of *The King and I*), *New York Times*, 15 July 1956, 65, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁴⁰ Yul Brynner, who originated the role of the King on Broadway, was similarly fetishized as a non-white, non-Western man in this film and *The Ten Commandments*, which was released in the same year. See Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 150-155.

¹⁴¹ Linda Williams, “A Wonderful, ‘Leaping Fish’: Varieties of *Uncle Tom*,” in *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 45-95.

Tom travels in book form to England, then back over to America, where he emerges a Siamese Tom in a Hollywood Siam.”¹⁴²

In many ways, “The Small House of Uncle Thomas” is no different from any other minstrel adaptation. It removes the story from the American South, an inversion of *Carmen Jones*’ transplantation to the South. The story’s displacement wrestles it away from questions of race by turning all of the players into Siamese characters. Yet it is nonetheless a product of Orientalist imaginings of a nondescript Other. Choreographed by Jerome Robbins, “The Small House of Uncle Thomas” purportedly cost \$500,000 to film. Arthur Knight of *Dance Magazine* claimed it was “the costliest single ballet ever staged anywhere, any time.”¹⁴³ The extravagant costs suggest just how vital the ballet was not only to the film’s overall entertainment value but to its larger liberal message for post-colonial racial tolerance and self-determination.

The ballet focuses on the slave Eliza’s escape from “King Simon of Legree,” reducing Uncle Tom, Eva, and Topsy to little more than “loving friends.” Tuptim narrates the story from stage right, reading from a scroll with a flower in her hand, accompanied by a female chorus behind her. Off to the other side of the stage is an all-male band, dressed in red. With minimal sets and background, and danced on a shining black floor, the production number employs Asian-inflected make-up, costumes, sets, and dance styles. Men in black hold set pieces, standing on the proscenium’s edge, poised for the various scene changes.

¹⁴² Marcus Wood, “Curious and Curiouser: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Anna Leonowens, and *The King and I*,” *Common-Place* 4, no. 2 (January 2004), n.p., www.common-place.org.

¹⁴³ Arthur Knight, “Dance in the Movies: *The King and I*” (review), *Dance Magazine* 30, no. 8 (August 1956): 9. The ballet from *An American in Paris* actually cost about this much, if not a little more, to film. Donald Knox quotes the same figure of \$500,000 in *The Magic Factory: How MGM Made an American in Paris* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 147, while my own research shows that, while finishing the sequence, the ballet was estimated to cost \$542,000. Joe Finn to Arthur Freed RE: ‘An American in Paris’ Ballet Number cc: Messrs. Strohm, Cohn, 13 December 1950, AFC, Box 54, Folder 1 of 5: “An American in Paris (Production information/corresp.).”

The music, a recapitulation of some of the show's songs, most notably "Hello, Young Lovers" and "A Puzzlement," offers an Orientalist variation on the otherwise pedestrian Rodgers tunes with the help of "gongs, cymbals, and other traditional musical instruments."¹⁴⁴

Dance Magazine's Knight put it best when he glowingly praised the number for its "inventive staging of the Harriet Beecher Stowe classic as it might have been interpreted in Siam in 1862 ... A river is suggested by a trembling white sheet that smooths out to become the ice-bound Ohio, a forest is a throng of dancers waving their arms, a storm a sudden spray of paper streamers freezingly white against the black background." He found Academy Award-winning Irene Sharaff's costumes bold, vibrant, and authentic; Robbins' dance to "skillfully combine Oriental stylization with balletic pantomime ... Best of all," he reflected, "is Robbins' knowing use of the conventions of Oriental theatre, the moments when the property men lower their cut-out clouds as Eliza climbs the mountain or gently pull the clouds aside as Little Eva ascends to heaven."¹⁴⁵

Like most reviewers, Knight commended the ballet without questioning the racial problems the sequence suggested. While many of the dancers were, in fact, Asian, we cannot assume that all of the dancers were. It is impossible to tell, for every dancer was made up to look the same with a white-painted face, a curious and destabilizing inversion of Hollywood's usual reliance on blackface for the depiction of non-white characters. Only two dancers—King Simon of Legree and Uncle Tom—wore black masks, perhaps to hide the fact

¹⁴⁴ Ma, "Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'Chopsticks' Musicals," 21.

¹⁴⁵ Knight, review of *The King and I*, *Dance Magazine*, 9.

that women danced the roles.¹⁴⁶ The nearly-universal use of “white face” erased race altogether in the number, just as race and slavery become disentangled. All are “Siamese”; no racial distinctions can be drawn between master and slave. Indeed, Eva is introduced alongside Uncle Tom and Topsy (though she is distinguished with a blonde wig), without any mention of status; the three are merely “loving friends” and “happy people” in contrast to “one who is not happy. The slave, Eliza.” Thus it is unclear whether Tom, Eva, and Topsy are slaves or not; it is visually indeterminable, a striking contrast to Stowe’s characters. The distinction here implies race but does not outwardly state it. Eliza is the only definite slave and is thus racially-marked and set apart by her link to the black slaves in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (but as in the ballet, intimations of race were carefully avoided in the scene when Anna and the King discuss the American war to free the slaves). Eliza’s costume further distinguishes her as a slave. She wears an identical outfit, different only in color, to Tuptim’s. Just as Eliza is the only clearly-marked slave in “The Small House of Uncle Thomas,” Tuptim is the only slave in *The King and I*. Their matching outfits reinforce their difference from the rest of the characters. In contrast, the erasing of Tom and Topsy’s identities is notable; and Eva’s lumping in with them further erases race so that they are all completely race-less, just as they all wear the same mask.¹⁴⁷

It is all the more curious, then, that when Tuptim quotes Stowe’s Topsy, she retains the original minstrel-like dialect: “I spects I’s de wickedest critter in de world.” This

¹⁴⁶ Gemze De Lappe appeared as Legree. I cannot determine who was Uncle Tom as the chorus of dancers was not credited. “Dancer Seeks \$200,000: Charges Erroneous Credit in Film of ‘King and I,’” *New York Times*, 30 November 1956, 19, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁴⁷ For more analysis on “The Small House of Uncle Thomas” see Laura E. Donaldson, “*The King and I* in Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, On the Borders of the Women’s Room,” in *Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender, and Empire-Building* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 32-50; and Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 204-208.

momentarily re-inscribes race, but this time on Topsy rather than Eliza. And, more importantly, it reminds us that the “Siamese” ballet is anything but Siamese. There is nothing authentic about it, despite its reliance on Orientalist stylizations. It is not a representation of Asia, but a representation of what the West imagined Asia to look, feel, and act like. This racialized vision was further complicated through the process of adapting an American classic, itself a problematic text for its minstrel-like depiction of slaves. “Small House of Uncle Thomas,” then, repackaged questions of slavery and freedom, race and humanity as an appeal for self-determination in a post-colonial neo-imperialist Cold War climate.¹⁴⁸ As told through the white-painted faces of the “Siamese” dancers, this fifteen-minute production number is laden with layers of symbolic yellowface, all of which, like *Carmen Jones*, ultimately reaffirmed white cultural superiority and pointed to a veiled postwar colonial impulse.

In the final analysis, Hammerstein, despite his best intentions to promote cultural sensitivity and global cooperation, promoted racial tropes and Hollywood stereotypes, images which, quaint though they might have been, were a far cry from reality.¹⁴⁹ Whether through the use of racial re-dubbing and vocal blackening, as in the case of *Carmen Jones*, or in “yellowing” the faces of an inter-racial cast in *The King and I*, the message was the same: just as the Cold War globe had been divided between the first and second (and even third) worlds, so race was polarized into the categories of white and all others.

¹⁴⁸ Like other Cold War parables, most notably *The Ten Commandments* (1956), biblical references abounded. In “The Small House of Uncle Thomas” Simon of Legree, along with his slaves, are drowned as they cross the melting Ohio River. This “miracle from Buddha” parallels the parting of the Red Sea, a comparison that most likely was not lost on postwar Americans.

¹⁴⁹ Thai Prince Wan Waithayakon Krommun Naradhip Bongsprabandh, the President of the United Nations General Assembly and grandson of King Mongkut, was reported to have “disliked” *The King and I* according to “A Prince of Diplomacy,” *New York Times*, 13 November 1956, 5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Like *The King and I*, *Carmen Jones* captures the possibilities and problems of producing a musical devoted to non-white subject material in postwar America. With the nation beginning to split apart over race and questions of desegregation, an all-black film might have been considered a *cause célèbre*. But the silencing of the film's star, and the even more egregious substitution of a white voice for a black voice, undermined whatever racially liberal visions Preminger and Hammerstein might have held. And the lyrics, more a racial caricature than an authentic slice of black life, equally belied the original intent with which Billy Rose and Oscar Hammerstein set out in 1943 to showcase black talent and treat black life with sympathy. But their vision was necessarily circumscribed, since they based their project on a racially suspect opera from the start.

Likewise, Hammerstein could only promote universal humanity in *The King and I* through the use of racial stereotypes and exotic longing. The filmmakers lumped all non-whites into a single category—Other—in ways that unraveled cultural sensitivity. And yet, the fluidity with which Hollywood made and re-made race suggested the possibility that race was indeed little more than a construct, one that could be remolded and “carefully taught.” Did these rare racialized musicals enable audiences to identify across racial divides, as James Baldwin had once identified with Bette Davis?¹⁵⁰ Perhaps the true power of these films rested not in the circumscribed liberal message of tolerance and racial sympathy originally intended, but in the potential they offered for breaking down color lines. Their limits, then, could become their possibilities.

¹⁵⁰ Jane Gaines, *Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), Chapter 1: “Green Like Me,” 24-51.

Chapter 6

An Invitation to Dream: The Artistic Possibilities and Commercial Limits of Fantasy Dances

Gene Kelly's 'Invitation to the Dance' is an invitation to most beautiful enjoyments for eyes and ears. ... But the picture is also an invitation to something unusual: A magic world of film and dance, an unreal sphere is conjured—and no words, no dialog penetrate into this world to disturb it or break its style.¹

The determination of great art in motion pictures is the magical, almost demonical dematerialization of life.²

The preceding chapters have explored the ways in which song-and-dance routines functioned as sites of resistance. Whether individual performers struggled to gain control over their bodies and voices from a film industry that could wield near total power over them, or whether actors used their performances to buck social norms, spectacles were contested spaces. Performers used moments of spectacle—in the form of discourse, nostalgia, or their own race and stardom—to maneuver through the competing demands of postwar life. Such tussles often produced gaps both between the celluloid and real worlds and between the sounds and images within a single film. Bodies could become detached from voices, as was the case with the dubbing of Dorothy Dandridge, while Judy Garland

¹ Hans Rudolf Haller, " 'Invitation to the Dance' – a dance picture like there never was before" (review), *Schweizer Familien Wochenblatt*, n.d., typed translated transcript, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: " 'Invitation to the Dance' Files etc," Sub-folder A.

² Fedor Stepun (Russian Sociologist, 1932) quoted in "A new dance picture with Gene Kelly: The Dematerialization of Life: Comments to the American film 'Invitation to the Dance' " (review), *Sie Und Er*, 5 April 1956, typed translated transcript, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: " 'Invitation to the Dance' Files etc," Sub-folder A.

used small fissures in her performances to disconnect from MGM's off-screen expectations and constructions of her. And though Gene Kelly enjoyed far more power in Hollywood than Dandridge or Garland, he needed spectacle just as much as they did, given early Cold War anxieties. The disparity between his actual dancing and how he *spoke* about dancing further points to the potential for song-and-dance to offer a release from everyday life.

Since his earliest days at MGM, he had striven to fuse his artistic and technological visions to produce a unique form of cine-dancing. But his artistic leanings extended well beyond this innovation. Indeed, while in Hollywood, Kelly used his filmic projects to express many of his longings; nowhere was this more visible than in his all-dance picture, *Invitation to the Dance*. This musical was the culmination and coalescence of his dreams—his dream to have complete control over the processes of production to create a form of cinematic dance unlike anything ever before attempted. In the process he hoped to expose the masses of Americans, indeed the masses of moviegoers worldwide, to classic dance forms.

This chapter considers the artistic and commercial dreams that went into the making of *Invitation to the Dance*. The film demonstrated the power (and boundaries) of cinematic dance—and of musical numbers in general—to articulate unspoken yearnings and desires. His film showed how to voice dreams of the self that, without dance, would otherwise remain unspoken. *Invitation to the Dance* tapped into deeper dreams, dreams that Kelly himself might not even have realized were present.

Focusing on the most fantasy-driven part of the film, the thirty-minute “Sinbad the Sailor” live action-animation sequence, this chapter contemplates the function of fantasy dance numbers in postwar musicals. Viewed as “indirect” forms of expression by

Hollywood censors, dance typically was less heavily policed than other parts of musicals, and thus provided a relatively safe opportunity for filmmakers, dancers, and vicariously audiences, to play around with and explore other possibilities for which the everyday demands of postwar American life might not have allowed. In a society that on the surface permitted only narrow variations of self-expression, dance afforded individuals a chance to break out of that mold. And Hollywood dances, whose reaches were far greater than that of any stage, made this possible on a mass scale.

Prelude to a Dream: The “American in Paris Ballet”

Kelly could not fully realize his artistic dreams in *Invitation to the Dance* until he had proven himself, both to MGM and to the American public. Though he was privileged with immense clout at the studio, he did not garner such esteem overnight; it was only after he had demonstrated his ability to lead projects (with co-director Stanley Donen beginning with *On the Town* in 1949) that he was granted the opportunity to step out completely on his own. His undeniable box office popularity translated into studio executives’ trust. But stardom alone would not guarantee studio backing for an all-dance picture. He needed to assure MGM that the American public was not only willing to sit through extended cinematic dances, but that moviegoers actually wanted *more* dancing.

By 1950, there was evidence that American spectators were ready for long dance sequences in films. The British film *The Red Shoes* (1948) had proven enormously successful both in England and America. While not an all-dance film, the picture pushed the boundaries of cinematic dance farther than they had ever been before. The film’s crowning moment was the fifteen-minute “The Ballet of the Red Shoes,” which combined classical

ballet with special effects and haunting artistic backdrops. The result was a stunning number capturing multiple perspectives, with the proscenium arch disappearing and reappearing throughout.³ Given the success of *The Red Shoes* and similar elaborate dance numbers, such as “A Day in New York Ballet” from *On the Town*, Kelly, along with producer Arthur Freed and director Vincente Minnelli, felt the American moviegoing public was now ready for even more. And so Kelly devised the classic “An American in Paris Ballet,” the seventeen-minute concluding ballet of Minnelli’s *An American in Paris* (1951). Though he collaborated with Minnelli, Freed, and scores of studio laborers—artists, set designers, musicians, costume designers—the piece represented Kelly’s own personal artistic vision. Indeed, he enjoyed artistic *carte blanche* on this production number; Minnelli had already moved on to his next film project, *Father’s Little Dividend*, by the time the crew even began rehearsing the ballet. Costing a then unprecedented \$542,000 (out of a total \$2,723,903) and taking over a month to film, the “American in Paris Ballet” was the longest dance sequence yet to be included in a mainstream Hollywood musical feature.⁴

Placed at the end of the film, the ballet is the fantasy of the ex-G.I.-turned artist, Jerry Mulligan (Gene Kelly), who has just lost his love, Lise (Leslie Caron).⁵ Set against George

³ *The Red Shoes*, Produced and Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, Color, 133 min., Independent Producers/The Archers (UK), 1948, Videocassette, Author’s Collection.

⁴ The ballet was shot between 6 December 1950 and 8 January 1951, according to production information from VMP, Folder 3: “American in Paris - prod.” Hugh Fordin provides budget figures in his account of the film’s production, in *M-G-M’s Greatest Musicals: The Arthur Freed Unit*, originally published: *The World of Entertainment! Hollywood’s Greatest Musicals* (New York: Doubleday, 1975; reprint n.p.: Da Capo Press, 1996), 328. For more on the film’s production, see Donald Knox, *The Magic Factory: How MGM Made An American in Paris* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

⁵ This fantasy is not the first such sequence in the film. Earlier, Adam Cook (Oscar Levant), the aspiring concert pianist/composer, dreams of performing the Third Movement of Gershwin’s “Concerto in F for Piano and Orchestra” (1925) on the Paris stage. But not only is he the soloist, he is also the conductor, every member of the orchestra, and the face of every cheering person in the audience. While there is no dancing in this dream sequence, it is nonetheless a variation of what Jane Feuer has dubbed, the “dream ballet” in so far as it “represents the wish of the dreamer.” This was most likely intended to showcase a virtuoso performer, more along the lines of numbers featuring Jose Iturbi in *Anchors Aweigh* (1945) or Levant in *The Barkleys of*

Gershwin's orchestral poem, "An American in Paris" (1928), the number is broken into eleven scenes to match the various moods of Gershwin's piece, from the frenzied cacophony of a Parisian street, represented by the "honking" of trumpets of various tones; to the quiet tenderness of a lilting flute and oboe supported by yearning strings; to the lusty blues of a muted solo trumpet, echoed by a trombone; contrasted with the jazzy staccato of the blaring trumpet.⁶ Each sequence is likewise modeled after a different French painter—Dufy, Renoir, Utrillo, Rousseau, Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec—in setting, costume, and color. As Kelly explained, "Each of the shifting scenes of the ballet were created, costumes and designs, in the style of one of these great artists. What these tried to say in their painting, we tried to capture in dance and action."⁷ Bright Technicolor reds and greens are used for Dufy's Place de la Concorde; cool pastels to suggest Renoir's Flower Market; vibrant blues and bright yellows mixed with rich oranges and lush greens for Rousseau's Carnival; warm, muted yellows, oranges and cream shades recreate Van Gogh's Place de l'Opéra; whites and blacks offset by deep earth tones, punctuated by splashes of red and orange, capture Lautrec's Chocolat in the Moulin Rouge.⁸ The ballet alternates between lively, if not frantic, ensemble routines with speeding close-ups and shaky camera shots that look almost hand-held, to quiet

Broadway (1949). Indeed, this sort of virtuoso performance of classical—or at least canonical—music seems to have ended by the 1950s; Levant's performance of the "Concerto in F" is perhaps the last such performance of its kind. Jane Feuer *The Hollywood Musical*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 73-76.

⁶ Gershwin wrote "An American in Paris" for Walter Damrosch; it premiered 13 December 1928 at Carnegie Hall. The suite was intended to capture the sounds of Paris, as Deems Taylor's program notes indicated. Robert Kimball and Alfred Simon, *The Gershwins* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 107-109.

⁷ Gene Kelly, "Making a Cineballet for 'An American in Paris,'" *Dance Magazine* (August 1951), 24, GKC, Box 10, Untitled Folder.

⁸ "Outline of Ballet Number," Typed Script, n.d., AFC, Box 54, Folder 3 of 5: "An American in Paris (Ballet information)." Kelly's portrayal of Lautrec's dancing clown, "Chocolat Dansant," is an uncanny recreation of the 1896 poster, down to the bartender in the background. Of course, Kelly does not appear in blackface though he in all other ways mimics Chocolat.

moments, those intimate *pas de deux* between Kelly and Caron, surrounded by mist on the sound stage.⁹

The dream ballet, part plot recapitulation and part wish fulfillment, represents Jerry's unending search for Lise.¹⁰ The number begins and ends with a translucent Kelly, superimposed on a black-and-white sketch, holding the red rose that has represented Lise throughout the entire film.¹¹ During the seventeen-minute ballet, Caron appears and disappears, often leaving no trace behind but the rose, which Kelly handles as delicately as he had held her. The flower is, in many ways, as real—and as much a fantasy—as Caron herself. In Kelly and Minnelli's libretto for the ballet, they described Lise as something of a fleeting image—close to Kelly, but never fully within his reach. “She seems more like a flower than a real person,” at one point; “an elusive, evanescent creature,” at another.¹² Her role in this ballet was perhaps more symbolic than anything. While Caron technically danced the role of Lise, she also was meant to dance the role of a “vision”—the intimation of an idea

⁹ *An American in Paris*, Produced by Arthur Freed, Directed by Vincente Minnelli, Color, 113 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1951, DVD, Author's Collection. To film the ballet, Minnelli employed a different principal photographer, John Alton, feeling generally dissatisfied with cameraman Al Gilks's inability to effectively use lighting to establish mood in the rest of the film. I would note, however, that Gilks's filming of the other musical numbers is quite exquisite; his camerawork is smooth and seamless to form the ideal dancing partner, conforming to Kelly and Fred Astaire's approach to filming dance. For more on the production and filming of the ballet, see Knox, *The Magic Factory*, 138-166 and Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 316-332.

¹⁰ Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 73-76.

¹¹ Kelly's half-faded image, along with the red rose, was meant to make the transition from the reality of the black-and-white artists' ball to the vibrant colors of the dream ballet. Knox, *The Magic Factory*, 147-153; Vincente Minnelli and Gene Kelly, Libretto for “An American in Paris Ballet,” Typed Script, 6 September 1950, 2, VMP, Folder 1: “American in Paris-script.” Also located in AFC, Box 1, Folder 3: “An American in Paris (Ballet script-3 copies)” and AFC, Box 54, Folder 3 of 5: “An American in Paris (Ballet information). This faded projection of Kelly at the beginning and end of the production number is reminiscent of his “Alter Ego Dance” from *Cover Girl* (1944) (see Chapter Two).

¹² Vincente Minnelli and Gene Kelly, Libretto for “An American in Paris Ballet,” Typed Script, 6 September 1950, 3, 4, VMP, Folder 1: “American in Paris-script.”

more than the idea itself.¹³ Such metaphorical characterization fit in the overall vision of the ballet; Kelly intended the number to “suggest not essentially a fantasy, but more a half fantasy, that half real world which makes things even more real.”¹⁴

Caron’s Lise was not just the half-slumbering dream Kelly’s Jerry Mulligan chased in the “American in Paris Ballet.” She was a metaphor for the larger dream Kelly pursued while in Hollywood. That dream came and went throughout his career, dependent on the amount of power and control he exercised at any given time, as dictated by his box office potential, but the traces of it, like Lise’s red rose, never fully disappeared. And, like the rose he fondled in the ballet, Kelly gently cultivated his dream until he was able to turn it into a reality with his all-dance picture, *Invitation to the Dance*.

As Chapter Two discussed, Kelly had been experimenting with what he called the cine-dance since he first arrived in Hollywood, but never before had he engaged in such a massive undertaking as with *An American in Paris*.¹⁵ Hugh Fordin, the “biographer” of Arthur Freed’s musical production unit at MGM, emphasizes the importance of this massive number, noting, “The *raison d’être* for making the picture in the first place was to do a ballet to Gershwin’s tone poem.”¹⁶ Freed, Minnelli, and Kelly had always intended the ballet to be the centerpiece of the film, rather than a colorful production number tacked on to showcase

¹³ “Outline of Ballet Number,” Typed Script, n.d., 1, AFC, Box 54, Folder 3 of 5: “An American in Paris (Ballet information).”

¹⁴ Minnelli and Kelly, Libretto for “An American in Paris Ballet,” 1.

¹⁵ “A Day in New York” was a relatively long dance number for 1949, but it was not Kelly’s original brainchild, though he did create its choreography. The film was based on composer Leonard Bernstein’s and choreographer Jerome Robbins’ wartime stage production (book/lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green), *On the Town*, itself an adaptation of their 1944 ballet, *Fancy Free*. Furthermore, the most fantastic scene of Kelly’s version, when he and Vera-Ellen float in the clouds of New York, was eliminated prior to exhibition after test audiences reacted negatively, clamoring for more “realistic” dancing routines. Fordin, *M-G-M’s Greatest Musicals*, 266. For more on the stage production and original ballet, see Ethan Mordden, *Beautiful Morning’: The Broadway Musical in the 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 120-134.

¹⁶ Fordin, *M-G-M’s Greatest Musicals*, 316.

MGM talent. The number was to stand on its own holistic merits; something that could be appreciated separately from the rest of the film. Kelly wanted the ballet to be impressionistic rather than literal, like the artwork it sought to recreate in its set designs. He explained to faithful readers in *Dance Magazine*, “For *American in Paris* we wanted to do a ballet without an actual story line or plot, a ballet that *suggested*, rather than narrated, a ballet which said more with things unsaid, than with things said.”¹⁷

The “American in Paris Ballet” revealed Kelly’s desire to fuse art forms (painting and dance) in order to make “high” art palatable for the masses without compromising the original quality of either form. When the 1951 Academy Awards were announced, Gene Kelly received a “special” award for “Achievement in the Art of Choreography on Film.” Though the award celebrated his cumulative efforts in this and his past films, the presumption was nonetheless that his work on the “American in Paris Ballet” was what had ultimately earned him such an honor.¹⁸ For the next twenty years the studio continued to tout the achievement of the “American in Paris Ballet.” Indeed, Frank Sinatra’s concluding remarks in MGM’s 1974 celebratory musical retrospective, *That’s Entertainment!*, boasted, “Through the years MGM has produced over 200 musical films. But if you have to select one number from one film that would best represent the MGM musicals, I have a feeling that the vote would be unanimous, especially among the people who worked here. And that’s why we have saved the best for the last. *An American in Paris* ... The ballet from that film is

¹⁷ Gene Kelly, “Making a Cineballet for ‘An American in Paris,’” *Dance Magazine* (August 1951), 24, GKC, Box 10, Untitled Folder.

¹⁸ *An American in Paris* won a total of nine Academy Awards in 1951: Best Picture, Best Story and Screenplay, Best Cinematograph (Color), Best Art Direction (Color), Best Set Decoration (Color), Best Costume Design, and Best Achievement in Music (Scoring of a Musical Picture). In addition, Producer Arthur Freed won the Irving G. Thalberg Award for Outstanding Production. Typed list of Awards *An American in Paris* Won, n.d., AFC, Box 1, Folder 2: “An American in Paris;” “Bogart, Leigh Win Oscars: ‘American in Paris’ Tops,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, 21 March 1952, 1, AFC, Box 1, Folder 2: “An American in Paris.” The film grossed \$8,005,000 according to Fordin, *M-G-M’s Greatest Musicals*, 331.

as timeless as the day you and I first saw it ... It can only be described as MGM's masterpiece."¹⁹

In his triumphant ballet Kelly made his case for dance to all of America—beyond the potential of story-telling, dance was an avenue for exploring the deepest recesses of individual self-expression. Dance critic John K. Newnham, who was relatively lukewarm about the overall picture, praised the ballet precisely because it demonstrated the possibilities cinematic dance posed for Americans. “For once in a way, no pretence is made that it is being performed on a stage,” he began. “It all takes place in Gene Kelly’s imagination. It has the whole of Paris as its background. Its settings are sometimes artificial, sometimes realistic. It has no limits to bind it.”²⁰

The “American in Paris Ballet” proved to be a testing ground for Kelly. The success of the ballet gave him the confidence, and the necessary pull with studio executives in Culver City and New York, to do something he had always dreamed of; namely, to make an all-dance picture, one that relied on dance, music, and pantomime to communicate a story.²¹ The driving desire behind this was to expose as many Americans to dance as possible, since

¹⁹ *That's Entertainment!*, Produced and Directed by Jack Haley, Jr., Color, 131 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1974, Videocassette, Author's collection.

²⁰ John K. Newnham, “‘An American in Paris’: Dance Film Notes,” *The Dancing Times*, n.d., AFC, Box 54, Folder 5 of 5: “An American in Paris (Hugh Fordin Research/Notes).”

²¹ Early articles covering the filming of *Invitation* frequently attributed Kelly's clout at the studio and box office potential to his success in *An American in Paris*. By most accounts, it was assumed that without such a triumph MGM would not have allowed Kelly to take such an artistic chance. See, for instance, Beverly Linet, “An American in London,” *Modern Screen* (December 1952): 58, GKC, Box 10, Scrapbook 9 (1952-1955); Joe Hyams, “Gene Kelly: All the World Loves to Dance,” *Cue*, 2 May 1953, 12, AFC, Box 55, Folder 1 of 2: “Invitation to the Dance;” and “Gene Kelly Does a Movie Entirely in Dance,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 14 December 1952, Section 4, 2, GKC, Box 10, Scrapbook 9 (1952-1955). The Press Book for *Invitation* drew a similar link between the two films: Announcement Story (untitled) and “Three Stories Unfolded in ‘Invitation to the Dance,’ Novel Musical with Gene Kelly and World-Famous Dancers” (Prepared Review), M-G-M Press Book for *Invitation to the Dance*, 1957, 3, PBC, no folder.

so few dancers enjoyed national, mass, exposure.²² Making *Invitation to the Dance* constituted for Kelly the realization of multiple and overlapping dreams—from controlling production to achieving unprecedented cinematic heights. And, stepping in front of the camera enabled Kelly to express the sort of release and freedom common in his dances. Unlike most of his other dances, Kelly’s choreography in this film, particularly in “Sinbad the Sailor,” transcended the very rules of nature, permitting him greater imaginative freedom than any of his other celluloid work before or since. But such freedom came at a price for the actor/dancer. While MGM gave him a relative free hand to create this film, executives ultimately lacked faith in the film’s box office potential; a concern even faithful audience members echoed. Thus commercial realities circumscribed the film’s artistic potential, demonstrating how in the postwar period no dream was completely boundless.

Realizing a Dream: The Making of *Invitation to the Dance*

Invitation to the Dance (filmed 1952-1953, released c. 1956 or 1957) was unlike any other Hollywood musical before or since; it lacked a central plot to connect the various musical numbers together—the antithesis of the 1950s aesthetic ideal of the integrated musical, in which story, song, and dance are woven together to form a seamless picture.²³ Rather, it was divided into three distinct acts, each with its own story, music, and feel. Only Gene Kelly, who appeared in each segment, tied it all together (while numerous international

²² Gene Kelly, “Come and Trip It...,” *Seventeen Magazine* (December 1955): 131, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3: “Invitation to the Dance;” Gene Kelly, “Fantastic Toe,” Typescript of article for *Seventeen Magazine*, n.d., GKC, Box 3, Folder 13: “Articles by Gene Kelly;” Gene Kelly, “Invitation to the Dance” (explanation of why the film was made), Typescript, n.d., GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc,” Sub-Folder A.

²³ Freed’s *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946) has only the loosest of plots. It is far more a revue, and showcase for MGM players, than the typical Freed musical.

dance stars were featured, no other Hollywood stars were cast). Act I, “Circus,” revisited the classic *Pagliacci* tale of the love-struck clown. Kelly danced the role of Pierrot against the backdrop of a traditional Italian *commedia dell’ arte*, accompanied by international ballet dancers Igor Youskevitch and Claire Sombert with score by French composer Jacques Ibert.²⁴ Act II, “Ring Around the Rosy,” was a loose retelling of Arthur Schnitzler’s play, *Reigen* (which was adapted into the French film, *La Ronde*) in which a bracelet (apparently syphilis in the original) was passed from one pair of lovers to another until making its way back to the original couple.²⁵ The final Act, “Sinbad the Sailor” (“The Magic Lamp” in England) saw Kelly as Joe Sinbad, an American sailor in a Baghdad bazaar, who finds Aladdin’s lamp and uncovers a boy-genie.²⁶ Set against Roger Edens’ loose adaptation of Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade*, Op. 35 (1888), the two enter a cartoon fairy tale

²⁴ *Pagliacci*, an Opera in Two Acts by Ruggiero Leoncavallo, 1892. Many reviews made this comparison between Kelly’s clown and *Pagliacci* or Pierrot, a stock character of pantomime. See, for example, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Time Magazine* 67, no. 24 (11 June 1956): 105; Bosley Crowther, “Screen: Twinkle-Toes: Gene Kelly Performs in All-Dance Film” (review), *New York Times* 23 May 1956, 35, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc.,” Sub-folder A; and Holl., Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Variety* (Weekly), 16 May 1956, 18, PCAR, Folder: “Invitation to the Dance [Loew’s, 1955]. The same article also ran in *Daily Variety*, 15 May 1956, 3, AFC, Box 55, Folder 1 of 2: “Invitation to the Dance.”

²⁵ In only one media account of the transformation of *Riegen/La Ronde* was syphilis mentioned: Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Time Magazine* 67, no. 24 (11 June 1956): 106. Legally, the studio was prohibited from publicizing the connection between “Ring Around the Rosy” and *La Ronde*, even though MGM had purchased the rights to *Reigen* from the Schnitzler estate. None of the official studio publicity made mention of the Schnitzler connection; MGM legal advised Arthur Freed that they “should under no circumstances issue any publicity that ‘Ring Around the Rosy’ has anything to do with ‘La Ronde,’ or mention ‘La Ronde’ in any interviews given by Gene Kelly or anybody connected with this production.” R. Monta to Arthur Freed (cc: Kenneth MacKenna, E.J. Mannix), Typed signed memo, 11 July 1952, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.” See also “Inside Stuff—Pictures,” *Variety*, 3 September 1952, n.p., GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc.,” Sub-folder C: “Ring Around the Rosy.” The Press Book for *Invitation to the Dance* (1957) can be found in PBC, no folder.

²⁶ The film was broken up into two parts when it exhibited in England. “Circus” and “Ring Around the Rosy” were the feature, while “Sinbad the Sailor” was the accompanying cartoon short. For unspecified legal reasons, the studio was forced to change the name of the cartoon sequence to “The Magic Lamp.” Peggy O’Day to Messrs Arthur Freed, Gene Kelly, Typed signed memo, 24 January 1956, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.” On exhibition in England, see Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Punch*, 9 September 1956, n.p.; Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Kinematograph Weekly*, 20 September 1956, n.p. Both clippings found in GKC, Box 18, Envelope mailed from the Arthur P. Jacobs Co. in London 24 September 1956: “Invitation to the Dance Reviews.” See also J.G., Review of *Invitation to the Dance/The Magic Lamp*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* (BFI) 23, no. 273 (October 1956): 126.

land out of *The Arabian Nights*, where they battle dragons and menacing palace guards.²⁷

While the final product was well-polished, lending the impression of a smooth musical from start to finish, the film's production, post-production, and exhibition were hampered by delays and artistic-corporate arguments. At each stage of this film's creation—from the first shapeless uttering of the idea to its final edits—Gene Kelly was at the center, immersing himself in every minute detail.

For Kelly, making *Invitation to the Dance* fulfilled several long-held ambitions: to elevate the place of dance in Hollywood and in America writ large, to have complete artistic control, to expose the masses to dance, and to push cinematic dance in new directions. But accomplishing his dream of transforming dance into a mass art form was no easy undertaking, for it demanded convincing studio executives that an all-dance film could be commercially successful. As Kelly admitted, “For years, I held this desire but could not bring it to fruition, for I knew I had to completely answer the demands of the Hollywood moguls who put up the financing for such a project: Who outside of dancers would want to see an all dance film? How could it possibly be interesting enough? Why, in a medium where you have the advantages of speech and dramatic action, should you negate these by doing away with them?”²⁸

In the late 1940s ballet began to enjoy more exposure on Broadway and in Hollywood, most notably with Agnes De Mille's groundbreaking choreography of “Laurey's Dream” in Rodgers' and Hammerstein's 1943 stage production of *Oklahoma!* (film 1955),

²⁷ *Invitation to the Dance*, Produced by Arthur Freed, Directed by Gene Kelly, Color, 92 min., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1956, Videocassette, Author's collection. We might read Kelly-as-Sinbad's skirmishes with the dragon and guards as a metaphor for his larger struggles to assert fully his autonomy while filming the picture.

²⁸ Gene Kelly, “Invitation to the Dance” (explanation of why the film was made), Typescript, n.d., 2, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc,” Sub-Folder A.

and Michael Powell's 1948 British film, *The Red Shoes*.²⁹ The commercial successes of these works, along with Kelly's contributions in *On the Town* and *An American in Paris*, proved that audiences would accept ballet. But never before had anyone attempted a full-length ballet film. By all accounts, Kelly was lucky to have had the opportunity to create such a "bold and imaginative experiment in filmmaking."³⁰ Even *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther, who was skeptical of the project, called it "a brave experiment," admitting that, "Mr. Kelly deserves some admiration. So does Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for letting him go at this picture and footing the obviously high costs."³¹ And despite producer Arthur Freed's own initial misgivings about the film, he ultimately praised it during production, predicting it "will be history making."³²

It was a coup of the highest sort for Kelly; not only was he given the backing of a major studio to create a feature dance film, but he was allowed to do it virtually on his own, without a proverbial safety net. In essence, he was unfettered in a still-oppressive studio system. Despite having to answer to studio executives, especially when it came to wrangling over post-production editing and the film's release, Kelly was by and large completely alone. Though he had previous experience directing and choreographing musicals, this was the one

²⁹ An unidentifiable clipping, "Ballet Boom in Hollywood," from one of Gene Kelly's scrapbooks notes Kelly's contribution to the "ballet fever of 1952." GKC, Box 10, Scrapbook 9 (1952-1955). While Gene Kelly's cinematic choreography never rivaled *The Red Shoes*, it is not hard to imagine how the film impacted him as a dancer and a filmmaker.

³⁰ Holl., Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Variety* (Weekly), 16 May 1956, 18, PCAR, Folder: "Invitation to the Dance [Loew's, 1955]. The same article also ran in *Daily Variety*, 15 May 1956, 3, AFC, Box 55, Folder 1 of 2: "Invitation to the Dance."

³¹ Bosley Crowther, "Screen: Twinkle-Toes: Gene Kelly Performs in All-Dance Film" (review), *New York Times* 23 May 1956, 35, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: "'Invitation to the Dance' Files etc.," Sub-folder A.

³² Arthur Freed to Gene Kelly, Telegram, 7 September 1952, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: "'Invitation to the Dance' Files etc.," Sub-folder B: "Circus Ballet." Hugh Fordin notes that Freed initially resisted studio executives who gave Kelly the green light; Freed did not want to do an all-dance film, but as Fordin explains, "because of his [Freed's] admiration for Kelly he was willing to go along with it." Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 370.

and only MGM musical he directed without his co-director, Stanley Donen.³³ Furthermore he undertook this project beyond Freed's immediate grasp. The bulk of the film was shot at MGM's England Studio, Metrobrit, in Boreham Woods just outside of London, even though the location lacked the proper facilities and technical expertise to accommodate filming a musical of this magnitude.³⁴ Virtually everyone in Hollywood, Kelly included, recognized "that a movie of nothing but ballet is a tremendous gamble."³⁵ Allowing Kelly to film the picture far from Freed's hawk-like gaze only compounded the risk for MGM.

It was not simply the film's exceptionally unique nature that made Freed, not to mention MGM and Loews executives, squeamish. It was Kelly's over-extension on the project that gave studio men pause. In essence, the production was a veritable "one man show." Aided by his two dance assistants, Carol Haney and future second wife Jeannie

³³ Kelly and Donen first teamed in writing the script for *Take Me Out to the Ballgame* (1949), which earned them Arthur Freed's trust, according to Hugh Fordin. They went on to co-direct *On the Town* (1949) and *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955) for Freed's unit. Donen, however, was given many more solo projects during the 1950s, including the MGM musicals *Royal Wedding* (1951), *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954), *Deep in My Heart* (1954), and *Funny Face* for Paramount (1957). For Donen's filmography, see Joseph Andrew Casper, *Stanley Donen*, Filmmakers Series, ed. Anthony Slide, no. 5 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983). See also Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 240, 258. The only solo directing Kelly did for MGM was *Invitation to the Dance*, though he went on to direct at other studios in the 1960s, as well as directing the original Broadway version of Rodgers' and Hammerstein's *Flower Drum Song* (1958). An account of Kelly's directorial projects at Twentieth Century Fox during the late 1960s can be found in John Gregory Dunne, *The Studio* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux 1969; reprint, New York: Vintage, 1998).

³⁴ Most reports suggest that Kelly wanted to work in Europe to avoid some unspecified tax troubles in the United States. Even Freed Unit Musical Coordinator Lela Simone, who oversaw the filming in England, acknowledged the tax break Kelly received in Europe. Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 11 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 131, 137, HOHP, OH 112. But Kelly denied this reason, asserting in an interview for *Cue*, "We couldn't have made it in America ... For one thing, if it had been done in Hollywood, it would have been done in an entirely different way. Instead of my being the only movie star, there would have been others, because the studio would have felt it needed more box office assurance, in view of the money it cost." Quoted in Joe Hyams, "Gene Kelly: All the World Loves to Dance," *Cue*, 2 May 1953, 12, AFC, Box 55, Folder 1 of 2: "Invitation to the Dance." Biographer Alvin Yudkoff hints that Kelly left for Europe to avoid the second Red Scare in Hollywood, given his initial brush with HUAC back in 1947. Yudkoff, *Gene Kelly: A Life of Dance and Dreams* (New York: Back Stage Books, 1999), 222-223. On Metrobrit's limited facilities, see Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 380-383, 389. Lela Simone likewise discussed some of the technical problems in her oral history with Rudy Behlmer. Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 11 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 139, HOHP, OH 112.

³⁵ Beverly Linet, "American in London," *Modern Screen* (December 1952): 58, GKC, Box 10, Scrapbook 9 (1952-1955).

Coyne, “Kelly is everywhere—planning, writing the stories, building-up the choreography, rehearsing his own rôles, rehearsing everyone else’s. Choosing costumes and colours, designing some of the costumes himself. Dancing, then rushing to work with the camera-man, back to dancing again.”³⁶ Of course, he was in constant communication via telegram, telephone, and letters with his producer. Freed lent his usual support from afar, providing Kelly with the best of his musical production unit. As he reassured Kelly in 1953, “Rest assured you will get what the picture needs and I promise you that I will accomplish this in my own way. You must know that I am with you one hundred percent and no stone will be left unturned to make your dream come true on ‘Invitation’.”³⁷

But the distance between England and Hollywood made Freed’s usual hands-on approach to producing nearly impossible. Freed sent over trusted Music Coordinator Lela Simone to supervise the film’s rocky progress. Simone and Freed communicated daily, which Fordin claims was kept relatively secret from Kelly, though neither Simone nor Freed ever faulted Kelly for problems during production.³⁸ Freed always outwardly professed to have the utmost confidence in Kelly’s abilities to spearhead this project, as when he cabled Kelly the night before principal photography began: “Good luck baby. I know this will be

³⁶ Peter Williams, “Hollywood’s Catch: Gene Kelly’s Prowess has been the Theme of his Films,” *Dance and Dancers* 3, no. 2 (January 1952): 7, GKC, Box 10, Scrapbook 9 (1952-1955). Haney and Coyne not only helped him create the dances, they assisted in rehearsals and functioned as stand-ins when Kelly was behind the camera. Lela Simone considered Haney to be “Gene’s sort of second ghost” or “alter ego.” Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 20 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 203, HOHP, OH 112. See also “Kelly the Star vs. Kelly the Director,” M-G-M Press Book for *Invitation to the Dance*, 1957, 3, PBC, no folder.

³⁷ Arthur Freed, MGM, Culver City, to Gene Kelly, Metrobrit, Borehamwood, England, Typed letter (unsigned copy), 3 January 1953, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3 (2 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance – Gene Kelly (misc.) Letters, etc.”

³⁸ I found few if any letters between Simone and Freed in his papers at the Cinema-Television Library at the University of Southern California. Fordin reprints several of their communications in his account of the production, but he does not cite the locations of these documents. Fordin, *M-G-M’s Greatest Musicals*, 380-382, 386-389.

the high spot of your career. Love from your biggest fan,” or when, a month later, he cabled to express his pleasure with the daily rushes.³⁹ Despite these warm words of encouragement, however, Freed did not fully trust Kelly.

Kelly had long since proven himself to be a hard worker, a “ruthless” perfectionist even, but hard work alone was not enough of a guarantee.⁴⁰ The cables from Ben Goetz, the Chairman and Managing Director of Metro’s British Studios and Louis B. Mayer’s son-in-law, reveal the uneasiness many at the studio felt about Kelly’s abilities. Goetz kept MGM General Manager, Eddie Mannix, apprised of Kelly’s filming delays, and though Goetz avoided accusatory tones, his cables hinted at executive’s displeasure with Kelly. Goetz reassured Mannix: “He [Kelly] has now gotten into production rhythm ... He is alert to situation.”⁴¹ This last sentence signaled Kelly’s own concern with the film’s progress, and yet it also pointed to the power dynamic operating at MGM. Goetz’s comment suggests that, despite the wide latitude extended to Kelly, he still had to be reined in so that the entire production would not spiral out of control.

In the early 1990s, Lela Simone recalled feeling that the filming of “this picture was going to be a disaster.” Though numerous members of the Freed Unit collaborated on the picture, both in Culver City and in England, Simone pointed out an unusual lack of structure

³⁹ Arthur Freed, Culver City, to Gene Kelly, Metrobrit, Borehamwood, England, Night telegram (copy), 18 August 1952; Arthur Freed, Culver City, to Gene Kelly, M-G-M British Studios, Borehamwood, England, Telegram (copy), 12 September 1952, both located in AFC, Box 14, Folder 3 (2 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance – Gene Kelly (misc.) Letters, etc.”

⁴⁰ Numerous journalists commented on Kelly’s perfectionism and Spartan-like work ethic. See, for instance, Rubert Allan, “Gene Kelly’s *Invitation to the Dance*,” *Look Magazine* 17 (24 March 1953): 90.

⁴¹ Ben Goetz, London, to E.J. Mannix, MGM, Culver City, Telegram (copy), 3 September 1952, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.” A copy of this telegram can also be found in GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc,” Sub-folder B: “Circus Ballet.” For more on Mannix’s role at MGM, See Fleming, *The Fixers*.

and organization on the filming of *Invitation*.⁴² Hugh Fordin paints a picture of Kelly as indecisive and out of control. While in Paris prior to his arrival at Metrobrit, Kelly “went into a kind of gestation period. As yet he had no vision of what he wanted to project on the screen. He seemed disturbed, distracted and unsure of himself. He was about to make an experimental picture, and he found himself without the security blanket of Freed’s presence and minus any creative major studio personnel. He had isolated himself; he was far away from home.”⁴³ Would he be able to accomplish this endeavor?

Although Kelly’s artistic vision drove him from start to finish, he struggled to articulate his dream to others. As Simone, never complaining, gently put it: “getting involved in INVITATION TO THE DANCE, I mean ... there was a perpetual ... how shall I say it ... not knowing what to do next.” While Simone was the glue holding the project together—arranging for equipment, dealing with the crew, making sure Kelly’s vision could be translated onto the screen—she could only accomplish as much as Kelly’s own progress allowed. The production, she acknowledged “went reasonably well, but what did not go reasonably well was that Gene was not really oriented into one direction. He changed all the time.” In short, “Gene was not sure in what he was doing there.” He had taken on more than he could chew, “And as time went on, he also knew it.”⁴⁴

⁴² Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 11 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 133, HOHP, OH 112.

⁴³ Fordin, *M-G-M’s Greatest Musicals*, 376.

⁴⁴ Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 11 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 131, 137, 138, HOHP, OH 112.

Beyond Kelly's own uncertainties and hesitations, constant delays hampered the production almost from the start.⁴⁵ For one, Kelly and Simone were forced to adjust to a different work pace. While their English counterparts were eager to please, they often refused to work after hours and rarely gave up their tea breaks, even if those breaks happened to fall in the middle of a take.⁴⁶ Then of course there were technical problems; inadequate equipment that would break down, problems with the set; poorly crafted costumes. As Simone later groaned, "But you can imagine what this whole INVITATION TO THE DANCE consisted of. I mean, one problem after another. Problems in artistic fashions and in [physical] fashions. It was absolutely incredible."⁴⁷

In terms of the musical compositions, two of the three sequences faced significant obstacles. For "Circus," the famous French composer Jacques Ibert had been commissioned to write a new piece, which he began without incident. When filming began, the piece was not yet complete; pianists performed Ibert's sketches on the set during the month-and-a-half of rehearsals before pre-recording began on August 11 (principal shooting started a week later). But during this critical rehearsal period, Ibert's daughter committed suicide. Though he was distraught and devastated, he continued sending Simone his sketches from Paris. Creating choreography in the absence of a score proved a formidable challenge. While

⁴⁵ For an overview of the production, see Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 371-396; Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 11 November 1990 and 17 December 1990, telephone interview, transcript, HOHP, OH 112; Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 176-191, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 5-234, Envelope 4.

⁴⁶ Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 11 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 137, HOHP, OH 112. Fordin quotes a communication from Simone to Freed, 4 September 1952, which describes in great detail these labor issues, as well as problems with wardrobe and equipment; I could not find this letter in Freed's papers. Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 380-381.

⁴⁷ Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 11 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 137, HOHP, OH 112.

Simone and Kelly both insisted that Ibert's personal tragedy in no way affected his composition, it created undeniable logistical problems for the cast and crew.⁴⁸

For "Ring Around the Rosy," the music proved to be an even greater problem. Trumpeter Malcolm Arnold was hired to create the soundtrack for this second sequence. Simone and musical director John Hollingsworth immediately realized Arnold's score would not work; it simply did not match Kelly's ideas for the dance. They recorded the piece quickly, knowing full well it would have to be completely replaced after filming. But they could not delay production long enough to fix the fundamental problems with the music. So they filmed the sequence with the bad score, and upon her return to the States, Simone worked closely with up-and-coming studio composer André Previn to create a completely new orchestral piece.⁴⁹ Previn jumped at the opportunity but recognized the "technical difficulties" of scoring music to pre-existing photography. "There were some temporary tracks, some verbal counting, and a lot of deep, dark silence. Therefore when the film was turned over to me I was faced with the problem of writing a balletic score entirely dictated by the already existing and unchangeable film," he explained to readers of *Film Music*. "Every nuance of tempo, every phrase, every meter change had to be fitted exactly to the picture; normal procedure for the scoring of a normal film, but certainly the hard way to compose a ballet. When the final timing sheets and click track charts were put in a bundle, they looked like the Manhattan City Directory."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 17 December 1990, 247-252. See also Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 385-386.

⁴⁹ Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 386, 394-395; Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 11 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 139-141, HOHP, OH 112; Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 186-187, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 5-234, Envelope 4.

⁵⁰ André Previn, "Film Notes: *Invitation to the Dance* (Ring Around the Rosy Sequence)," *Film Music* 15, no. 5 (May 1956), 8.

Additional problems abounded over a proposed fourth segment for the film in which various dancers would be paired with popular American tunes such as “The Whiffenpoof Song” and “Sunny Side of the Street.”⁵¹ After several of these songs had been recorded and shot, Freed and studio executives decided to abandon the sequence in mid-production, feeling that it was not up to par. As Simone confessed to Freed, “You have by now seen most of the ‘Popular Song’ rushes ... The fact that the photography in some of the songs is not really good depressed Gene no end.”⁵² Twenty years later, Kelly still regretted this decision: “I thought it was rather a good section, rather clever,” he insisted.⁵³ He felt that the studio did not give the sequence, which cost the studio \$110,667, an adequate chance.⁵⁴

In its place, Metro executives insisted Kelly create a routine that would feature himself even more than in the first two acts. Nervous to foot the bill for such an experimental film, MGM executives thought their only guarantee of decent box office returns would come from Gene Kelly’s star power. “They said we want you to do a third piece where you really dance or take it over,” he later recalled. “I thought and I said well I’d better give them a cartoon because I can go all through that. And I thought of doing Sinbad.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Kelly’s collection of sheet music includes handwritten notations expressing his hope of using these and other popular songs, including “Here Comes the Sun,” “Thou Swell,” and “Where or When.” GKC, Box 27, Folder 1: “Sheet Music A-H” and Folder 4: “Sheet Music T-W.”

⁵² Simone’s letter quoted in Fordin, *M-G-M’s Greatest Musicals*, 387.

⁵³ Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 180, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 5-234, Envelope 4.

⁵⁴ Production Information for *Invitation to the Dance* #1605, typed, n.d., AFC, Box 55, Folder 1 of 2: “Invitation to the Dance.”

⁵⁵ Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 181, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 5-234, Envelope 4.

And so he began work on this final segment of the film, in which he would perform nearly all of the dancing against a hand-drawn background.⁵⁶

At first, Kelly faced resistance from Arthur Freed and studio head, Dore Schary. While Kelly had executed a brief live action-animation dance in *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), in which he danced with Jerry the Mouse, he was now proposing a much longer, and far more complicated, number. In a telegram, Freed confessed his and Schary's concern about an undertaking of this nature. Schary believed that such a mammoth cartoon would delay production for six to nine months. As Freed explained, "Schary and Mannix advised me that it would be too impractical for them to agree to this. Gene I must say that in these times to hold up an enterprise so long makes it reasonable for you and me to agree with them." Freed searched for a middle ground that would keep studio executives and Kelly equally happy. He concluded his telegram practically begging Kelly to drop the cartoon. "Is there a short sequence you could do yourself which I think we desperately need to please your big audience," he implored.⁵⁷

Kelly was adamant, insisting four days later that the cartoon proceed: "I am still pursuing this for I feel it is a must for the picture."⁵⁸ Kelly proposed tackling the cartoon in England to speed up its production. Freed conceded, responding that same day that he could

⁵⁶ Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 180, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 5-234, Envelope 4. Kelly's initially envisioned the film in four parts: "Circus," "Ring Around the Rosy," a popular song section, and a children's ballet. In the early planning phases, however, he had not completely settled on the idea of using a cartoon for the children's section. "MGM Buys Schnitzler's 'Ring' To Avoid 'Ronde' Controversy over 'Dance'," unidentifiable clipping (possible *Variety*), n.d., n.p., AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): "Invitation to the Dance #1605."

⁵⁷ Arthur Freed, Culver City, to Gene Kelly, Metrobrit, Borehamwood, England, Night telegram (copy), 4 December 1952, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3 (2 of 2): "Invitation to the Dance – Gene Kelly (misc.) Letters, etc."

⁵⁸ Gene Kelly, England, to Arthur Freed, MGM, Culver City, Telegram, 8 December 1952, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3 (2 of 2): "Invitation to the Dance – Gene Kelly (misc.) Letters, etc."

probably “secure ‘go ahead’ for you. Cable me if you really believe this is possible.”⁵⁹

Freed and Kelly eventually received authorization to begin the cartoon, but in the end it proved “technically absolutely impossible” to be filmed at Metrobrit; the studio insisted it be shot and animated in Culver City.⁶⁰ But before filming could begin, Kelly had to fulfill a pre-existing commitment for *Brigadoon*. He did not return to “Sinbad the Sailor” for nearly a year.

Rehearsals for Kelly, Carol Haney (who made a brief appearance as Scheherazade) and David Kasday (the genie) began in August of 1953 and continued for two months. The live action was shot in front of a blue screen over a period of ten days that October, with Haney and Coyne functioning as dancing doubles who would later be replaced by cartoon characters.⁶¹ Then the studio animators went to work sketching the “250,000 individual drawings” necessary to complete the number. The animation took one-and-a-half years to complete.⁶² The cartoon sequence, which lasted about thirty minutes, cost MGM \$947,659 (as compared to \$180,264 on “Circus” and \$158,370 for “Ring Around the Rosy”), amounting to more than half of the total \$1.7 million spent on production costs.⁶³

⁵⁹ Arthur Freed, MGM, Culver City, to Gene Kelly, Metrobrit, Borehamwood, England, Night telegram (copy), 8 December 1952, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3 (2 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance – Gene Kelly (misc.) Letters, etc.”

⁶⁰ Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 11 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 137, 138, HOHP, OH 112. See also, Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 395.

⁶¹ Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 395-396; Data taken from Assistant Director Reports for “Sinbad the Sailor,” n.d., AFC, Box 14, Folder 4: “Invitation to the Dance (Cost status reports, Progress reports, A.D.S., 2 Budgets).” The filming actually went four days over the allotted six that had been anticipated, according to the Weekly Progress Report for *Invitation to the Dance* (cartoon seq), 23 August 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 4: “Invitation to the Dance (Cost status reports, Progress reports, A.D.S., 2 Budgets).”

⁶² “250,000 Individual Drawings Were Required for Unique Cartoon Episode of M-G-M’s ‘Invitation to the Dance’,” M-G-M Press Book for *Invitation to the Dance*, 1957, 2, PBC, no folder.

⁶³ There are varying estimates of the final cost of the picture. Fordin maintains that it cost a total of \$1,419,105, while archival evidence suggests figures as low as \$1,042,085 and as high as \$1,796,185. All of these numbers, however, are indisputably higher than the original budget of \$854,766. Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 396; Production Information for *Invitation to the Dance* #1605, typed, n.d., AFC, Box 55, Folder 1 of 2:

But even after the filming and sketches were drawn, Kelly's problems were far from over. He was forced to wait for years before MGM released the film, in part because the studio kept tinkering with it, but also because executives were perplexed about how best to exploit the picture. In a 1954 letter to the head of the New York publicity office, Si Seadler voiced concerns about keeping buzz alive for the film until it was ready to be released. "Several people have asked me, 'Have they abandoned the picture INVITATION TO THE DANCE?' It seems to me that in some publicity way we should keep this attraction alive from time to time ... [Freed] said that the fact that it has been under way so long means that its great novelty requires the utmost time and patience."⁶⁴ Seadler was nervous that the picture's novelty would not be enough to sustain public interest. And if nobody saw the film, the whole endeavor would have been in vain, both in terms of artistic labor and capital.

Periodically, edits would be made while Kelly continued redubbing his taps as late as 1955.⁶⁵ In large part, Kelly was caught in between Freed and higher executives who argued over post-production cutting. MGM head Dore Schary had a strained relationship with Freed, especially in comparison to Freed's friendship with Schary's predecessor, L.B. Mayer. As Lela Simone maintained, Freed "detested Schary. He absolutely abhorred him. And vice versa."⁶⁶ Schary insisted on reviewing daily rushes and reserving final say on editing. Freed

"Invitation to the Dance;" Weekly Progress Report for *Invitation to the Dance* (cartoon seq), 23 August 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 4: "Invitation to the Dance (Cost status reports, Progress reports, A.D.S., 2 Budgets)."

⁶⁴ Si Seadler to Howard Dietz, Memo (copy), 3 June 1954, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): "Invitation to the Dance #1605."

⁶⁵ Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 396. A weekly progress report for the film dated 23 August 1955 indicated that work had continued on the picture through at least 20 August 1955. Weekly Progress Report for *Invitation to the Dance* (cartoon seq), 23 August 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 4: "Invitation to the Dance (Cost status reports, Progress reports, A.D.S., 2 Budgets)."

⁶⁶ It certainly seems that Schary had a lot to do with slashing musical production at MGM, though he did take over the studio at a time of financial crisis. Reducing musical production was a quick way to curb costs. A convincing argument can be made linking Schary's ascendance at the studio to the beginning of the decline in

hinted at the tension between Schary and himself when he joked to Kelly, “Now, the executioners; pardon me, the executives; pardon me, Dore, wants to run the picture with me as far as it has gone, which we should be able to do early next week.”⁶⁷

Schary’s enthusiasm for the project was lukewarm at best. Though he sent supportive telegrams to Kelly during filming, the head of the studio was less than ecstatic about the overall picture.⁶⁸ Nearly a year after “Sinbad” had been completed, Schary indicated some of his concerns with the film. While he felt that, for the most part, “Circus” was “beautifully done in every department,” he did insist that some additional cuts be made. “Ring Around the Rosy,” however, was a different story. Schary found it “self-consciously artistic” and “a very bad imitation” of “Gene’s own work in SINGIN’ IN THE RAIN.” Schary was dismayed that the cuts he had previously recommended had not yet been made. He concluded to Freed, “Summing up this sequence, I believe it is greatly improved and certainly is far better than I ever believed it would be, but I still believe some of it is long and should be corrected. I would like to talk to both you and Gene about it.”⁶⁹

In the end, subsequent post-production slashing of the cartoon sequence garnered the most debate between Kelly and his superiors. Though he tried his best to fight for Kelly, Freed’s own power at the studio had waned significantly once Schary replaced Mayer, as Freed’s biting joke about Schary as unilateral “executioner” implied. Back in England once

MGM’s golden age of musicals. Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 5 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 80, HOHP, OH 112.

⁶⁷ Arthur Freed, MGM, Culver City, to Gene Kelly, Metrobrit, Borehamwood, England, Typed letter (unsigned copy), 3 January 1953, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3 (2 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance – Gene Kelly (misc.) Letters, etc.”

⁶⁸ See, for instance, two cables from Dore Schary to Gene Kelly, Telegram, 11 September 1952 and 27 November 1952, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc,” Sub-folder B: “Circus Ballet.”

⁶⁹ Dore Schary to Arthur Freed, cc Gene Kelly, Memo, 4 June 1954, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

again, Kelly was far removed from the editing process. In July of 1955, he cabled Freed after reviewing the latest version of *Invitation*. He despaired: “Was shocked at cuts in cartoon ... Feel some indiscriminately made and bad for general music buildups ... would like to fly [to] California tonight and go over film with you.”⁷⁰ He echoed these sentiments a few days later, in a letter he sent off to Culver City. He expressed his frustration with the cuts, because he felt that the studio executives had disregarded his own personal suggestions for how to tighten the picture. He gently admonished Freed, “These cuts are very simple to put back ... I’m sure they’re worth it, or I wouldn’t go to all this trouble and expense on my own time.”⁷¹

Though Freed took his role as Kelly’s advocate quite seriously, there was very little he could do. He tried to reassure Kelly that the cuts would not diminish the sequence’s overall quality, arguing “that it was the healthy thing to do ... Gene, I couldn’t swear that I was right but I think, objectively, on an overall basis, the cut will tighten up the sequence.” But even though he ultimately stood his ground regarding these cuts, he nonetheless appealed to Schary to restore the excised portions, as he related to Kelly:

When you called me and also wrote to me, I was not sure I had been right and asked that the cuts be restored ... I ... called Dore, personally, and went up to see him and expressed the viewpoint that on account of your extraordinary work and your deep and vital interest in having as perfect a picture as possible, that I believed we should make the change and do it your way. I must say that Dore agreed with me on this. Dore then called the Departments and found out that the reel would have to be sent back to be re-dubbed and therefore another delay would have to be faced. He then ran the cut version himself and told me the next morning that as well as he knew the film he could not

⁷⁰ Gene Kelly, Borehamwood, England, to Arthur Freed, MGM, Culver City, Cablegram, 28 July 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3 (2 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance – Gene Kelly (misc.) Letters etc.”

⁷¹ Gene Kelly, Boreham Wood, England, to Arthur Freed, MGM, Culver City, Letter (typed signed), 4 August 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3 (2 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance – Gene Kelly (misc.) Letters etc.” Ironically, in 1975 Kelly actually admitted that he would have made even more cuts to “Circus,” though he had similarly protested the studio’s initial editing choices in this first sequence. Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 184, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 5-234, Envelope 4.

tell where the new cuts had been made and therefore didn't want to order any further delays.⁷²

Freed attempted to intervene on Kelly's behalf, and for a moment it seemed Schary had been swayed. But ultimately, the studio's bottom line took precedence over Kelly's artistic vision, and Freed was powerless to alter the film. What at first glance sounded like praise of the final version was, perhaps, more a resignation to his own faltering position at MGM.

For his own part, Kelly was deeply disappointed by the way in which the studio handled his artistic dream. *Dance Magazine* reported how "Kelly himself despaired of what they were doing to his picture."⁷³ Lela Simone admitted that Kelly was "disenchanted" with the film by the end, despite the overall coup he had orchestrated in getting MGM to back his picture.⁷⁴ More than anything, Kelly was troubled by the years he was forced to wait until his picture would be screened. He later recalled, "I was very much and deeply hurt that it was so cavalierly treated ... I could see that the publicity people and the distributors ... didn't know how to present it and weren't used to listening to directors and actors as in my case telling them how to put pictures out." Kelly had envisioned *Invitation* as a way to bring dance to those who otherwise would not have the opportunity to see it. But this dream was to remain largely unfulfilled.⁷⁵ As he subsequently lamented, "Commercially, the picture was

⁷² Arthur Freed, MGM, Culver City, to Gene Kelly, Paris, France, Letter (typed unsigned), 12 August 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3 (2 of 2): "Invitation to the Dance – Gene Kelly (misc.) Letters etc."

⁷³ Arthur Knight, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Dance Magazine* 30 (June 1956): 14.

⁷⁴ Lela Simone, interview by Rudy Behlmer, 11 November 1990, telephone interview, transcript, 142, HOHP, OH 112.

⁷⁵ Countless media reports of the film's production, as well as reviews, noted how *Invitation to the Dance* was a dream come true for Kelly. See, for instance, Beverly Linet, "American in London," *Modern Screen* (December 1952): 24, GKC, Box 10, Scrapbook 9 (1952-1955); Robert Kass, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Catholic World* 183 (July 1956): 305; Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Time Magazine* 67, no. 21 (11 June 1956): 105; Stephen Watts, "On Arranging Terpsichore for the Camera Eye," *New York Times*, 14 September 1952, GKC, Box 8, Scrapbook 6 (c. 1950-1951?); Art Buchwald, "No Dialogue, No Script," *New York Herald Tribune*, 30 October 1952, 25, GKC, Box 8, Scrapbook 6 (c. 1950-1951?); "Gene Kelly Does a

never sent to the far corners of the globe and I doubt if it has ever been seen outside the major cities which is not where it should be seen. It was supposed to have all these classic dancers whom they [audiences] wouldn't see otherwise and be seen in small towns and villages and hamlets."⁷⁶

Waking from the Dream: The Artistic and Commercial Limits of *Invitation to the Dance*

Ultimately MGM never quite figured out what to do with *Invitation*, and so it sat on the shelf for years, waiting to be released.⁷⁷ As *Variety* starkly pointed out, "M-Gs waiting almost a year before placing the picture in release indicates that it is a 'nervous' film. It'll attract the balletomanes and other devotees of the art houses, but its chances in general situations are slim. It'll take hard selling even in the specialized houses."⁷⁸ After years of post-production tweaking, the studio remained at a loss about how to market, much less exhibit, the picture. It had been one thing to let Kelly go off on his own to make the film. But the box office would prove to be a far greater gamble.

Movie Entirely in Dance," *New York Herald Tribune*, 14 December 1952, Section 4, 2, GKC, Box 10, Scrapbook 9 (1952-1955); Rubert Allan, "Gene Kelly's *Invitation to the Dance*," *Look Magazine* 17 (24 March 1953): 88, 90-94; and Joe Hyams, "Gene Kelly: All the World Loves to Dance," *Cue*, 2 May 1953, 12, AFC, Box 55, Folder 1 of 2: "Invitation to the Dance."

⁷⁶ Gene Kelly, interview by Marilyn Hunt, March 1975, transcript, 182, JRDD, Special Collections, *MGZMT 5-234, Envelope 4.

⁷⁷ Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, 396. Many reviewers made note of MGM's delay in releasing the film. See, for instance Moira Walsh, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *America* (2 June 1956): 252; and Clive Barnes, Movies Revisited: 'Invitation to the Dance', *New York Times*, 29 July 1977, GKC, Box 18, No folder. As of early April of 1955, while minimal post-production alterations were still in progress, the studio had yet to determine a timetable for the film's national or international release, according to Dan S. Terrell, MGM/Loew's, New York, to Enid Haupt, *Seventeen Magazine*, New York, Letter (typed signed), 7 April 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): "Invitation to the Dance #1605."

⁷⁸ Holl., Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Variety* (Weekly), 16 May 1956, 18, PCAR, Folder: "Invitation to the Dance [Loew's, 1955]. The same article also ran in *Daily Variety*, 15 May 1956, 3, AFC, Box 55, Folder 1 of 2: "Invitation to the Dance."

MGM, like the other major studios, could only tolerate art, creativity, and imagination to the extent that they proved profitable. Steven Cohan astutely illuminates the tension between art and commercialism. Musicals made under the Studio System, he reminds us, were products of a standardized, and rather conventional, industry that demanded adherence to precise specifications (that is, to the conventions of the genre). Thus films could not stray too far from the norm, even as each filmmaker employed artistic and technical innovations to top all other musicals in the use of spectacle. In short, “Individual artists could aim high but as far as studios were concerned the musical remained an industrial product, its value assured through its standardization.”⁷⁹ As an all-dance, “artsy” film, *Invitation to the Dance* defied the Hollywood musical formula. Whatever Kelly had originally intended to do with his film, his artistic license only went as far as the box office. As *Time Magazine* bemoaned, “The trouble seems to be that Hollywood just cannot bring itself to put the art before the coarse ... when it came to a showdown with his studio bosses, Showman Kelly was forced to play for the quick cash and let the enduring credit go.”⁸⁰ Winning over a mass audience for such an experimental film would prove too daunting a task for the studio, and in the end, MGM never even tried to reach mass markets in the States. The studio was unable to capitalize on Kelly’s inventiveness.

Metro’s lackluster handling of the film acutely disturbed Kelly. In August of 1955, as post-production was finally coming to a close, he wrote to Freed expressing his displeasure, demanding to know, “Is ‘Invitation’ going to be shown at the Edinburgh Festival? Is it going to be shown at the Venice Festival? Is it going to be shown at any festival? Is it going to be

⁷⁹ Introduction to Steven Cohan, ed., *Hollywood Musicals, The Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), 11.

⁸⁰ Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Time Magazine* 67, no. 21 (11 June 1956): 105.

shown??" He felt that Metro was missing important opportunities to garner international exposure for the film, which he believed would be as successful abroad as in the U.S. His concern extended beyond exhibition, revealing his anxieties about marketing possibilities, without which the film would surely fail. "Have they [MGM publicity department] planned a campaign for the picture, and what type are they talking about? I'm dying to know. Also, when do you think it will be released? This fall, or perhaps in time for the Academy nominations?"⁸¹

Internal studio discussions regarding marketing strategies highlight the problems and limits of promoting Kelly's experimental film. As Si Seadler urged Freed in 1956, "This picture cries to be seen. Advance build-up is vital and nobody can ever remotely know what it is until they see it." Even though he felt *Invitation to the Dance* was "something for the history of this business," he expressed concern about how to appeal to moviegoers. His solution was two-fold: he implored Freed to "be ruthless. Cut whole sections" of the cartoon. Second, he insisted on a publicity blitz. " 'Invitation to the Dance' will get raves, but we've got to convince the mass audience as well as the class that 'this is something everybody's got to see.' The way to start is to start talk, talk." Seadler wanted as broad an audience as possible, encompassing egghead intellectuals, the growing "new class" of white collar and corporate laborers, and the "working-class majority."⁸² He insisted on a hasty release,

⁸¹ Gene Kelly, Boulogne, France, to Arthur Freed, MGM, Culver City, Letter (typed, signed), 12 August 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3 (2 of 2): "Invitation to the Dance - Gene Kelly (misc.) Letters, etc."

⁸² Jackson Lears, "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass-Consumption Society," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed., Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 50-51.

admitting, “We’ve got a long way to go to getting on this, but the picture, unique of its kind, is tremendous artistically. We’ll do our level best to make it so commercially.”⁸³

But by 1956 MGM realized the film could not be marketed to the bulk of Americans; Metro settled on a more limited exhibition in the United States. The studio was more confident in the film’s European exhibition, given the international cast with whom foreign audiences were more familiar, in addition to a more artistically-experimental cinema on the Continent.⁸⁴ Indeed, Kelly anticipated that his film would appeal to European audiences: “This is the type of film which I feel will definitely increase the prestige of American films in Europe and add immeasurably to our foreign market for pictures ... I hope to make the Europeans believe we are aspiring artistically, so they will have a greater respect for the fine things we are attempting in our studios at home.”⁸⁵ But winning over American audiences would prove a much more daunting task for MGM’s publicity department.

A deep ambivalence about the film’s commercial potential infused its marketing and eventual exhibition. Studio publicity consistently emphasized the experimental nature of the film, from trailers to pre-prepared articles and newspaper advertisements.⁸⁶ MGM publicist Howard Herty insisted that the studio exploit “the belief that the prestige of the motion

⁸³ S. F. Seadler to Arthur Freed, Holograph note, 10 May 1956 (the date was illegible but based on the content it was most likely written in 1956), AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

⁸⁴ Foreign distribution, they likewise hoped, would prove more lucrative, given that dubbing would not be an obstacle, unlike other Hollywood musicals.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Joe Hyams, “Gene Kelly: All the World Loves to Dance,” *Cue*, 2 May 1953, AFC, Box 55, Folder 1 of 2: “Invitation to the Dance.” Dickran Tashjian traces the relationship of American to Western European art. As he explains, Americans had long attempted to distinguish themselves from “European cultural hegemony” to demonstrate that our cultural forms were not “an appendage of Western European culture.” In so doing, Americans had proclaimed the artlessness of their culture. “The Artlessness of American Culture,” in *Making America: The Society and Culture of the United States*, ed. Luther S. Luedtke (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 172.

⁸⁶ Frank Whitbeck and Jack Atlas, Trailer for *Invitation to the Dance*, Typed script, 13 April 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605;” M-G-M Press Book for *Invitation to the Dance*, 1957, No folder.

picture industry in general, and M-G-M in particular, is enhanced by INVITATION TO THE DANCE.” His ideas for promoting the film played off of the “pioneering aspects of the picture, and the willingness of the producer to gamble with a non-talking picture.”

Yet he nonetheless suggested that showings be limited to major urban areas, specialty art houses, and abroad. Herty proposed New York City for the site of the picture’s world premiere. As he explained, “Conceding New York City is the cultural center of America it is suggested the first showing of INVITATION TO THE DANCE be held there in a small art house and have the sponsorship of the Modern Museum of Art.”⁸⁷ Countless MGM musicals premiered in New York, typically at Radio City Music Hall, often in conjunction with a holiday and accompanied by live entertainment.⁸⁸ A film’s premiere was critical to its ultimate success at theaters around the nation; a successful New York opening built up hype and word-of-mouth press, garnering significant receipts, which would encourage local exhibitors to support the picture.⁸⁹ Proposing to debut *Invitation* in a far smaller venue reveals a lack of faith on the part of studio.

⁸⁷ Outline of Publicity and Exploitation Ideas, Typed outline, n.d, 1, 5. While the outline was unsigned and undated, it was identifiable through the memo to which it was attached: Howard Herty to Howard Strickling, Typed memo, 20 September 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

⁸⁸ This practice ensured stellar opening week receipts. A photograph taken from 50th Street above Rockefeller Plaza shows a crowd of anxious moviegoers queued up in both directions of a city block waiting to be admitted to Radio City Music Hall to see *On the Town*. AFC, Box 56, Folder: “3 (of 4) On the Town Arthur Freed Collection.” “10,000 Wait to See Music Hall Show: 7-Block 2-File Line Is Called All-Time Record,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 30 December 1949, 13, AFC, Box 56, Folder: “4 (of 4) On the Town Arthur Freed Collection.”

⁸⁹ New York and Los Angeles publicity men carefully tracked box office activity for every MGM musical released. Daily, weekly, and monthly totals were broken down by cities and compared to other films—both movies running concurrently (though not necessarily musicals) as well as previous hit musicals. See, for instance, memos between Howard Strickling and Howard Dietz for *Easter Parade* (1948), AFC, Box 10, Folder: “Easter Parade 1 (1 of 2),” Packet: Easter Parade Storyfile (7/48-1/47); *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), AFC, Box 4, Folder: “The Barkleys of Broadway Folder 1 (1 of 2);” and *The Band Wagon* (1953), VMP, Folder #11: “Band Wagon - post prod.” also located in AFC, Box 4, Folder: “The Band Wagon Folder 2 (1 of 2).”

In the end, *Invitation to the Dance* never enjoyed its world premiere in New York City as originally planned. It was first shown to the public at the Studio Four Cinema in Zurich, Switzerland, in April of 1956, with a “personal appearance” by Kelly and rave reviews in the foreign press.⁹⁰ Yet despite the glowing European reception, MGM continued to sit on the film.⁹¹ It is unclear when the film actually opened in New York, much less the rest of the country. By some accounts, the picture began playing the next month, still others claim the film would be fated to wait nearly another year, until 1 March 1957, before the general public had the chance to view it at the Plaza, a local art house in New York.⁹²

In the meantime, MGM hosted special screenings for interest groups. Several members of the University of Southern California’s DKA Professional Cinema Fraternity, for

⁹⁰ This was the first official public screening. However, parts of the film were shown in special screenings, as when Mrs. Dean Gray Edwards, a New York City clubwoman who “bosses movie reviewing for the national magazine received by some 10,000,000 U.S. clubwomen,” was shown “Circus” in June of 1954. Fritz Goodwin to Arthur Freed, Memo, 18 June 1954, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.” The film previewed at the Fine Arts Theatre in Beverly Hills on 28 June and 7 July 1955 according to Howard Strickling’s two Preview Reports, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

⁹¹ According to publicity material, the studio found it a favorable practice to delay nation-wide release until a few months after a film’s premiere. In the case of *Invitation to the Dance*, it was advised that, “Assuming for a moment that INVITATION would open in New York about November 15th [1955], it is suggested other premieres follow no sooner than Feb. 15th. The three-month delay is recommended so that the impact of the long N.Y. run has an opportunity to be felt in other parts of the country...” Outline of Publicity and Exploitation Ideas, Typed outline, n.d, 1, attached to: Howard Herty to Howard Strickling, Typed memo, 20 September 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

⁹² Freed’s papers give no indication of release dates or box office receipts. Stanley Green lists the opening date as May 1956. This fits with the U.S. reviews, which are predominately clustered around May and June of 1956. Fordin claims the U.S. premiere was in March 1957, which is in line with the M-G-M Press Book, copyrighted in 1957. Stanley Green, *Hollywood Musicals Year by Year* (Milwaukee, Hal Leonard Publishing, 1990), 206; Fordin, *M-G-M’s Greatest Musicals*, 396. M-G-M Press Book for *Invitation to the Dance*, 1957, PBC, no folder. Reviews from 1956 include: *The Hollywood Reporter*, 15 May 1956, 3, PCAR, Folder: “Invitation to the Dance [Loew’s, 1955];” Jack Eden, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Motion Picture Daily*, 15 May 1956, n.p., PCAR, Folder: “Invitation to the Dance [Loew’s, 1955];” Holl., Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Variety* (Weekly), 16 May 1956, 18, PCAR, Folder: “Invitation to the Dance [Loew’s, 1955],” article also ran in *Daily Variety*, 15 May 1956, 3, AFC, Box 55, Folder 1 of 2: “Invitation to the Dance;” Archer Winsten, “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ at Plaza,” (review), *New York Post*, 23 May 1956, 74, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc.,” Sub-folder A; Arthur Knight, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Dance Magazine* 30 (June 1956): 14-17, 80. According to the *Motion Picture Herald’s* Release Charts from May of 1956 through March of 1957, the announcement of MGM’s delayed decision to release the film on 1 March 1957 was not even made public until 23 March 1957. *Motion Picture Herald*, 26 May 1956-30 March 1957.

instance, were invited to screen the film on 4 October 1955, nearly two years before its U.S. release. USC cinema student Henry A. Carlson wrote MGM to express his gratitude for being invited to the screening. “I am wishing you all the success that ‘INVITATION TO THE DANCE’ deserves, and express the hope that your example may start a trend. If the general public appreciates it half as much as I did, it should be a real ‘hit’.”⁹³ Elaine Linden, also a DKA member and an employee of Paramount Studios, wrote to Arthur Freed that seeing the film “was an unforgettable [*sic*] experience—like my first Hot Fudge Sundae—only better. I was completely absorbed and delighted throughout the hour and a half, and I only regret that it wasn’t longer.”⁹⁴

In December 1956, half a year after its Zurich premiere, 170 members of the Los Angeles Dance Alliance likewise viewed the film. According to one MGM publicity agent in attendance, “I have never seen or heard a more enthusiastic audience. Applause broke in after the individual numbers. After the showing, they stood around in groups, discussing in the most glowing terms the dancing, color, photography, etc.”⁹⁵ As Robert Y. Takagi, the group’s president, gushed in a letter to Freed, “. . .members and friends of Dance Alliance felt, as I did, that they had seen and enjoyed a truly imaginative and unique motion picture in the dance idiom, which brings dance to its rightful cinematic importance. Many of us are

⁹³ Henry A. Carlson, USC, Pasadena, to MGM, Production Section, Culver City, Typed signed fan letter, 5 October 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

⁹⁴ Elaine Linden, Paramount Branch, Paramount Pictures Corporation, Hollywood, to Arthur Freed, MGM, Culver City, Typed signed fan letter, 5 October 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

⁹⁵ Jim Merrick, Publicity, to Arthur Freed, Memo, 17 December 1956, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

looking forward to a second viewing when it opens here for regular release.” He concluded by predicting that “word will spread of your distinctive contribution to the Dance.”⁹⁶

Takagi’s and DKA’s responses were exactly the sort that the MGM Publicity Department hoped to garner, as the official press material for *Invitation* reveals. In an early draft of the trailer, Frank Whitbeck, the studio publicity man charged with creating their trailers, emphasized the film’s highbrow nature. Whitbeck initially envisioned the trailer consisting of an informal conversation in which Kelly would talk about the picture.

According to the script, Kelly would admit, “... I would like to tell you about ‘Invitation to the Dance’ because there might be some of you to whom it might appeal. Some of you—not all! Generally speaking it falls into the category of what is popularly termed an ‘art picture’.” He would end the trailer with the reiteration, “As I said when I first met you ... don’t take my word for it ... because only you can decide for yourself as to whether you want to see something truly different.”⁹⁷ Kelly rejected this proposed trailer, adamantly refusing to appear in it. “He just will not talk about his own picture,” Whitbeck complained.⁹⁸

The final version of the trailer was rather uninspiring. Whitbeck, along with assistant Jack Atlas, professed, “The feeling is that it [the film] should be sold to the hilt as an art house presentation. Slant it to the ‘400’, load it with ‘snob-appeal’ ... as Freed puts it ... ‘Sell it like a Cadillac’. Consequently, we have tried to make it different than trailers designed for general release selling.” Yet, the trailer itself blandly described each of the

⁹⁶ Robert Y. Takagi, Dance Alliance, Los Angeles, to Arthur Freed, MGM, Culver City, Letter (typed signed), 20 December 1956, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

⁹⁷ Frank Whitbeck, Trailer for *Invitation to the Dance* (draft), 7 April 1955, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

⁹⁸ Frank Whitbeck to Si Seadler, Memo (copy with script attached), 7 April 1955, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

three sequences while noting the credentials of the three composers, Ibert, Previn, and Rimsky-Korsakov. The script concluded triumphantly: “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ is a new experience in screen entertainment, combining the outstanding talents of the world of art ... music and the dance! It is a project that is bold, ambitious, but most of all unprecedented. We recommend it sincerely for a new adventure in motion picture enjoyment.”⁹⁹

The studio press book was similarly unimpressive. Though MGM press books had been shrinking in size and content during the 1950s, the book for *Invitation* is strikingly scant, with just two pages of prepared articles and six devoted to display ads.¹⁰⁰ The campaign stressed the distinguished artists employed—“the most glittering talents in music and dance from two continents”—and the film’s artistic innovation—“a totally different form of musical entertainment.”¹⁰¹ But because the film lacked any major Hollywood stars, there were none of the typical article-length features about any of the dancers; rather there were small pictures accompanied by brief captions, and only for Igor Youskevitch, Belita, Carol Haney, and Tamara Toumanova.¹⁰²

The studio’s concerns about the film’s limited appeal, it turned out, were well-founded. Even fans who unequivocally enjoyed the musical acknowledged the challenge it would face at the box office. Muriel Fitzpatrick of Washington, D.C., sent a letter to MGM

⁹⁹ Frank Whitbeck and Jack Atlas, Trailer for *Invitation to the Dance* (official), 13 April 1955, cover sheet, 3, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

¹⁰⁰ Compare to *The Barkleys of Broadway* (1949), which had five pages of articles; *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), with a total of 24 pages also devoted five to features; *Silk Stockings* (1957) contained three pages of articles, while *Bells Are Ringing* (1960), the final Freed musical, consisted of a mere four pages, with only one page committed to articles. All Press Books from PBC, no folder.

¹⁰¹ Ad no. 406, Caption to Still LM-33084, M-G-M Press Book for *Invitation to the Dance*, 1957, 1, 2, PBC, no folder.

¹⁰² A short three paragraph story about how Kelly discovered Claire Sombert and Claude Bessy was also included. Each woman received a single paragraph of biographical attention, perhaps a sentence or two more than the stand-alone bio-captions for the other dancers. “Kelly ‘Imports’ Two Paris Ballet Stars,” M-G-M Press Book for *Invitation to the Dance*, 1957, 3, PBC, no folder.

in late January of 1959, two years after the film's limited release, inquiring about how to obtain a souvenir program booklet. She proudly admitted, "I have seen INVITATION TO THE DANCE about six times and will undoubtedly continue to see it for as long as it is shown because it is the kind of picture I would never tire of." She wanted the book not only as a remembrance of the picture, but also to help "persuade my friends to go with me when I see it again." The studio's publicity department happily complied, mailing her a booklet a few days later.¹⁰³ Her repeated viewings and unwavering adulation for Kelly's picture were rare and, perhaps more importantly, gestured toward the problems the film faced in exhibition. Though she loved the film, she nonetheless admitted that selling others on the picture was proving to be a Herculean task.

Of course, it is difficult to determine how the *majority* of audience members felt about the film, since only a handful of fan correspondences survive.¹⁰⁴ Fortunately, however, MGM tested the film in two preview showings in June and July of 1955, before the final edits and cuts were completed. Unlike usual Freed musical previews, this one played at the Fine Arts Theatre in Beverly Hills, targeting a very specific demographic of art-lovers.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Muriel Fitzpatrick, Washington D.C., to MGM, Hollywood, Typed signed fan letter, 30 January 1959, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): "Invitation to the Dance #1605." Atop the note was a typed message indicating the publicity department had mailed her a program on 4 February 1959.

¹⁰⁴ Freed's papers contain very little fan mail. It is hard to assess whether Kelly's collection is complete or not, as many of his papers were lost in a home fire in 1983. GKC, Box 12, no folder.

¹⁰⁵ It was far more typical for these musicals to preview at more "general" theaters, such as New York City's Loew's 72 Street Theater (*An American in Paris*), the Picwood Theatre in West Los Angeles (*The Band Wagon*), the Alexander Theatre in Glendale, CA (*The Barkleys of Broadway*), the Encino Theatre in Encino, CA (*Brigadoon*), and the Bay Theatre in Pacific Palisades (*Singin' in the Rain*). The second preview for *The Barkleys of Broadway* was held at the Academy Theatre in Inglewood, but it is unclear whether this was a regular or special venue. See Preview Survey for *An American in Paris*, 14 August 1951, AFC, Box 1, Folder 2: "An American in Paris;" First Report of First Preview for *The Band Wagon*, 26 March 1953, VMP, Folder 11: "Band Wagon – post production;" Howard Strickling, First Report of First Preview for *The Barkleys of Broadway*, 16 December 1948, AFC, Box 4, Folder: "The Barkleys of Broadway Folder 1 (1 of 2);" First Report of First Preview of *Brigadoon*, 4 June 1954, VMP, Folder 18: "Brigadoon – preview;" Howard Strickling, First Report of Second Preview for *Singin' in the Rain*, 27 December 1951, AFC, Box 21, Folder:

Studio publicist Howard Strickling compiled audience responses into reports that he then presented to producer Arthur Freed. This provides us with a rare glimpse into the minds of viewers. Over the course of the two screenings, 375 audience members completed surveys. Of these, 210—more than half—were women, and nearly half (167) of those in attendance were between the ages of 18 and 30. The next biggest age group was the 31 to 45 range (with 90 responses, roughly 24 percent); the rest were fairly equally distributed between the youth (12-17) and above-45 categories.¹⁰⁶

A cursory glance at the anonymous responses suggests an overwhelmingly positive reception. One hundred-sixty six of the respondents rated the film “outstanding” and another 116 found it “excellent.”¹⁰⁷ The gender breakdown was relatively consistent: 159 of the 167 women (95 percent) found it either outstanding or excellent; likewise for 123 out of 165 men (74 percent). And nearly all respondents claimed they would recommend the film to their friends. Even the un-solicited comments sang the film’s—and Kelly’s—praises. In the open-ended portion of the survey, where audience members could comment freely, there were some ringing endorsements, such as this offered by a female moviegoer: “I enjoyed it immensely. My young son did too. I think people would enjoy seeing this because it isn’t insipid as so many pictures are. Has true entertainment value.” Another woman wrote that *Invitation* was “one of the best [films] I’ve ever seen and probably will ever.” And a third woman was quoted as saying, “Yes, having studied dance, I can appreciate it so that I should

“Singing in the Rain #1546;” Howard Strickling, First Report of Second Preview for *The Barkleys of Broadway*, 21 December 1948, AFC, Folder: “The Barkleys of Broadway Folder 1 (1 of 2).”

¹⁰⁶ Nina C. Leibman offers an instructive model in how to use audience polling data, though her application is for television audiences in the 1950s. *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 81-86.

¹⁰⁷ It is important to note that when asked to rate the film, the only choices were: Outstanding, Excellent, Very Good, Good, and Fair. There was no opportunity to provide a purely negative rating.

like to see it many more times ... Excellent production—congratulations to Mr. Kelly and the excellent choreography.” A man at the film’s second preview in July found the picture “fantastically wonderful” while another man praised the dancing as “excellent.” A third man felt the picture, “Rates with ‘Red Shoes’ as one of the best dance pictures ever made—I don’t know why MGM hesitates to release this movie—they must be crazy, or else underrating the taste of the American people.” Several viewers enjoyed Kelly’s choreography, and one man complimented Kelly’s casting choices, remarking, “Plaudits to Kelly for not dominating whole picture—what he did was good and he had guts to surround himself with such talent. I would and will see this again!

But for as much adulation as Kelly garnered, he faced a sizeable amount of criticism from viewers, some of whom were undeniably longstanding fans of his work. The bulk of the criticism was focused on Kelly’s artistic aspirations, which many felt should be limited to the sort of hoofing that had made him a star in the mid-1940s. One woman scathingly wrote in her comments, “I think Gene Kelly was trying to be something he isn’t in ‘Circus’. I thought this sequence had far too much Kelly and not enough [Igor] Youskevitch. ‘Ring’—he seemed to be more in his field ... Keep Kelly in things like ‘An American in Paris’ or ‘Singin’ in the Rain’. Don’t let him get dramatic as he tried in ‘Circus’—use Youskevitch for that.” Still another male spectator, who self-identified as an artist, went even further, complaining that this film claimed to be the highest sort of art, but fell short. “This picture is typical of the pseudo-intellectual trend,” he angrily accused. “You have unsuccessfully attempted to appease a hypocritical public by telling them ‘this is art’ when it is not.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Howard Strickling, First Report of First Preview of *Invitation to the Dance*, 28 June 1955, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605,” and Howard Strickling, First Report of Second Preview for *Invitation to the Dance*, 7 July 1955, 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.” Strickling, First Report of First Preview of *Invitation to the Dance*, 10.

Such complaints of Kelly's artistic overstretching underscored the larger question of the film's overall commercial viability, in which many audience members presaged the critical response that would come out the following year. While some viewers cheered that the film would appeal to all age groups—"an adult film that they can let the kids see too!"—many others predicted that the film would appeal to a very limited audience.¹⁰⁹ Several women maintained that art-lovers would flock to the film: "Anybody interested in 'culture' will like it!" and "It will play to a select audience possibly, but praise be—some culture yet!" But more ominous were the comments exposing skepticism about the film's box office potential. Many felt that the inclusion of "culture" would actually hurt *Invitation*, as in the case of one woman who admitted, "I think this was purely creative and imaginative picture, however I do not think it will go over commercially—it is for the person with a sensitive and artistic mind." Another woman echoed these sentiments, pointing out: "A very good picture if a person is interested in ballet and dancing. I do not believe that the common person would enjoy this type of picture." One male spectator was even more definitive, arguing that, "this film should be limited to art film houses—not for general public" while yet another man scribbled, "Don't see how general public could accept." In short, in the words of two women, there was "Some doubt as to whether the general public will appreciate" a film of this nature that was "... Unusual but not commercial. Hope you make money..."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Strickling, First Report of Second Preview of *Invitation to the Dance*, 5. The Protestant Council and the Film Estimate Board of National Organizations gave *Invitation* the same classification of "Adults-Young People" but the Legion of Decency only gave it the second-highest rating, an A-2, or "Morally Unobjectionable for Adults" (A-1 would have been appropriate for all age groups). Harrison's did not report a ranking to the Production Code Administration. PCA, Compilation of Ratings and Classifications for *Invitation to the Dance*, n.d., PCAR, Folder: "Invitation to the Dance [Loew's, 1955]."

¹¹⁰ Strickling, First Report of First Preview of *Invitation to the Dance*, 3, 6, 9; Strickling, First Report of Second Preview of *Invitation to the Dance*, 4, 8.

What makes these audience responses so rich is their depth and thoughtfulness. More typically in preview surveys, moviegoers dashed off succinct comments, often about the Technicolor or sound levels in the theater (across the board, audiences complained about the sound being too loud; *Invitation to the Dance* was no exception). Audiences would also comment if they wanted to see more (or less) of a particular actor, clamored for additional cutting, or in the case of cinematic adaptations of Broadway musicals, might beg for the restoration of cut songs.¹¹¹ In the case of *Invitation to the Dance*'s previews, the audience tended to be much more reflective, not just of their moviegoing experience, but of the picture's overall potential and contribution to musical filmmaking. This was due, in part, to the presumably unique makeup of the targeted art-house audience. While we will never know the actual composition of the audience who viewed the film that June and July, and whether this audience had more artistic leanings than the general public, it is certain that their introspective responses were far more insightful than that of the average preview audience. Seeing the film inspired these individuals to think about art—high and low—and its place in American popular culture.

Kelly had hoped to make dance more palatable to the average moviegoer (by fusing classical forms with more modern, popular styles) while using film to expose masses of Americans to dance. But as even these limited audience responses indicated, he failed on both counts. He was trying, in the words of one female spectator, to be something more than

¹¹¹ *On the Town* (1949) is a vivid illustration of the latter. When Arthur Freed began adapting the stage version for the screen, he decided to drop much of the original Leonard Bernstein songs, feeling they were too "avant-garde," as Hugh Fordin explains. And so he commissioned new music to be written, retaining original lyricists Betty Comden and Adolph Green. Viewers familiar with the original Bernstein score expressed disappointment that the music had been excised. One man in the Pacific Palisades preview wrote, "Where was best music in stage play?" Another man at the same theatre insisted, "Make more movies of stage shows but use original scores." Howard Strickling, First Report of First Preview of *On the Town*, 9 September 1949, 15, 16, AFC, Box 17, Folder 1: "On the Town Arthur Freed Collection." For more on the film's production, see Fordin, *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals*, Chapter 8, quotation from 258.

just a mere entertainer. Though such an insinuation was laden with cultural snobbery, it nonetheless revealed the very real artistic hierarchies at work in the 1950s. Audiences expected Kelly's dancing to match the working-class image he had always cultivated and championed. They could accept him dressed up as a George M. Cohan figure, executing a playful tap routine to the music of the iconic American composer George Gershwin, as he did in the "American in Paris Ballet" years earlier. But as the tragic Pierrot, or as a sailor prancing about a cartoon world, he seemed strained and pretentious.

Indeed, critical responses to the film confirmed that Kelly had over-reached and left his audience behind. It is true that many reviewers genuinely enjoyed the film, particularly those in the foreign press, whose praise for the film far outweighed that of their American counterparts. In Zurich, where the film premiered in April of 1956, reviews were overwhelmingly and unequivocally laudatory.¹¹² In West Berlin the picture took the grand prize at the city's film festival in July of 1956.¹¹³ According to one account, "Invitation Dance most sensational gala opening film for any Berlin festival since inception six years ago. 2000 top personalities and officials in soldout [audience] ... Applauded 34 times during performance and for minutes at the end."¹¹⁴ And in England *Invitation* was received quite

¹¹² Examples of foreign reviews include: "A Picture Takes New Roads: 'Invitation to the Dance'," *Wochenblaetter*, 21 April 1956, typed translated transcript; Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Film & Radio*, 7 April 1956, typed translated transcript; and Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Schweizer Familie*, 21 April 1956, typed translated transcript, all taken from GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: "'Invitation to the Dance' Files etc," Sub-folder A.

¹¹³ Jerry Wald to Arthur Freed, Holograph note with unidentifiable clipping attached, 3 July 1956, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): "Invitation to the Dance #1605."

¹¹⁴ E. Lapinere to Gene Kelly, Typed signed letter, 27 June 1956, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: "'Invitation to the Dance' Files etc," Sub-folder A.

auspiciously at the Edinburgh Festival that August, where thousands, including members of the Royal Family, flocked to see the film.¹¹⁵

Yet, despite the warm reception, the London press nonetheless voiced concern about the film's limited potential. *Punch* praised the film, but ended rather ominously: "In short, the whole programme is variously entertaining, but has to be *actively* appreciated. It is not for the vast majority of moviegoers who judge a film by the ease with which they can 'lose themselves' in it." The *Queen's* review was equally mixed. While the anonymous writer appreciated Kelly's efforts, it was felt that those efforts fell a bit short. England's *Monthly Film Bulletin* was far harsher when it bitingly commented that, "If it finally disappoints, the reasons must be attributed to its creator's failure to say anything really new or significant in an admittedly difficult *genre*."¹¹⁶

Both trade journals and the popular press in America echoed the foreign press and test audiences in their qualified praise for *Invitation*. *Motion Picture Daily* and *The Hollywood Reporter*, for instance, cautioned the film would only do well in art houses.¹¹⁷ Mrs. Louis L. Bucklin, Preview Editor for *National Parent-Teacher Magazine*, meanwhile, found the film to be excellent, quoting a student reviewer as saying, "The most imaginatively produced

¹¹⁵ Telegram from Blum in London to Robert Vogel in New York. Vogel, in turn, sent the telegram to Messrs. J. Cohn, A. Freed, J. Houseman, K. MacKenna, E. Mannix, D. Schary, C. Reagan, M. Schenck, H. Strickling, B. Thau, L. Weingarten, 22 August 1956, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): "Invitation to the Dance #1605."

¹¹⁶ Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Punch*, 9 September 1956, n.p., GKC, Box 18, Envelope of press clippings mailed from Arthur P. Jacobs Co. in London on 24 September 1956; Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Queen*, 18 September 1956, n.p., GKC, Box 18, Envelope of press clippings mailed from Arthur P. Jacobs Co. in London on 24 September 1956; and J. G., Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* 23, no. 273 (October 1956): 126.

¹¹⁷ Jack Eden, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Motion Picture Daily*, 15 May 1956, n.p., PCAR, Folder: "Invitation to the Dance [Loew's, 1955];" and Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Hollywood Reporter*, 15 May 1956, 3, PCAR, Folder: "Invitation to the Dance [Loew's, 1955]." Examples of positive and unqualified reviews include Rose Pelswick, "'Invitation to the Dance': All Dance, Pantomime; No Dialogue—Brilliant" (review), *New York Journal American*, 23 May 1956, 21, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: "'Invitation to the Dance' Files etc," Sub-folder A; and Justin Gilbert, "'Invitation to Dance' Sheer Enjoyment" (review), *New York Daily Mirror*, 23 May 1956, 2A, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: "'Invitation to the Dance' Files etc," Sub-folder A.

picture I have ever seen.” But, she continued, “At the same he [the student reviewer] cautioned that the film might seem a little slow to those who do not care for the dance.” Still other reviews accused *Invitation* for not living up to its artistic intentions. As Philip T. Hatung noted in *Commonweal*, “No doubt Gene Kelly had a brilliant idea when he decided to make an entire film in the dance medium; however, between the idea and the reality, between the conception and the creation, fell several shadows.”¹¹⁸ *Dance Magazine*’s Arthur Knight jeered, “One admires his intentions, but it is disturbing to realize that Kelly himself is apparently unaware of his own limitations.”¹¹⁹ Likewise several journalists pointed out that Kelly was a hooper, not a classical ballet dancer. “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ is something that Gene must have wanted to do in the worst way,” Wanda Hale told readers of the *New York Daily News*. “Now, since this arty experiment is out of his system, I hope he will leave the selection of his vehicles to MGM...”¹²⁰

Many American reviewers disliked the film altogether; there were a striking number of wholly negative notices, a rare occurrence for a Freed musical. *New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther found the film “gaudy,” “banal,” unsophisticated, concluding, “it would have been more commendable if Mr. Kelly had been more fertile with ideas and less inclined

¹¹⁸ Mrs. Louis L. Bucklin, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *National Parent-Teacher* 51, no. 1 (September 1956): 39; Philip T. Hatung, “Save me the Waltz” (review of *Invitation to the Dance*), *Commonweal* 64, no. 9 (1 June 1956): 225.

¹¹⁹ Arthur Knight, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Dance Magazine* 30 (June 1956): 16. Knight found Kelly’s performance a sub par attempt at recreating Jean Louis Barrault’s style. An anonymous female member of a Beverly Hills preview audience echoed Knight, scribbling accusingly, “First scene of Gene Kelly in ‘Circus’ is a direct steal from Jean Louis Barrault’s pantomime in ‘Children of Paradise’. What nerve!” Howard Strickling, First Report of Second Preview for *Invitation to the Dance*, 7 July 1955, 3, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

¹²⁰ Wanda Hale, “Gene Kelly’s Dance Film Opens at Plaza” (review), *New York Daily News*, 23 May 1956, 15C, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc,” Sub-folder A. Archer Winsten of the *New York Post* reiterated this sentiment: “Now that he’s gotten that out of his system, he can get back to what he does much better, namely, performing as character or dancer.” Archer Winsten, “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ at Plaza” (review), *New York Post*, 23 May 1956, 74, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc,” Sub-folder A.

to overdo.” Robert Kass of *Catholic World* ruefully remarked that *Invitation* was “a promising idea, executed without courage or imagination.” *Saturday Review*’s Hollis Alpert repeated these sentiments, pointing out that “Circus” only underscored the “embarrassing mediocrity of the director, choreographer, and chief pantomimist.” He found “Ring Around the Rosy” “Waste, sheer waste,” while “Sinbad the Sailor” seemed trite and uninspired.

Alpert finished his review rather harshly:

I was left with the feeling that this director and choreographer had only second-rate and derivative ideas for so potentially exciting an undertaking, and that he may well lack the proper respect for the skilled and fully qualified people he employed as co-workers. Ironically, they all, unwittingly, show up the limitations of Mr. Kelly as dancer, too. I’m afraid it’s back to the practice-bar for him.

Robert Hatch of *The Nation* shared this sentiment, lamenting Kelly to be “a dancer of prodigious monotony and a choreographer who takes instant fire from the obvious. His *Invitation to the Dance*, about which we have been hearing rumors for years, is, large, resplendent, self-confident and almost empty.”¹²¹

Ultimately, *Invitation to the Dance* was bound by the limits of art in America. Kelly aimed to challenge the prevailing cultural hierarchies at the time that relegated ballet to highbrow art and tap to the world of middle- and lowbrow culture. As he explained to readers of *Seventeen Magazine* in 1955: “it isn’t necessary to get arty or highbrow—but neither is it necessary to make concessions and do things that have been done before.”¹²² He eschewed dominant categories, seeking instead to blend ballet with pantomime, jazzy

¹²¹ Bosley Crowther, “Screen: Twinkle-Toes: Gene Kelly Performs in All-Dance Film” (review), *New York Times* 23 May 1956, 35, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc.,” Sub-folder A; Robert Kass, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Catholic World* 183 (July 1956): 306; Hollis Alpert, “SR Goes to the Movies” (review of *Invitation to the Dance*), *Saturday Review* 39 (26 May 1956): 25; and Robert Hatch, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *The Nation* 182, no. 23 (9 June 1956): 497.

¹²² Gene Kelly, “Come and Trip It...,” *Seventeen Magazine* (December 1955): 131, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3: “Invitation to the Dance.”

modern dancing, and the “nonsense and fun” of a child’s cartoon.¹²³ But unlike Disney’s hippopotamus-ballerinas from *Fantasia*’s 1940 “Dance of the Hours” (led by the austere Leopold Stokowski, who appeared alongside Mickey Mouse, no less!), Kelly’s attempt to blend high and low art was a fusion in the worst sense, a diluting of culture that the elite saw through and the masses would not sit through.¹²⁴

He was not the only one who attempted to stretch and redefine the boundaries of art in the postwar period. Jackson Pollock, whose enormous drip paintings first became famous in the late 1940s, ushered in abstract expressionism, which he held to be a commentary on the postmodern world as well as an “expression of freedom” and a celebration of the individual. While he eschewed the standard conventions of the American art world, he was unable to remain on its fringes. Like the Beats who adopted an outsider’s stance on 1950s mass consumerist culture, the painter was championed by the very mainstream culture he sought to critique. In October 1948 he was featured in *LIFE* magazine, and the following year the magazine positioned him as “the Greatest Living Painter in the United States.”¹²⁵ As a disaffected artist, Pollock was disinterested in winning wide appeal, in contrast to Kelly, who constantly sought the widest audience possible. Kelly wanted his art—a blend of elite and “lower” forms—to be popular with the masses. His work was certainly not *avant-garde*,

¹²³ Gene Kelly, “Come and Trip It...,” *Seventeen Magazine* (December 1955): 78, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3: “Invitation to the Dance.”

¹²⁴ “Dance of the Hours” (1876), composed by Amilcare Ponchielli, was an ideal target for cultural blurring. In 1967 Allan Sherman used it for his “Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh” spoof.

¹²⁵ Erika Doss, “The Art of Cultural Politics: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism,” in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 198, 216; and Andrew Perchuk, “Pollock and Postwar Masculinity,” in *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation*, eds. Andrew Perchuk and Helaine Posner (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 32. Ed Harris’ Academy Award winning 2000 film, *Pollock*, provides an excellent and fairly accurate account of Pollock’s life and art.

like Pollock's, or even *Fantasia*, but *Invitation to the Dance* was not fully popular either. It was *in-between* art to be sure, and perhaps that helps explain its limited potential.

As production problems accrued and delay upon delay built up long after the editing was complete, Kelly grew increasingly despondent. He would only make four more musicals for MGM after this; three of which he filmed concurrently with *Invitation*.¹²⁶ He continued making dramatic pictures, but increasingly moved behind the camera. His heart, it seemed, was no longer devoted to making musicals. Or perhaps his dreams had remained the same but the genre had moved on without him. The undeniable failure of *Invitation to the Dance*, in terms of production and reception, was a failure of the most personal kind; when reviewers attacked the film, they attacked him.¹²⁷

Invitation to the Dance underscores the problems in trying to transform highbrow art into popular culture in the postwar period. While the musical was an unusually creative picture for the era, Metro never gave it a chance, so fearful were executives of its potential commercial failure. The MGM slogan—*ars gratia artis*—belied the commercial nature of filmmaking. But if postwar art was to be relevant it had to be widely disseminated, and to be widely disseminated, it could not deviate too far beyond the realm of acceptable cultural tastes.-

Though Kelly was always keenly aware of the commercial demands of moviemaking, he had dreamed of a film of endless artistic possibilities. But as this project proved, art was

¹²⁶ *Brigadoon* (1954), *Deep in My Heart* (1954), and *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955), though he only made a brief appearance, dancing with brother Fred in one number, in *Deep in My Heart*. His final MGM musical was Cole Porter's *Les Girls* (1957).

¹²⁷ On the film's impact on his career, see Sheryl Flatow, "Through a Lens Brightly," *Ballet News* 6, no. 10 (April 1985): 38, GKC, Box 12, no folder and Rudy Behlmer, "Gene Kelly," typed manuscript with holographic corrections by Gene Kelly, 7 August 1963, was intended for publishing *Films in Review*, p 25-26, GKC, Box 3, Folder 12: "Biographical Material."

not an infinite creative outlet for individuals; there were very real limits placed on imagination, whether the limits were financial or cultural. On a more figurative level, Kelly's dream—as articulated in the film itself, most notably in the third sequence, “Sinbad the Sailor”—was a lesson in the power of and restrictions on postwar dream-making in general. “Sinbad” functioned as a series of interlocking dreams; the production of which reminds us that even private dreams have their limits, some of which are self-imposed. But “Sinbad” also reveals the undeniable potential cinematic dances pose for our own dreams. We would expect that the normal rules of the world, such as those of time, space, and gravity, might not apply in a fantastical cartoon world. But, in Kelly's dream world, not even *he* is bound by those rules. While far fewer postwar Americans had the privilege to watch *Invitation to the Dance* than *An American in Paris*, Kelly's all-dance picture is nonetheless an important testament to what song-and-dance could offer.

The Dancing Dream: The Fantastical Possibilities in “Sinbad the Sailor”

“Sinbad the Sailor,” the most fantastical of *Invitation's* three acts, chronicles the adventures of the American sailor “Joe Sinbad from Pittsburgh, Pa.”¹²⁸ It begins with Carol Haney sitting cross-legged in front of a blue screen as the fabled Scheherazade. Against the haunting strains of Rimsky-Korsakov's solo violin “punctuated by rolled chords on the harp”—Scheherazade's *leitmotif*—she moves her arms and contorts her torso, beckoning her audience toward her as she begins to read from *The Arabian Nights*.¹²⁹ The scene dissolves

¹²⁸ Gene Kelly, Plot Synopsis for *Invitation to the Dance* Cartoon Number “Sinbad the Sailor,” Typed Script, 12 August 1953, 1, MGMC, Folder 6: “Invitation to the Dance.” All other plot descriptions come from the actual film in the author's collection unless otherwise specified

¹²⁹ Maiko Kawabata, “The Narrating Voice in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Shekherazade*,” *Women and Music* 4 (2000), 20. My own musical descriptions have been guided by Nikolay Rimksy-Korsakov, *Scheherazade*, op. 35, New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein, Reissue of 1959 recording, Sony Classical SMK 60737 and Nikolay

into a Baghdad marketplace, where we meet Sinbad (Kelly). While shopping he recovers Aladdin's lamp and unleashes a boy-genie (David Kasday). The genie shrinks the two down in size and, like Alice through the rabbit hole, they leap into a cartoon picture book. Here Sinbad battles a dragon in a diamond field before being captured by the Sultan's guards. The Sultan's daughter pleads for Sinbad's life, and the two fall in love, but not before Sinbad outwits, or rather, out-dances the palace guards. I would like to focus my discussion on two key elements of this piece—Roger Edens' adaptation of the original orchestration and the fantasy-within-the-fantasy *pas de deux* Kelly performs with the cartoon princess.

Edens' butchering of Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestral suite, which critics generally applauded, is rife with problems.¹³⁰ Beyond the visibly gross artistic license he adopts, in which he not only unravels Rimsky-Korsakov's narrative structure but introduces completely new and unrelated musical lines, Edens plays around with national identity and gender in his version. While he reifies the Orientalist flavor of the original score, he also submits that music to a process of Americanization and masculinization. The original suite consisted of four movements, each a different story from *The Arabian Nights*—"The Sea and Sinbad's Ship"; "The Kalendar Prince"; "The Young Prince and the Young Princess"; and "Festival at Baghdad, the Sea, the Shipwreck, Conclusion." The violin of Scheherazade's *leitmotif* constituted her voice, tying each of the movements together. As Rimsky-Korsakov

Rimsky-Korsakov, *Scheherazade Op. 35 Symphonic Suite for Orchestra*, Dover Miniature Scores (Mineola, New York: Dover, 1999).

¹³⁰ See, for instance, Arthur Knight, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Dance Magazine*, 30 (June 1956): 17; Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Hollywood Reporter*, 15 May 1956, 3, PCAR, Folder: "Invitation to the Dance [Loew's, 1955];" J.G., Review of *Invitation to the Dance/The Magic Lamp*, *Monthly Film Bulletin* (BFI) 23, no. 273 (October 1956): 126.

explained, the violin solo functioned as “the unifying thread ... delineating Scheherazada herself as telling her wondrous tales to the stern Sultan.”¹³¹

To be sure, the orchestral piece, like Bizet’s *Carmen*, was problematic in its vision of the East. As a Russian nationalist composer, one who fused classical European traditions with Russian folk music, Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade* suite was undeniably Orientalist in its composition. He intended this piece to be “a kaleidoscope of fairy-tale images and designs of Oriental character ... [The] hearer ... should carry away the impression that this is beyond doubt an Oriental narrative of some numerous and varied fairy-tale wonders and not merely four pieces played one after the other and composed on the basis of themes common to all four movements.”¹³² This was not the composer’s only foray into Arabian themes, as Gerald Abraham reminds us.¹³³ But, that fascination with the Orient was positioned firmly in the West, as Rimsky-Korsakov employed only traditional Western instruments, meters of time, and keys to tell his version of *The Arabian Nights*.¹³⁴ Thus, this orchestral piece is told through Western eyes, expressing longing, desire—a fetishization of the East.

¹³¹ Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life*, Originally published 1909, Translated from the fifth revised Russian edition by Judah A. Joffe, Edited with an introduction by Carl van Vechten (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), 292.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 293, 194. On Rimsky-Korsakov’s place in Russian music, see Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 81-86. See also Victor I. Seroff, *The Mighty Five: The Cradle of Russian National Music* (New York: Allen, Towne & Heath, 1948); and M. Montagu-Nathan, *A History of Russian Music: Being an Account of the Rise and Progress of Composers, with a Survey of their Lives and a Description of their Works*, 2d. rev ed. (New York: Biblio & Tannen, 1969), Chapter 8, 179-236.

¹³³ Gerald Abraham, *Essays on Russian and East European Music* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985), Chapter 6: “Arab Melodies in Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin,” 93-98.

¹³⁴ Specifically, he used piccolos, flutes, oboes, an English horn, clarinets, bassoons, horns, trumpets, trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (triangle, cymbals, tambourine, snare drum, bass drum, tamtam), harp, violins, violas, cellos, and basses. Instrumentation listed in Rimsky-Korsakov, *Scheherazade Op. 35*, Dover Miniature Score, n.p.

Scheherazade's violin theme, in fact, is "seductive and mobile, hard to pin down, undulating melodically and harmonically, and suspending or taking up time."¹³⁵

Edens builds on this Orientalist foundation by adding further Arabian flair. In the bazaar, Sinbad accidentally stumbles into a kooch tent, at which point Edens introduces a new theme, one that approximates the sort of music most Americans probably associated with belly dancing as popularized in other cartoons and films. He briefly revisits this theme, when Kelly eludes a dragon in the sparkling cartoon "Valley of the Diamonds"—a dazzling fusion of image and sound where flutes and harp punctuate the glistening of the precious gems.¹³⁶ In his attempt to help Sinbad escape from the dragon, the boy-genie tames the beast, lulling it into a trance. The dragon begins to dance, pulling a veil over its mouth as its eyes grow elongated with thick, curly lashes, becoming a clearly-marked female, modeled after Carol Haney.¹³⁷ The genie's playing inscribes a decidedly Orientalist femininity on the dragon. This gendering is further emphasized by the dragon's movements, which parallel the belly dancer from the Baghdad market. Edens repeats his earlier musical diversion, though this time it is a far jazzier variation combining his new theme with modern riffs on Rimsky-Korsakov's original. In both instances, Edens blends a sultry minor clarinet with heavy percussion to produce a new motif in line with Americans' perceptions of Eastern music.

Just as Edens draws upon an imagined sound of the East, Kelly infuses the segment with an Orientalist texture. The harem women and palace guards, as Kelly envisioned them, are "dressed, or should I say, drawn in ancient Persian outfits just as you'd see them on any

¹³⁵ Kawabata, "The Narrating Voice in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Shekherazade*," 29.

¹³⁶ Kelly, Plot Synopsis for *Invitation to the Dance* Cartoon Number "Sinbad the Sailor," 2.

¹³⁷ Haney modeled for the "hepcat dragon" in addition to one of the harem girls in the Sultan's palace. "250,000 Individual Drawings were Required for Unique Cartoon Episode of M-G-M's 'Invitation to the Dance'," M-G-M Press Book for *Invitation to the Dance*, 1957, 2, PBC, no folder.

illustrated page of the ‘Arabian Nights.’ The two identical guards have long, over-exaggerated moustaches down to their belts and no eyes. The hyperbole continues as they explain the sailor’s attempted theft of diamonds to the short, rotund Sultan. Edens relies here on muted brass, inflected with lilting flutes, to simulate their shouting, while a series of Arabic-looking characters mixed with Western symbols (exclamation points, stars) appear in cartoon-bubble form over their heads, though the letters are improperly formed from left to right.¹³⁸

The guards, of course, are an approximation, a caricature, as Kelly’s 1953 plot synopsis reminds us: the Persian harem, for instance, is not real, but “our conception of it.”¹³⁹ Rather than try to make this look and sound authentic (as *Carmen Jones* and *The King and I* attempt), Edens’ reliance on non-Persian music, and Kelly’s use of cartoons, emphasize the fantastic qualities of the story. This is not real, they inform us, but rather a cartoon dream world where dragons can become belly dancers, guards can become inanimate balls, and a single kiss can transform time and space. The fantastical images enhance the ways in which Edens fetishizes the original orchestral piece, forcing the audience to hear its exotica through American ears.

Despite such fetishization, Edens’ efforts to Americanize Rimsky-Korsakov’s suite far outweigh his Orientalist-inflected adaptation. The MGM arranger abandons much of the original score, mixing up the movements and introducing a wholly new theme, which I have labeled Kelly’s *leitmotif*. It is a light, playful melody in no way insinuated by any of

¹³⁸ As Kelly envisioned it: “The two guards state vociferously Sinbad’s crime of taking the diamond and we do this by having their mouths moving as if they’re shouting, with humorous effects from cacophonous noises in the orchestra. As the same time, just as in a comic strip, we see Arabic letters and phrases appearing to shot [*sic*] from their mouths up over their heads.” Kelly, Plot Synopsis for *Invitation to the Dance* Cartoon Number “Sinbad the Sailor,” 3.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

Rimsky-Korsakov's themes. It consists of alternating bassoon, oboe, and trombone solos before clarinets, flutes, saxophones, strings and percussion take over. And it is in a very danceable 3/4 meter, a time measurement never used in the original score. Edens relies on this theme three times in "Sinbad." We hear it for the first time when we meet the sailor in the marketplace (the belly dancer's motif only briefly interrupts his *leitmotif*). We next hear this new theme when Kelly and the boy-genie, who has been refashioned into a smaller version of Sinbad complete with white sailor uniform and hat, perform a charming soft-shoe tap routine, playfully mirroring each other's movements.¹⁴⁰ And finally, its strains return when Kelly, the genie, and the Sultan's daughter, likewise refashioned into an American WAC, exit the palace in the final frame of the film. The suite originally concluded with Scheherazade's theme, intermixed with a "half-slumbering" Sultan's thematic recapitulation, signaling her triumph over him.¹⁴¹ But Edens chooses to forgo this finale in favor of Kelly's *leitmotif*, emphasizing his centrality to the sequence while gesturing towards the creative role Kelly played in bringing the cartoon to life.

Kelly's *leitmotif* is thus the major recurring tonal theme of the thirty-minute segment, supplanting the original violin and harp which Rimsky-Korsakov had woven throughout his four movements to signify the narrative frame Scheherazade's voice supplied.¹⁴² She is no longer the central character of the story; Kelly—as the American protagonist—is the main figure both visually and tonally. Edens thereby succeeds in transforming the original Russian

¹⁴⁰ This scene is a contrasting parallel to some of Kelly's more strenuous homosocial sailor dances, as in his routines with Frank Sinatra in *Anchors Aweigh* (1945) as well as his trios in *On the Town* (1949) and *It's Always Fair Weather* (1955), though in the latter he played a G.I., not a sailor. Additional comparisons might be made to his duets with Donald O'Connor in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952).

¹⁴¹ Kawabata, "The Narrating Voice in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Shekherazade* ," 32.

¹⁴² For an excellent analysis of the musical narrative voice, see Kawabata, "The Narrating Voice in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Shekherazade* ," 18-39.

suite into an American one. Unlike his adaptation of George Gershwin's "An American in Paris," in which he made only minimal changes for the 1951 ballet, Edens drastically alters Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* to transform it into an American song. He employs American instruments, particularly the saxophone, which had not been used in the original suite, and American styles, most notably jazz.¹⁴³

Edens' efforts to Americanize the music are matched by Kelly's attempts to infuse American visual markers into "Sinbad the Sailor." Firstly, he Americanizes both the Sultan's daughter and the genie. Unlike most versions of *Aladdin's Lamp*, this genie is not an all-powerful man, but a sweet, smiling child, "dressed exactly like any of the adult genies we've come to know through our fairy stories." As Kelly's first wish, he remakes the genie in his own image in every detail.¹⁴⁴ The boy is now a smaller version of Kelly, a wholly Americanized genie and, perhaps, a projection of Kelly's inner child. If Kelly was, in the words of Rick Altman, an eternal clown, then it was a childish clown who often preferred the company of kids to adults, as his ensuing dance with the genie confirms.¹⁴⁵ And, even more importantly, he injects American tap dancing throughout the thirty-minute sequence, which most often intersects with Edens' American-styled composition. In this way, Kelly Americanizes the stories of *The Arabian Nights* as much as Edens Americanizes its music.

¹⁴³ And as the iconic American composer George Gershwin informed us in 1918, "the real American folk song is a rag/ a little jazz." "The Real American Folk Song (Is a Rag)" was George and Ira Gershwin's first collaboration. Philip Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley: A History of America's Greatest Lyricists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 127-128.

¹⁴⁴ Kelly's plot synopsis makes no mention of the genie's reconfiguration as an American sailor. Kelly, Plot Synopsis for *Invitation to the Dance* Cartoon Number "Sinbad the Sailor," 1.

¹⁴⁵ Consider his various dances with children in *Anchors Aweigh* (1945) and *An American in Paris* (1951). Had he not broken his ankle and appeared in *Easter Parade* (1948), he would have appeared opposite a little boy there as well. Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 54-58.

Gender, likewise, becomes something with which to play, and Edens, along with cartoonists Hanna Barbera and Fred Quimby, re-gender elements of the story. Most notably, Edens abandons Rimsky-Korsakov's violin/harp solo, which connoted Scheherazade's voice. The violin, long associated with women's voices, functioned as the narrating persona who "gives the illusion of insinuating herself, of casting herself as a character within the tale." Maiko Kawabata suggests that each of the violin solos throughout the four movements "has a distinctive musical signature, something in the nature of a calling card: in other words, she seems to be 'speaking' in the first person."¹⁴⁶ With the exception of Carol Haney's opening sequence, Edens transfers Scheherazade's theme to the boy-genie.

Each time the boy plays his musical instrument—first to tame a snake, then the dragon, and then finally the palace guards—it is with her *leitmotif*. But Edens switches the instrumentation, choosing a clarinet instead of a violin, and thereby silencing, if not wholly erasing, Scheherazade from the story. The melody, wrenched away from Scheherazade, thus becomes associated with the genie. And the genie, if not a literal projection of Kelly's desire to remain a child, is at the very least a miniature facsimile of Kelly. The clarinet line becomes, in effect, a representation of Kelly's voice. This, coupled with the Kelly *leitmotif*, transforms *Scheherazade* into a masculine orchestral piece.

Read in this context, the boy-genie's taming of the dragon takes on even greater significance. The use of a clarinet in lieu of the traditional violin/harp masculinizes the main musical line, but also reinscribes femininity with the dragon's metamorphosis from a genderless monster to a flirty female lizard who is no longer a threat to Kelly. Originally, the violin-as-Scheharazade inserts itself throughout the suite to assert her "empowerment"—not

¹⁴⁶ Kawabata, "The Narrating Voice in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Shekherazade*," 23, 29, 37.

simply narratively over the Sultan—weaving throughout and dominating the other themes of the four movements.¹⁴⁷ The use of a clarinet transforms the female voice of the original storyteller into the male voice of the cartoon sequence’s protagonist. It then uses this male voice to tame and dominate the genderless dragon by mapping gender onto it and transforming the dragon into an acquiescent female. Thus Edens relocates power, centering it firmly on Gene Kelly and thereby radically altering the original flavor of the suite.

But despite all of the changes Roger Edens introduces, Rimsky-Korsakov’s orchestration was still the ideal selection of music for the cartoon fantasy. In describing the kaleidoscope-structure the Russian composer crafted, Kawabata notes, “This is the beauty of *Shekherazade*; we come away from it knowing that we have experienced something, though we are not quite sure what, as in a dream.” It was, in her words, an “indeterminate” suite in which musical events unfold neither linearly nor teleologically. The suite, though based off of four tales from *The Arabian Nights*, actually draws upon many other narrative possibilities (sub-plots or “sideshadows”). *Scheherazade*, while a musical narrative, is cyclical and uncertain; “we know that Shekherazade has saved herself when the piece ends as it began, with her recitative,” but the details of how she has accomplished this matter less than the actual outcome.¹⁴⁸ It is a highly impressionistic piece, though it largely predates the Impressionism school of music to which Rimsky-Korsakov did not belong.¹⁴⁹

What Rimsky-Korsakov/Edens achieve aurally, Kelly accomplishes visually, forging a space where the boundaries of dance, like those of a dream or of twilight fading, are fuzzy

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

¹⁴⁹ For a succinct overview of Impressionist music, see Margery Halford, ed., *Debussy: An Introduction to His Piano Music*, 2d edition (New York: Alfred Publishing Co., 1991), 2-7.

and full of possibilities. Indeed, when the genie lulls the palace guards into a trance, they dance rather than sleep. As the genie plays Scheherazade's theme on his instrument, time is suspended for the guards, affecting the same outcome as the original violin solo, lending a sense of infinity to the overall piece.¹⁵⁰ Their dance is a waking dream, the urge to move their bodies drives them, though they are unaware of what they are actually doing, thereby enabling Sinbad's escape. Along these lines, but even more telling, is Kelly's *pas de deux* with the cartoon princess, a dream-within-a dream.

Sinbad and the princess, whose yellow dress is an odd mixture of Eastern and Western garb, begin dancing in the soft twilight outside of the palace as Edens introduces, with very little variation, Rimsky-Korsakov's third movement, "The Young Prince and the Young Princess," a tender violin and winds *Andantino quasi allegretto* in 6/8.¹⁵¹ The two whirl around in each other's arms, until a single kiss transforms their world. The cartoon fantasy of the Sultan's Palace gives way to another—and even more fantastic—dreamworld. Night becomes day. The regal palace becomes a bucolic hillside of pastel pinks and purples and blues, with flower petals and leaves blowing in the wind. The two leap through fields, dance on lily pads, swing through the air on vines. As the cartoon girl moves, she uses the wind to manipulate her yellow veil, which is not simply an extension of her own dancing body, but in many ways becomes a third dancer in the sequence.¹⁵² Time and space and gravity no longer seem to matter, as Kelly dances in slow-motion, seemingly suspended in mid-air. As the sequence concludes, the two roll around in the grass, until they are lying next to each other with arms extended, as if they had been making angels in the snow. The

¹⁵⁰ Kawabata, "The Narrating Voice in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Shekherazade*," 32.

¹⁵¹ Rimsky-Korsakov, *Scheherazade Op. 35*, Dover Miniature Score, 95.

¹⁵² This is reminiscent of Cyd Charisse's veil dance from *Singin' in the Rain*'s "Broadway Melody."

embedded dream world dissolves back into the nighttime world of the palace. The two maintain their positions, arms extended, but are now standing side by side. Just as they are about to kiss again, the two guards, no longer under the genie's spell, grab Kelly.

In this sequence, dance is capable of disrupting time, space, and even movement. Here Edens has chosen to retain Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestration with only minimal changes, maintaining the sense of time (or lack of time) that pervades the entire suite. The sense of unending, suspended time is matched by the sparse cartoon backgrounds Barbera and Quimby provide. Hillsides are implied, rather than fully delineated, with minimal sketching. Images are suggested rather than formally defined. And colors, too, are pale and limited, unlike the vibrancy of the palace. The muted pastels enhance the sense of infinity, since there are no focal points in the background; indeed, there is no sense of distance to be overcome.¹⁵³ Images are fluid, scenes melt from one location to another: first a country hillside, then a lily pond, and finally cliffs linked by clinging vines.

Then, too, the animation, combined with Kelly's use of trick photography, enhances the boundless feel of the sequence. He employs slow motion to provide the illusion of his being suspended in mid-air.¹⁵⁴ With the use of the camera, he is able to defy gravity, much as cartoon characters can. The princess likewise transcends laws of movement; unlike a live dancer, she can sustain *pirouettes* and remain balanced on the toes of one foot for seemingly unending periods of time. Thus, the music, *mise-en-scène* (or *mise en abîme*), images, and

¹⁵³ Though this is a cartoon, the sparse background can be compared to the yellow backdrop of the live action "Miss Turnstiles Ballet" from *On the Town* (1949), which "conveys the feeling of infinity." "Breakdown of Musical Numbers from 'On the Town'," Typescript, n.d., 2, AFC, Box 56, Folder 2 (of 4): "On the Town Arthur Freed Collection."

¹⁵⁴ Of course, he was not the first to incorporate such techniques. Fred Astaire relied on slow motion for his dance with Ginger Rogers in the dream sequence "I Used to Be Color Blind" in *Carefree* (RKO, 1938), which was filmed without cuts or edits. In "Steppin' Out with My Baby," from *Easter Parade* (1948), Astaire performs in slow-motion while the chorus behind him continues to dance in normal time. John Mueller, *Astaire Dancing: The Musical Films* (New York: Wings Books, 1985), 144, 282.

dancing all converge to produce a seamless impression of timelessness, which produces an undulating sense of longing. This is not simply the narrative longing between two lovers; the driving desire of this segment suggests a larger yearning for release. As Arthur Knight described it in 1956:

It is obvious that the possibilities of working in this fantasy medium sparked his [Kelly's] imagination far more than dance itself, and he responded with marvelous inventions in the jazz idiom that he knows best. The duet, performed against a cartooned hillside, for example, recalls very strongly his *Almost Like Being in Love* routine from *Brigadoon*—but with a freedom and release impossible in a realistic, three dimensional setting. With settings that are little more than the sketchiest of sketches, Kelly is able—and willing—to throw conventional restraints to the winds.¹⁵⁵

Like the “American in Paris Ballet,” Kelly here chases a somewhat elusive dream. But where the dream had been Lise, it is now a less tangible, less articulate, vision. It is the hope to be unrestrained—not just unfettered from the financial demands of picture-making or of popular (if not limited) conceptions of art—but to be free from the demands of the so-called “real world.” To play, to leap, to fly through the air without regard for landing, these urges were part of Kelly’s larger yearning to be himself, to express himself in everyday life the way he only could while dancing. This desire is not a mere longing to escape postwar expectations and limitations, but a hope of fundamentally altering and rendering powerless the boundaries of everyday life.

The extra-lingual qualities of this sequence, and *Invitation to the Dance* as a whole, further enable the transcendence of everyday life. Without using a single spoken word, Kelly combines pantomime, bodily movement, dance, and music to tell multiple, and at times overlapping, stories. As he saw it, “Dancing is such a universal art form that anyone at any

¹⁵⁵ Arthur Knight, Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Dance Magazine*, 30 (June 1956): 80.

age can feel it and understand it. Everyone in the world moves and feels; all people watching *Invitation to the Dance* in India or Japan will understand it just as clearly as the people in London or Pittsburgh.”¹⁵⁶ And earlier, in 1952 while still in production, Kelly wrote to his fans: “With no dialogue there’ll be no language barriers. Dancing, after all, is an international language ... I don’t miss the dialogue too much anyway. I feel just as comfortable dancing as I do talking.”¹⁵⁷ Indeed, Kelly’s film rendered national and linguistic boundaries irrelevant, as critics and even audience members echoed.¹⁵⁸ One man pointed out that the picture “should have a big foreign market since there is no language barrier.”¹⁵⁹

More importantly, dance, as opposed to spoken language, often enabled the articulation of dreams and desires in a society that policed the boundaries of self-expression. In the political realm, red-baiting witch hunters put Americans on guard, while Hollywood’s Production Code Administration, in its final years of power, still managed to exert influence and authority over filmmakers. The PCA monitored every script and every lyric before production could even begin. To disregard PCA approval would prove a near-impossible barrier for exhibition. *Invitation to the Dance* found itself in a unique position precisely because it did not contain spoken language. But the PCA did not overlook the film completely, and in fact expressed great concern over the inclusion of a prostitute as one of

¹⁵⁶ Gene Kelly, “Come and Trip It...,” *Seventeen Magazine* (December 1955): 131, AFC, Box 14, Folder 3: “Invitation to the Dance.”

¹⁵⁷ Gene Kelly, “Kelly Sends Dance ‘Invitation’ From Paris,” *Los Angeles Mirror*, 14 October 1952, n.p., GKC, Box 10, Scrapbook 9 (1952-1955).

¹⁵⁸ See, e.g., Archer Winsten, “‘Invitation to Dance’ at Plaza,” (review), *New York Post*, 23 May 1956, 74, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc,” Sub-folder A.

¹⁵⁹ Strickling, First Report of Second Preview of *Invitation to the Dance*, 7. Interestingly, two audience members, a man and a woman, thought the film would be improved with the addition of dialogue. See Strickling, First Report of First Preview of *Invitation to the Dance*, 10 and Strickling, First Report of Second Preview of *Invitation to the Dance*, 3, respectively.

the characters in “Ring Around the Rosy.”¹⁶⁰ Reviewing the final prints, the PCA likewise insisted on the elimination of certain dance sequences that were believed to be unnecessarily provocative.¹⁶¹ Ultimately, however, the PCA conceded that, without actual spoken language, there was not much that could be done. As Robert Vogel relayed back to Dore Schary, “RING AROUND THE ROSY was screened by the full board. They felt that the entire story is a Code violation because it deals with a series of adulterous affairs. They felt that it can be overlooked because it is a dance sequence and therefore somewhat indirect and also because it is buried in the overall picture.”¹⁶²

Ultimately, then, dance afforded Kelly—and others—a certain freedom not possible in everyday life. What could not be said *directly* with words, whether because of moral or political restrictions, could be suggested *indirectly* with the body.¹⁶³ Yearnings not in step

¹⁶⁰ R. Monta to Arthur Freed cc: Messrs. Dore Schary, E.J. Mannix, Kenneth MacKenna, Signed memo, 17 July 1952, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.” At the opening of “Ring” each character is introduced with a title; the PCA insisted that the title of “prostitute/ girl on the street” (Tamara Toumanova) be changed to the more ambiguous “girl on the stairs.” She was not allowed to be shown soliciting men for sex. See Robert Vogel to Arthur Freed, Signed memo, 28 February 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.” Interestingly, many reviewers called her a prostitute or streetwalker, as in the case of Bosley Crowther, “Screen: Twinkle-Toes: Gene Kelly Performs in All-Dance Film” (review), *New York Times* 23 May 1956, 35, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc.,” Sub-folder A; “ ‘Invitation’ Artistic with Limited Audience Appeal” (review), *The Hollywood Reporter*, 15 May 1956, 3, PCAR, Folder: “Invitation to the Dance [Loew’s, 1955];” and Archer Winsten, “ ‘Invitation to Dance’ at Plaza,” (review), *New York Post*, 23 May 1956, 74, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc.” Sub-folder A.

¹⁶¹ Robert Vogel to Mr. Dore Schary, Signed memo (copy), 22 February 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.” When the PCA lent its final approval on the film six days later, their report indicated that neither adultery nor illicit sex was “an element in the picture.” PCA, Analysis of Film Content for Invitation to the Dance (typed report), 28 February 1955, 4, PCAR, Folder: “Invitation to the Dance [Loew’s, 1955].”

¹⁶² Robert Vogel to Mr. Dore Schary, Signed memo (copy), 22 February 1955, AFC, Box 14, Folder 2 (1 of 2): “Invitation to the Dance #1605.”

¹⁶³ Julia L. Foulkes, *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Jane C. Desmond, ed., *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001). For more general approaches to body history, see Roy Porter, “History of the Body,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1991), 206-232; Caroline Bynum, “Why All the Fuss about the Body?” in *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, eds. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 241-280; and

with mainstream values could be explored safely through dance. Dancing dreams, such as Kelly's *pas de deux* with the cartoon princess, were relatively blanketed from the probing eyes of those in power. And audiences might have sensed this possible outlet. Such moments of fantasy opened up the opportunity for viewers to project their own secret dreams onto the celluloid ones that danced before them. Longings and desires could be articulated indirectly *vis-à-vis* Kelly's and the cartoon's dancing bodies. Scheherazade's voice had been silenced, but another one had opened up, as captured in the genie's *leitmotif*. Dance was transformative, creating the indeterminate boundaries of dreams in and out of which the palace guards, Kelly, the princess—and by implication the audience—drifted. Of course, Kelly insisted that this dreamworld be a decidedly American, and masculine-dominated, space, which fit with his later Omnibus show.

In Kelly's dance numbers, viewers are active participants through the camera's eye: "the camera joins in the dance," becoming "a co-dancer."¹⁶⁴ And if the camera's eye functions as the audience's eye, then spectators dance along with Kelly. Following this logic, audiences could map their own desires, however fantastic and unrealistic, onto Kelly's dream-within-a-dream *pas de deux*. But just as Kelly and the princess are wrenched out of their bucolic fantasy, so too are moviegoers ripped away from theirs when the lights come up and the curtain descends. "The spectator 'wakes up' " from the "dream ballet, actual dreams,

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1977).

¹⁶⁴ Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Schweizer Familie*, 21 April 1956, typed translated transcript, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: " 'Invitation to the Dance' Files etc," Sub-folder A; Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 11 April 1956, typed translated transcript, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: " 'Invitation to the Dance' Files etc," Sub-folder A.

and the experience of the film itself,” as Jane Feuer observes.¹⁶⁵ The spell of the spectacle is finally broken, reality is not far behind.

And yet, critics and audiences seemed uncertain about this need for fantasy and release. While many reviewers and audiences applauded the cartoon as creative, the “dessert” of the film, and “A dancer’s dream..!” just as many felt it to be “vulgar,” unending, and gimmicky.¹⁶⁶ Several preview audience members expressed their disappointment with this dance, and with the cartoon princess in particular. One woman in the June 1955 preview noted that, “It would have been so very much more attractive if the girl had been real” while a man at the same screening complained, “The girl in Sinbad should have been live—where was Carol Haney?” A second man at this preview remarked thoughtfully, if not a little hesitatingly, “ ‘Sinbad’ was simply charming—Kelly’s dances with the guards and especially with the little feminine character in yellow were simply perfection. I did feel though, that her becoming a WAVE dated it and injected a note of realism that seemed to spoil the ending a bit.”¹⁶⁷

The fundamental musical formula is, at its heart, unrealistic in its movement between diegesis and song. Yet postwar audiences accepted this convention as real and natural. Even fantasy numbers were permissible, as long as they could be explained narratively. Because *Invitation* lacked an overall coherence, not to mention dialogue, it could only insinuate such an explanation for the cartoon *pas de deux*. And thus, many audience members were

¹⁶⁵ Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 76.

¹⁶⁶ Wanda Hale, “Gene Kelly’s Dance Film Opens at Plaza” (review), *New York Daily News*, 23 May 1956, 15C, GKC, Box 2, Folder 6: “ ‘Invitation to the Dance’ Files etc,” Sub-folder A; Strickling, First Report of First Preview of *Invitation to the Dance*, 9 (female); Review of *Invitation to the Dance*, Truth (London), 14 September 1956, n.p., GKC, Box 18, Envelope mailed from the Arthur P. Jacobs Co. in London 24 September 1956: “Invitation to the Dance Reviews;” Strickling, First Report of First Preview of *Invitation to the Dance*, 10 (male).

¹⁶⁷ Strickling, First Report of First Preview of *Invitation to the Dance*, 4, 12.

uncomfortable with the dream-within-a-dream dance.¹⁶⁸ The audience's lack of complicity in tolerating the dance's conventions pointed to the film's overall failure. Dream cine-dances were not limitless in their possibilities. Just as box office demands and Hollywood executives constricted Kelly's artistic *carte blanche*, fantasy spectacles likewise needed to please the public if they were to be successful. In the final analysis, *Invitation to the Dance* highlights the ways in which commercial limits could collide with artistic possibilities—spectacles were sites of resistance and freedom, but they were not boundless spaces. No matter how fantastical, they could never be removed fully from reality, as the cartoon *pas de deux* confirms. And postwar audiences seemed content, if not complacent, with established generic formulas; spectacles that strayed too far from the norm could be scrutinized in ways that eerily paralleled early Cold War life.

Conclusion: The Social Function of (Artistic) Fantasy

Ultimately, despite all of its limitations, *Invitation to the Dance* reveals the power and potential that dream dances, indeed all spectacles, offered postwar Americans. Dancing could defy the very laws of nature. It enabled performers to momentarily step out of their gender roles, if not their gendered bodies, as both Gene Kelly and Judy Garland demonstrated. Likewise, dance highlighted the mutability of the seemingly-fixed category of race, as “The Small House of Uncle Thomas” from *The King and I* revealed. Space, time, and even place became irrelevant in dances; a Hollywood backlot could be transformed into

¹⁶⁸ Or, in the words of Richard Griffith, “However high or beautifully a dancer leaps, he is pulled back to earth. But in film, with its complete control of space and time, he may float at will above us all. A dream come true? It proved the opposite. For when the pull of gravity is no longer felt by the audience, felt almost kinesthetically, the achievement of the dancer too is no longer felt and the drama of the dance goes flat.” Richard Griffith, “The Cinema of Gene Kelly” (Booklet to accompany the MoMA's showing of Kelly's films) (New York: Museum of Modern Art Film Library, 1962), 4. Compare this to the fantastical “Pirate Ballet” discussed in Chapter Two.

the South Pacific, while camera manipulation enabled dancers to suspend themselves in mid-air or dance on the ceiling.¹⁶⁹

With the laws of nature no longer applicable, spectacles were spaces of immense possibilities. Dances and songs—even those with lyrics, as Garland’s ironic and caustic deliveries remind us—could be used to articulate, however indirectly, what could otherwise not be spoken in Cold War America. When the rules of reality faded away, the fantastic became perfectly plausible. And, to borrow from Cole Porter, in a world where fantasy is the only reliable reality, anything goes.

But spectacles did not simply offer a release or escape from everyday life. Their unraveling of space, time, place, gender, race—the stuff of identity—engendered a radical refashioning of the self, both of the physical body (face paint alters a black woman into a Tonkinese woman) and inner desires. In a consumerist-driven mass culture, musicals—themselves seemingly a conservative form of mass art—could provide avenues for individuals to challenge predominant norms, from heterosexual marriage, to monogamy, to segregation and racism. Just as fantasy spectacles constituted literal breaks from the film’s narratives, so too were they breaks from the realities and demands of postwar life.

Indeed, with the rapidity of a costume change in a lavish production number, spectacles, like other art forms, could enable radical self-refashioning, however fleeting. While there were undeniable limits to what was possible, spectacles nonetheless provided a model for the type of private, individual rebellion so common in the fifties, and so commonly overlooked and forgotten with the explosion of mass youth protests in the sixties. Though a slave to the box office, and trapped in the gender, sexual, and racial categories of its day,

¹⁶⁹ Fred Astaire in “You’re All the World to Me” from *Royal Wedding* (1951).

postwar musicals offered an alternative to audiences, even as song-and-dance routines outwardly celebrated mainstream conservative values—the sanctity of the nuclear family, the superiority of American democracy, the triumph of capitalism. It was an alternative that could step outside of these traps, even for just a moment, to imagine a world of different, and endless, possibilities.

Epilogue

Beyond the Fifties

Though the Golden Age of the Hollywood musical has long since passed, the genre has more or less persevered with Disney films and teen pics, Broadway adaptations, and even the occasional original musical. One has only to recall the stunning success of recent Broadway adaptations such as *Chicago* (2002) and *Dream Girls* (2006), both of which were highly acclaimed box office hits and multiple award winners. Conversely, an increasing number of Hollywood movies, like *The Producers* or *Urban Cowboy*, have been transferred to Broadway, while a series of shows based on song catalogs, such as Abba's *Mama Mia*, have likewise made their way to the stage. The synergistic relationship between Broadway, Hollywood, and the recording industry might have shifted, but the fundamental connections have remained relatively in tact.

And yet, the contemporary Hollywood musical does not enjoy the primacy it did fifty years ago for important structural and aesthetic reasons. When the U.S. Supreme Court handed down the *Paramount Decrees* in 1948, it ordered that studios divorce themselves from their exhibition and distribution arms. In effect, the ruling ended the Studio System that had been an ideal breeding ground for musicals. Under the old system, studios such as MGM maintained a coterie of musical talent from composers and lyricists, to choreographers and performers—not unlike a summer stock company. But without long-term contracts

available, it became too expensive an undertaking to nurture and develop players.¹ Rising production costs throughout the 1950s, coupled with diminishing box office receipts, compounded these problems, making musicals an ideal target for foundering studios looking to cut costs.²

Additionally, the Production Code's gradual demise and ultimate obliteration in 1966 changed moviegoers' expectations. Where filmmakers once had to rely on insinuation and double meanings to avoid censorship, they could suddenly and explicitly say—and show—a great deal more, from drug addiction to sex. Musical, which had incorporated indirect messages in their spectacles, perhaps were no longer needed in an era of more direct communication. And with the post-1960 explosion of youth protests and the rise of personal politics, there were seemingly endless avenues for self-expression suddenly available. Problems no longer were nameless; armed with a newfound language, American audiences no longer needed fantasies to re-imagine possibilities for individual and social change.

On an even more abstract level, the diminishment of the Hollywood musical beyond the postwar period might be explained by a change in aesthetic tastes. With the introduction of *film noir* after the Second World War, the transplantation of Stanislavsky-inspired Method acting in Hollywood in the early 1950s, and a grittier approach to filmmaking, audiences clamored for more realistic portrayals of everyday life. While postwar moviegoers still accepted the conventions of the musical genre, particularly the transition from speech to

¹ Broadway actress Nanette Fabray, who appeared in Vincente Minnelli's *The Band Wagon* (1953) with Fred Astaire drew a direct connection between the end of studio contracts and the end of the classic musical. Nanette Fabray, interview by Gene Rayburn, n.d., typed transcript with holo. corrections, 1-2, HRC, Box 6, Folder 7: "Research Material: Transcript of Interview with Nanette Fabray by Gene Rayburn."

² Jane Feuer, who links the end of the musical's golden age to the demise of the old studio system, muses that, "What seemed to die out in the mid-1950s was the energy at the heart of the great MGM musicals, an energy based on faith in the power of singing and dancing connected with an almost religious belief in Hollywood itself as the great inheritor of the spirit of musical entertainment." *The Hollywood Musical*, 2d. ed. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993), 87-88.

song, they increasingly asked for more realism in their spectacles, as the responses to Gene Kelly's *pas de deux* in "Sinbad the Sailor" indicated.

But something changed after the 1950s. American audiences began to reject the very conventions of the genre. It no longer seemed plausible for characters to suddenly burst into song or execute a perfectly timed dance routine while strolling down an empty city street.³ Filmmakers responded, curtailing the overtly fantasy-laden spectacles so popular in the earlier postwar period. By the turn-of-the-century, filmmakers no longer trusted their audiences to accept the genre, as reflected in the dismembered approach Rob Marshall adopted when filming the song-and-dance routines of *Chicago*.⁴ The audience had changed, leaving the Hollywood musical behind.

³ Ironically, Feuer notes that the audience's increasing familiarity with the musical's conventions caused them to grow bored with the genre, forcing filmmakers to find new approaches. *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴ In contrast, *Moulin Rouge* (2001) is an ideal homage to the classic Hollywood musical, with its DeLuxe colors, (anachronistic) blend of contemporary and classical music, and reliance on special camerawork.

Filmography

- An American in Paris*. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by Vincente Minnelli. Color, 113 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1951. DVD. Author's Collection.
- Anchors Aweigh*. Produced by Joe Pasternak. Directed by George Sidney. Color, 140 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1945. Videocassette. Author's Collection.
- Babes in Arms*. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by Busby Berkeley. Black and white, 97 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939. Videocassette. Author's Collection.
- Carmen: A Hip Hopera*. Produced by Michael Elliot and Loretha Jones. Directed by Robert Townsend. Color, 88 min. MTV Productions/New Line Cinema, 2001. DVD Rented.
- Carmen Jones*. Produced and directed by Otto Preminger. Color, 105 min. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1954. DVD. Author's Collection.
- Cover Girl*. Produced by Arthur Schwartz. Directed by Charles Vidor. Color, 105 min. Columbia, 1944. Videocassette. MRC.
- "Dancing: A Man's Game." Produced by Robert Saudek. Directed by Gene Kelly. Black and white, 55 min. WNBC-TV Omnibus, 21 December 1958. 16 mm digital reel. MTR.
- Easter Parade*. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by Charles Walters. Color, 103 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1948. DVD. Author's Collection.
- For Me and My Gal*. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by Busby Berkeley. Black-and-White, 104 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1942. Videocassette. Author's Collection.
- The Harvey Girls*. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by George Sidney. Color, 104 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1946. Videocassette. MRC.
- I Could Go on Singing*. Produced by Stuart Millar and Laurence Turman. Directed by Robert Neame. Color, 99 min. United Artists, 1963. Videocassette. MRC.
- In the Good Old Summertime*. Produced by Joe Pasternak. Directed by Robert Z. Leonard. Color, 102 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1949. Videocassette. Author's Collection.
- Introducing Dorothy Dandridge*. Produced by Larry Y. Albucher. Directed by Martha Coolidge. Color, 115 min. HBO Home Video/HBO Pictures, 1999. DVD. Rented.
- Invitation to the Dance*. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by Gene Kelly. Color, 92 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1956. Videocassette. Author's Collection.

It's Always Fair Weather. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen. Color, 101 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1955. Videocassette. Author's Collection.

The Jazz Singer. Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck. Directed by Alan Crosland. Black and White, 89 min. Warner Bros., 1927. Videocassette. Author's Collection.

Jolson Sings Again. Produced by Sidney Buchman. Directed by Henry Levin. Color, 96 min. Columbia, 1949. DVD. Acquired through UNC Inter-library Borrowing.

The Jolson Story. Produced by Sidney Skolsky. Directed by Alfred E. Green. Color, 128 min. Columbia, 1946. Videocassette. Acquired through UNC Inter-library Borrowing.

The King and I. Produced by Charles Brackett. Directed by Walter Lang. Color, 133 min. 20th Century-Fox, 1956. DVD. Author's Collection.

Love Finds Andy Hardy. Directed by George B. Seitz. Black and white, 82 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1938. Videocassette. MRC.

Meet Me in St. Louis. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by Vincente Minnelli, Color, 113 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1944. DVD. Author's Collection.

On the Town. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen. Color, 98 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1949. Videocassette. Author's Collection.

Pinky. Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck. Directed by Elia Kazan. Black and white, 102 min. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1949. Videocassette. MRC.

The Pirate. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by Vincente Minnelli. Color, 102 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1948. Videocassette. Author's Collection.

The Red Shoes. Produced and Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. Color, 133 min. Independent Producers/The Archers (UK), 1948. Videocassette. Author's collection.

Rhapsody in Blue. Produced by Jesse L. Lasky. Directed by Irving Rapper. Color, 139 min. Warner Bros., 1945. Videocassette. Acquired through UNC Inter-library Borrowing.

Show Boat. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by George Sidney. Color, 108 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1951. Videocassette. Author's Collection.

Singin' in the Rain. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen. Color, 103 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952. DVD. Author's Collection.

South Pacific. Produced by Buddy Adler. Directed by Joshua Logan. Color, 171 min. Magna/20th Century- Fox, 1958. Videocassette. Author's Collection.

A Star is Born. Produced by Sidney Luft. Directed by George Cukor. Color, 176 min. Warner Bros., 1954, restored/reconstructed 1983. DVD. Author's Collection.

Summer Stock. Produced by Joe Pasternak. Directed by Charles Walters. Color, 108 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1950. Videocassette. Author's Collection.

Sunset Boulevard. Produced by Charles Brackett. Directed by Billy Wilder. Black and White, 110 min. Paramount, 1950. Videocassette. MRC.

That's Entertainment! Produced and Directed by Jack Haley, Jr. Color, 131 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1974. Videocassette. Author's Collection.

Till the Clouds Roll By. Produced by Arthur Freed. Directed by Richard Whorf and Vincente Minnelli (George Sidney uncredited). Color, 137 min. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1946. Videocassette. MRC.

Bibliography

- Abraham, Gerald. "Arab Melodies in Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin." In *Essays on Russian and East European Music*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985.
- Alexander, Karen. "Fatal Beauties: Black Women in Hollywood." In *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill, 45-54. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Allen, Robert C. *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- Altman, Rick. *The American Film Musical*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- _____, ed. *Genre: The Musical*. London: Routledge/British Film Institute, 1981.
- American Masters: Judy Garland: By Myself*. Produced and directed by Susan Lacy. Color, 114 min. Thirteen/WNET New York (PBS), 2004. DVD. Author's Collection. Included in the two-disc special edition of *Easter Parade*.
- Anderson, Marian. *My Lord, What a Morning*. With an introduction by Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Viking Press, 1956. Reprint, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.
- Artis, David. "Swing, Judy Garland and All That Jazz." *The Black Scholar* 21, no. 4 (1991): 30-34.
- Austin, Bruce A. *Immediate Seating: A Look at Movie Audiences*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1988.
- Austin, William W. "Susanna," "Jeanie," and "The Old Folks at Home": *The Songs of Stephen C. Foster from His Time to Ours*, 2d ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.
- Babington, Bruce and Peter William Evans. *Blue Skies and Silver Linings: Aspects of the Hollywood Musical*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985.
- Balanchine, George. *Choreography: A Catalogue of Works*. New York: Viking, 1984.
- Balio, Tino. *The American Film Industry*. Rev. ed. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.
- Banner, Lois. "A Perverse Tribute to Hollywood's Past: *Sunset Boulevard*." In *Hollywood's America: United States History Through Its Films*, eds. Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts, 203-209. St. James, New York: Brandywine Press, 1993.

- Baron, Ava. "On Looking at Men: Masculinity and the Making of a Gendered Working-Class History." In *Feminists Revision History*, ed. Ann-Louise Shapiro, 146-171. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994.
- Barrios, Richard. *A Song in the Dark: The Birth of the Musical Film*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Barson, Michael and Steven Heller. *Red Scared! The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated and edited by H.M. Parshley. New York: Knopf, 1953.
- Bederman, Gail. *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Beidler, Philip D. "South Pacific and American Remembering; or, 'Josh, We're Going to Buy This Son of a Bitch!'" *Journal of American Studies* (Special Issue: American Art and Music) 27, no. 3 (December 1993): 207-222.
- Belton, John. *American Cinema/American Culture*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1994.
- Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. New York: Pantheon, 1988.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Pax American: The Case of Show Boat." In *Cultural Institutions of the Novel*, eds. Deidre Lynch and William B. Warner, 399-422. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996.
- Bernardi, Daniel, ed. *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996.
- _____, ed. *Classic Hollywood: Classic Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Bernardoni, James. *George Cukor: A Critical Study and Filmography*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 1985.
- Bernstein, Matthew and Gaylyn Studlar, eds. *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997.
- Biskind, Peter. *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*. New York: Pantheon, 1983. Reprint, New York: First Owl Books, 2000.
- Black, Gregory D. *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

- _____. *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Block, Geoffrey. "The Broadway Canon From Show Boat to West Side Story and the European Operatic Ideal." *The Journal of Musicology* 11, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 531-532.
- Bock, Gisela. "Equality and Difference in National Socialist Racism." In *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott, 267-290. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Bonnell, Victoria E. and Lynn Hunt. *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Bordo, Susan. *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.
- Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- Boyd, Herb with Ray Robinson II. *Pound for Pound: A Biography of Sugar Ray Robinson*. New York: Amistad/HarperCollins, 2005.
- Boyer, Paul S. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and American Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. New York: Pantheon, 1985.
- Breines, Wini. "The 'Other' Fifties: Beats and Bad Girls," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz, 382-408. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.
- Broadway: The American Musical* (PBS Documentary). Directed by Michael Kantor. Color, 360 min. Ghost Light Films, 2004. Videocassette. Author's Collection.
- Brogdan, Robert. *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.
- Buckle, Richard in collaboration with John Taras. *George Balanchine: Ballet Master, A Biography*. New York: Random House, 1988.
- Burgess, Anthony, trans. Introduction to *Carmen: An Opera in Four Acts*. Music by Georges Bizet, Libretto by H. Meilhac and L. Halévy, based on the story by Prosper Mérimée. London: Hutchinson, 1986.

- Burt, Ramsay. *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- _____. "Dissolving in Pleasure: The Threat of the Queer Male Dancing Body." In *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond, 209-241. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th Anniversary Edition. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Byars, Jackie. *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- Bynum, Caroline. "Why All the Fuss about the Body?" In *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, eds. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, 241-280. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Cahn, Susan K. "From the 'Muscle Moll' to the 'Butch' Ballplayer: Mannishness, Lesbianism, and Homophobia in U.S. Women's Sport." *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 343-364.
- Carey, Gary. *All the Stars in Heaven: Louis B. Mayer's M-G-M*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981.
- Carter, Paul A. *Another Part of the Fifties*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Casper, Joseph Andrew. *Stanley Donen*. Filmmakers Series, ed. Anthony Slide, no. 5. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983.
- Ceplair, Larry and Steven Englund. *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-60*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.
- Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*. New York: BasicBooks, 1994.
- Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978.
- Clark, Robert L.A. "Local Color: The Representation of Race in *Carmen* and *Carmen Jones*." In *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries*, eds. Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Downing A. Thomas, 217-239. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006.
- Clarke, Gerald. *Get Happy: The Life of Judy Garland*. New York: Random House, 2000.
- Clover, Carol J. "Dancin' in the Rain." In *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan, 157-173. London: Routledge, 2005.

- Cogley, John. *Report on Blacklisting: Movies*. New York: Arno Press & *The New York Times*, 1972.
- Cohan, Steven. “‘Feminizing’ the Song-and-Dance Man: Fred Astaire and the Spectacle of Masculinity in the Hollywood Musical.” In *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, 46-69. London: Routledge, 1993.
- _____. *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- _____. “Dancing with Balls in the 1940s: Sissies, Sailors and the Camp Masculinity of Gene Kelly.” In *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Phil Powrie, Ann Davies and Bruce Babington, 18-33. London: Wallflower Press, 2004.
- _____, ed. *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Collins, Jim. “Toward Defining a Matrix of the Musical Comedy: The Place of the Spectator Within the Textual Mechanisms.” In *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman, 134-146. London: Routledge/British Film Institute, 1981.
- Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books, 1992, 2000.
- Corber, Richard J. *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993.
- _____. *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Couvares, Francis G. “Hollywood, Main Street, and the Church: Trying to Censor the Movies Before the Production Code.” *American Quarterly* 44, no. 4, Special Issue: Hollywood, Censorship, and American Culture (December 1992): 584-616.
- _____, ed., *Movie Censorship and American Culture*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.
- Crawford, Richard. *America’s Musical Life: A History*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001.

- Cripps, Thomas R. "The Myth of the Southern Box Office: A Factor in Racial Stereotyping in American Movies, 1920-1940." In *The Black Experience in America: Selected Essays*, eds. James C. Curtis and Lewis L. Gould, 116-144. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970.
- Crowther, Bosley. *The Lion's Share: The Story of an Entertainment Empire*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1957.
- Cuordileone, K. A. "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960." *Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (Sept 2000): 515-545.
- _____. *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Currid, Brian. "'Ain't I People?': Voicing National Fantasy." In *Music and the Racial Imagination*, eds. Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman, 113-144. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- _____. "Judy Garland's American Drag." *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 46, no. 1 (2001): 123-33.
- Dandridge, Dorothy and Earl Conrad. *Everything and Nothing: The Dorothy Dandridge Tragedy*. New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1970. Reprint, New York: Perennial/HarperCollins, 2000.
- Davies, Ann. "High and Low Culture: Bizet's *Carmen* and the Cinema." In *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film*, eds. Phil Powrie and Robunn Stilwell, 46-56. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006.
- D'Emilio, John. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*. 2d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London: Verso Books, 1996.
- Desmond, Jane C., ed. *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.
- Deutsch, Didier C. Liner Notes for *On the Town* Featuring Members of the Original Cast. Reissue of 1959 Recording. Columbia Broadway Masters/Sony 60538.
- Dixon, Wheeler Winston. *Lost in the Fifties: Recovering Phantom Hollywood*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005.

- Doherty, Thomas. *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*. Rev ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002.
- _____. *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Donaldson, Laura E. "The King and I in Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, On the Borders of the Women's Room." In *Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender, and Empire-Building*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Doss, Erika. "The Art of Cultural Politics: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism." In *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*, ed. Lary May, 195-220. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1977.
- Drury, Allen. *Advise and Consent*. New York: Doubleday, 1959.
- Dudziak, Mary L. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Dunne, John Gregory. *The Studio*. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux 1969. Reprint, New York: Vintage, 1998.
- Dyer, Richard. *Stars*. London: British Film Institute, 1979, 1998.
- _____. "Entertainment and Utopia." In *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman, 175-189. London: Routledge/BFI, 1981.
- _____. "A Star is Born and the Construction of Authenticity." In *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill, 132-140. London: Routledge, 1991.
- _____. *Only Entertainment*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- _____. "'I seem to find the happiness I seek': Heterosexuality and Dance in the Musical." In *Dance, Gender and Culture*, ed. Helen Thomas, 49-65. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- _____. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 2d. ed. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1983.
- Ewen, David. *The Life and Death of Tin Pan Alley: The Golden Age of American Popular Music*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1964.

- Eyman, Scott. *Lion of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.
- Faderman, Lillian. *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Feuer, Jane. "The Theme of Popular vs. Elite Art in The Hollywood Musical." *Journal of Popular Culture* 12, no. 3 (Winter 1978): 491-499.
- _____. "The Self-reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment." In *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman, 159-173. London: Routledge/British Film Institute, 1981.
- _____. *The Hollywood Musical*. 2d ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Fiedler, Leslie. *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*. New York: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1978.
- Figal, Gerald. *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Filene, Peter G. *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities in Modern America*, 3d ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.
- Finch, Christopher. *Rainbow: The Stormy Life of Judy Garland*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1975.
- Fischer, Lucy. "The Image of Woman as Image: The Optical Politics of *Dames*." In *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman, 70-84. London: Routledge/British Film Institute, 1981.
- Fleming, E. J. *The Fixers, Eddie Mannix, Howard Strickling and the MGM Publicity Machine*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2005.
- Fordin, Hugh. *M-G-M's Greatest Musicals: The Arthur Freed Unit*. N.p.: Da Capo Press, 1996. Originally published as *The World of Entertainment! Hollywood's Greatest Musicals*. New York: Doubleday, 1975.
- _____. *Getting to Know Him: A Biography of Oscar Hammerstein II*. New York: Random House, 1977.
- Foreman, Joel, ed. *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997.
- Foss, Peter, ed. *The Music and Lyrics of George & Ira Gershwin*, Special Centenary Edition. London: Warner/Chappell Music Ltd., for Warner Bros. Publications, 1987, 1991, 1998.

- Foster, Susan Leigh. "Closets Full of Dances: Modern Dance's Performance of Masculinity and Sexuality," In *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond, 147-207. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Discourse on Language*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972.
- _____. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage/Random House, 1977.
- _____. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage/Random House, 1978.
- Foulkes, Julia L. "Dance Is for American Men: Ted Shawn and the Intersection of Gender, Sexuality, and Nationalism in the 1930s." In *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond, 113-146. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001.
- _____. *Modern Bodies: Dance and American Modernism from Martha Graham to Alvin Ailey*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Franklin, John Hope. "Birth of a Nation—Propaganda as History." In *Hollywood's America: United States History Through Its Films*, eds. Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts, 42-52. St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1993.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1963. Reprint, New York, Laurel/Dell, 1983.
- Freedman, Jonathan and Richard Millington, eds. *Hitchcock's America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Fuller, Karla Rae. "Creatures of Good and Evil: Caucasian Portrayals of the Chinese and Japanese during World War II." In *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, ed. Daniel Bernardi, 281-300. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Furia, Philip. *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley: A History of America's Great Lyricists*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Gaines, Jane. "Green Like Me." In *Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Gardner, Gerald. *The Censorship Papers: Movie Censorship Letters from the Hays Office, 1934-1968*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co, 1987.

- Garrison, Dee. " 'Our Skirts Gave Them Courage': The Civil Defense Protest Movement in New York City, 1955-1961." In *NOT June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz, 201-226. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.
- Geddes, Donald Porter, ed. *An Analysis of the Kinsey Reports on Sexual Behavior in the Human Male and Female*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1954.
- Genné, Beth Eliot. "The Film Musicals of Vincente Minnelli and the Team of Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen: 1944-1958." Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1984.
- _____. " 'Freedom Incarnate': Jerome Robbins, Gene Kelly, and the Dancing Sailor as an Icon of American Values in World War II." *Dance Chronicle* 24, no. 1 (2001): 83-103.
- Genovese, Eugene D. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World Slaves Made*. New York: Vintage Books, 1972.
- Gerson, Kathleen. *No Man's Land: Men's Changing Commitments to Family and Work*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.
- Gerstner, David Anthony. "Dancer from the Dance: Gene Kelly, Television, and the Beauty of Movement." *The Velvet Light Trap* 49 (Spring 2002): 48-66.
- Gilbert, Tiffany. "American Iconoclast: Carmen Jones and the Revolutionary Divadom of Dorothy Dandridge." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2005): 234-249.
- Giles, Dennis. "Show-making." In *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman, 85-101. London: Routledge/British Film Institute, 1981.
- Gillis, John R. *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Gledhill, Christine, ed. *Stardom: Industry of Desire*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Glenn, Susan A. *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Gomery, Douglas. *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.
- _____. *The Hollywood Studio System: A History*. London: British Film Institute, 2005.
- Gould, Evlyn. *The Fate of Carmen*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996.

- Green, Stanley. *Hollywood Musicals Year by Year*. Milwaukee, Hal Leonard Publishing: 1990.
- Hacker, Helen Mayer. "The New Burdens of Masculinity." *Quarterly Journal of the National Council on Family Relations* 19, no. 3 (August 1957): 227-233.
- Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.
- Halford, Margery, ed. *Debussy: An Introduction to His Piano Music*, 2d ed. New York: Alfred Publishing Co., 1991.
- Halttunen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.
- Hammerstein II, Oscar. *Carmen Jones*, Based on Melhac and Halévy's Adaptation of Prosper Mérimé's *Carmen*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945.
- _____. *Lyrics*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949.
- Hammerstein II, Oscar and Joshua Logan. *South Pacific: A Musical Play*. New York: Random House: 1949.
- Handel, Leo. *Hollywood Looks at its Audience: A Report of Film Audience Research*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950.
- Hansen, Miriam. "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship." *Cinema Journal* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1986): 6-32.
- Hay, Peter. *MGM: When the Lion Roars*. Atlanta: Turner Publishing, Inc., 1991.
- Hemming, Roy. *The Melody Lingers On: The Great Songwriters and Their Movie Musicals*. New York: Newmarket Press, 1986.
- Hendershot, Cyndy. *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2003.
- Henderson, Amy and Dwight Blocker Bowers. *Red, Hot and Blue: A Smithsonian Salute to the American Musical*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.
- Henriksen, Margot A. *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

- Higham, Charles. *Merchant of Dreams: Louis B. Mayer, M.G.M., and the Secret Hollywood*. New York: Donald I. Fine, 1993.
- Hirsch, Foster. *A Method to Their Madness: The History of the Actors Studio*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1984.
- Hirschhorn, Clive. *The Hollywood Musical: Every Hollywood Musical from 1927 to the Present Day*. With forward by Gene Kelly. Rev. ed. London: Octopus Books, 1983.
- _____. *Gene Kelly: A Biography*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984.
- Horne, Marilyn with Jane Scovell. *Marilyn Horne: The Song Continues*. Fort Worth, TX: Baskerville Publishers, 2004.
- Inglis, Ruth A. "Self-Regulation in Operation." In *The American Film Industry*, rev. ed., ed. Tino Balio, 377-400. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. Originally published in *Freedom of the Movies* from the Commission on Freedom of the Press. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947.
- Jackson, Richard, ed. *Stephen Foster Song Book: Original Sheet Music of 40 Songs by Stephen Collins Foster*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1974.
- Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Jennings, Wade. "Nova: Garland in 'A Star is Born'," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 4, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 321-337.
- Jones, John Bush. *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre*. Hanover: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England, 2003.
- Jowitt, Deborah. *Time and the Dancing Image*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- _____. *Jerome Robbins: His Life, His Theater, His Dance*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.
- Kaledin, Eugenia. *Mothers and More: American Women in the 1950s*. Boston: Twayne, 1984.
- Kammen, Michael. *American Culture American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.
- Kasson, John F. *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America*. New York: Noonday/Hill and Wang, 1990.

- _____. "Dances of the Machine in Early Twentieth-Century America." In *A Modern Mosaic: Art and Modernism in the United States*, ed. Townsend Ludington, 153-174. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- _____. *Houdini, Tarzan and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001.
- Kawabata, Maiko. "The Narrating Voice in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Shekherazade*." *Women and Music* 4 (2000): 18-39.
- Kendall, Elizabeth. *Where She Danced*. New York: Knopf, 1979.
- Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky and Madeline D. Davis. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Kern, Jerome and Oscar Hammerstein II. *Show Boat: Original Broadway Score*. London Sinfonietta and Ambrosian Chorus. John McGlinn. Recorded June-August 1987 (London). CDC 7 49108 2 EMI.
- Kimball, Robert and Alfred Simon. *The Gershwins*. New York: Atheneum, 1973.
- Kimmel, Michael S. "Invisible Masculinity: Examining Masculinity in Relation to History and the Social Sciences." *Society* 30, no. 6 (Sept-Oct 1993): 28-36.
- _____. "Consuming Manhood: The Feminization of American Culture and the Recreation of the Male Body, 1832-1920." In *The Male Body: Features, Destinies, Exposures*, ed. Laurence Goldstein, 12-41. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- _____. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.
- Kindel, Holly Gillian. "Judy Garland: Stardom, Resistance and the American Film Musical." M.A. Thesis, San Francisco State University, 1997.
- Kinsey, Alfred C. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948.
- _____. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. Philadelphia: Saunders, 1953.
- Kislan, Richard. *Hoofing on Broadway: A History of Show Dancing*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1987.
- Klein, Christina. *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Kluger, Richard. *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975.

- Knapp, Raymond. *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Knight, Arthur. *Disintegrating the Musical: Black Performance and American Musical Film*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Knox, Donald. *The Magic Factory: How MGM Made An American in Paris*. New York: Praeger, 1973.
- Kobal, John. *Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance: The History of Movie Musicals*. London: Hamlyn, 1971.
- Koppes, Clayton R. and Gregory D. Black. "What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945." In *Hollywood's America: United States History Through Its Films*, eds. Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts, 157-168. St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1993.
- Lambert, Gavin. *On Cukor*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972.
- Lawrence, Greg. *Dance with Demons: The Life of Jerome Robbins*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2001.
- Lears, Jackson. "A Matter of Taste: Corporate Cultural Hegemony in a Mass-Consumption Society." In *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed. Lary May, 38-57. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Leibman, Nina C. *Living Room Lectures: The Fifties Family in Film and Television*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow/ Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Lhamon Jr., W.T. *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- _____. *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990. Reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Lightning, Robert K. "Dorothy Dandridge: Ruminations on Black Stardom." *CineAction* 44 (July 1997): 32-39.
- Lippe, Richard. "Gender and Destiny: George Cukor's *A Star is Born*." *CineAction!* 3/4 (Winter 1986): 46-57.

- Lipsitz, George. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.
- Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Ma, Sheng-mei. "Rodgers and Hammerstein's 'Chopsticks' Musicals." *Literature Film Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2003): 17-26.
- MacKinnon, Kenneth. *Love, Tears, and the Male Spectator*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002.
- Maltby, Richard. *Harmless Entertainment: Hollywood and the Ideology of Consensus*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983.
- Marshall, Bill and Robynn Stilwell, eds. *Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond*. Portland, OR: Intellect, 2000.
- Mast, Gerald. *Can't Help Singin': The American Musical on Stage and Screen*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1987.
- May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War*. Rev. ed. New York: Basic Books, 1999.
- May, Hal, ed. *Contemporary Authors: A Bio-Bibliographical Guide to Current Writers in Fiction, General Nonfiction, Poetry, Journalism, Drama, Motion Pictures, Television, and Other Fields*. Vol. 116. Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1986.
- May, Lary. *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- _____, ed. *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Mayne, Judith. *Cinema and Spectatorship*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- McCann, Graham. *Rebel Males: Clift, Brando, and Dean*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991.
- McConachie, Bruce A. "The 'Oriental' musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the U.S. war in Southeast Asia." *Theatre Journal* 46, no. 3 (October 1994): 385-399.
- Mellencamp, Patricia. "Spectacle and Spectator: Looking Through the American Musical Comedy." *Ciné-Tracts* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 27-35.

- _____. "Sexual Economics: *Gold Diggers of 1933*." In *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan, 65-76. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Meyerowitz, Joanne. "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958." *Journal of American History* 79, no. 4 (March 1993): 1455-1482.
- _____, ed. *NOT June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.
- Michener, James A. *Tales of the South Pacific*. New York: Macmillan, 1946. Reprint, New York: Fawcett/Ballantine, 1984.
- Miller, Keith D. and Emily M. Lewis. "Touchstones, Authorities, and Marian Anderson: The Making of 'I Have a Dream'." In *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement*, eds. Brian Ward and Tony Badger, 147-161. Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1996.
- Mintz, Steven and Randy Roberts. *Hollywood's America: United States History Through Its Films*. St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1993.
- Mizejewski, Linda. *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Modleski, Tania. *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Monder, Eric. *George Sidney: A Bio-Bibliography*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994.
- Montagu-Nathan, M. *A History of Russian Music: Being an Account of the Rise and Progress of Composers, with a Survey of their Lives and a Description of their Works*. 2d. rev ed. New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1969.
- Mordden, Ethan. *The Hollywood Musical*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981.
- _____. *Coming Up Roses: The Broadway Musical in the 1950s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- _____. *Beautiful Mornin': The Broadway Musical in the 1940s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Mosse, George L. *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*. New York: Howard Fertig, 1985.
- Most, Andrea. *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

- Mueller, John. *Astaire Dancing: The Musical Films*. New York: Knopf, 1985.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham. Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1999. Originally published in *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6-18.
- Nadel, Alan. *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Nafisi, Azar. *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*. New York: Random House, 2004.
- Neale, Steve. "Masculinity As Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema." In *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, 9-20. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Neve, Brian. *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Nixon, Marni with Stephen Cole. *I Could Have Sung All Night: My Story*. New York: Billboard Books/ Watson-Guptill Publications, 2006.
- Oates, Joyce Carol. *On Boxing*. With Photographs by John Ranard. Garden City, New York: Dolphin/Doubleday, 1987.
- Olsen, David C., ed. *Songs of Judy Garland*. Vol. 1. Hialeah, Florida: Columbia Pictures Publications, 1984.
- Peiss, Kathy. *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998.
- Perchuk, Andrew. "Pollock and Postwar Masculinity." In *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation*, eds. Andrew Perchuk and Helanie Posner, 31-42. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.
- Petric, Paula. "Capitalists with Rooms: Prostitution in Helena, Montana." *Montana: Journal of Western History* 31, no. 2 (1981): 28-41.
- Polenberg, Richard. *One Nation Divisible: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States since 1938*. New York: Penguin, 1980.
- Porter, Roy. "History of the Body." In *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke, 206-232. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1991.
- "Portrait of a Vertically Integrated Company: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer." In *The American Film Industry*. Rev. ed., ed. Tino Balio, 311-333. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. Originally published in *Fortune* 6 (December 1932): 51-58.

- Powrie, Phil, Ann Davies and Bruce Babington, eds. *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema*. London: Wallflower Press, 2004.
- Putney, Clifford. *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Pye, Douglas. "Being a Clown: Curious Coupling in *The Pirate*." *Cineaction* 63 (2004): 4-13.
- Radway, Janice. "Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies: The Functions of Romance Reading." In *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, eds. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, 465-486. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- _____. *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Raines, Howell. *My Soul is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South*. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1977. Reprint, New York: Penguin, 1983.
- Randall, Richard S. "Censorship: From The Miracle to Deep Throat." In *The American Film Industry*, Rev. ed., ed. Tino Balio, 510-536. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 631-660.
- Riesman, David. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.
- Riis, Thomas L. *Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890-1915*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989.
- Rimsky-Korsakov, Nikolay Andreyevich. *My Musical Life*. Translated from the fifth revised Russian edition by Judah A. Joffe. Edited with an introduction by Carl van Vechten. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1942.
- _____. *Scheherazade*, op. 35. New York Philharmonic, Conductor Leonard Bernstein. Reissue of 1959 Recording. Sony Classical SMK 60737.
- _____. *Scheherazade Op. 35 Symphonic Suite for Orchestra*. Dover Miniature Scores. Mineola, New York: Dover, 1999.
- Rippy, Marguerite H. "Exhuming Dorothy Dandridge: The Black Sex Goddess and Classic Hollywood Cinema." *CineAction* 44 (July 1997): 20-31.

- _____. "Commodity, Tragedy, Desire: Female Sexuality and Blackness in the Iconography of Dorothy Dandridge." In *Classic Hollywood, Classic Whiteness*, ed. Daniel Bernardi, 178-209. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Roberts, Randy. "You Must Remember This: The Case of Hall Wallis' *Casablanca*." In *Hollywood's America: United States History Through Its Films*, eds. Mintz and Roberts, 169-177. St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1993.
- Roffman, Peter and Jim Purdy. "The Red Scare in Hollywood: HUAC and the End of an Era." In *Hollywood's America*, ed. Mintz and Roberts, 195-202. St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1993.
- Rogin, Michael. "Kiss Me Deadly: Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies." In *Ronald Reagan, the Movie, and Other Episodes in Political Demonology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.
- _____. *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants and the Hollywood Melting Pot*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Rose, Sonya O. "Cultural Analysis and Moral Discourses: Episodes, Continuities, and Transformations." In *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, eds. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, 217-238. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Rosen, Ruth. "The Female Generation Gap: Daughters of the Fifties and the Origins of Contemporary American Feminism." In *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays*, eds. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris and Kathryn Kish Sklar, 313-334. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- _____. *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*. New York: Penguin, 2000.
- The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*. Produced and Directed by Connie Field. Color and black and white, 65 min. Clarity Productions, 1980/Direct Cinema Ltd., 1987. Videocassette. MRC.
- Ross, Steven J., ed. *Movies and American Society*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).
- Rotskoff, Lori. *Love on the Rocks: Men, Women, and Alcohol in Post-World War II America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Rotundo, Anthony E. *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.

- Rubin, Joan Shelley. *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon, 1978.
- Schatz, Thomas. *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1981.
- _____. *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.
- Scheurer, Timothy E. "The Aesthetics of Form and Convention in the Movie Musical." *Journal of Popular Film* 3, no. 4 (Fall 1974): 307-324.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." In *Feminism and History*, ed., Joan Wallach Scott, 152-180. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Seroff, Victor I. *The Mighty Five: The Cradle of Russian National Music*. New York: Allen, Towne & Heath, 1948.
- Shaw, Arnold. *Belafonte: An Unauthorized Biography*. Philadelphia: Chilton Company, 1960.
- Sherman, Jane. *The Drama of Denishawn Dance*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1979.
- Shipman, David. *Judy Garland: The Secret Life of an American Legend*. New York: Hyperion, 1992.
- Shumway, David R. "Watching Elvis: The Male Rock Star as Object of the Gaze." In *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons*, ed. Joel Foreman, 124-143. Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Siefert, Marsha. "Image/Music/Voice: Song Dubbing in Hollywood Musicals." *Journal of Communication* 45, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 44-64.
- Sitkoff, Harvard. *The Struggle for Black Equality 1954-1992*. Rev. ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1993.
- Skinner, James M. *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, 1933-1970*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993.
- Sklar, Robert. *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*. New York: Vintage, 1975.

- _____. "‘The Lost Audience’: 1950s Spectatorship and Historical Reception Studies." In *Identifying Hollywood’s Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movie*, eds. Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, 81-92. London: British Film Institute, 1999.
- Skolnick, Arlene. *Embattled Paradise: The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty*. New York: Basic Books, 1991.
- Smith, Jeff. "Black Faces, White Voices: The Politics of Dubbing in *Carmen Jones*." *The Velvet Light Trap* 51 (Spring 2003): 29-41.
- Spence, Mary Lee. "Waitresses in the Trans-Mississippi West: ‘Pretty Waiter Girls,’ Harvey Girls and Union Maids." In *The Women’s West*, eds. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, 219-234. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.
- Spigel, Lynn. *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- _____. *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Stacey, Jackie. *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Staiger, Janet. *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- _____. *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Stempel, Tom. *American Audiences on Movies and Moviegoing*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001.
- Stimson, Blake. "Andy Warhol’s Red Beard." *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 3 (Sept 2001): 527-547.
- Sutton, Martin. "Patterns of Meaning in the Musical." In *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman, 190-96. London: Routledge/British Film Institute, 1981.
- Swordlow, Amy. "Ladies’ Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace versus HUAC." In *Women’s America: Refocusing the Past*, 4th ed., Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart, eds, 493-506. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Originally published in *Feminist Studies* 8 (1982): 493-520.
- Taruskin, Richard. *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

- Tashjian, Dickran. "The Artlessness of American Culture." In *Making America: The Society and Culture of the United States*, ed. Luther S. Luedtke, 162-175. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Telotte, J. P. "Self and Society: Vincente Minnelli and Musical Formula." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 181-193.
- Terry, Walter. *Ted Shawn: Father of American Dance: A Biography*. New York: The Dial Press, 1976.
- Tinkcom, Matthew. "Working Like a Homosexual: Camp Visual Codes and the Labor of Gay Subjects in the MGM Freed Unit." *Cinema Journal* 35, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 24-42.
- _____. *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital, Cinema*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Thomas, Tony. *That's Dancing!* New York: Harry N. Abrams, n.d.
- Toll, Robert C. *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Tuana, Nancy, ed. et al. *Revealing Male Bodies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.
- Turim, Maureen. "Gentlemen Consume Blondes." *Wide Angle* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 52-59.
- Turner, Adrian. *Hollywood 1950s*. New York: Gallery Books, 1986.
- Vaughn, Stephen. "Morality and Entertainment: The Origins of the Motion Picture Production Code." *Journal of American History* 77, no. 1 (June 1990): 39-65.
- Walker, Nancy A. ed. *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- Ward, Brian. *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Weiss, Jessica. *To Have and To Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom and Social Change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Wexman, Virginia Wright. *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and Hollywood Performance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

- Whitfield, Stephen J. *The Culture of the Cold War*. 2d ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Wickberg, Daniel. "Heterosexual White Male: Some Recent Inversions in American Cultural History." *Journal of American History* 92, no. 1 (June 2005): 136-157.
- Williams, Linda. *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White From Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Williamson, Judith. "Woman is an Island: Femininity and Colonization." In *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski, 99-118. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Woll, Allen L. *The Hollywood Musical Goes to War*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1983.
- Wolf, Stacy. *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2002.
- Wood, Ann Douglas. "'The Fashionable Diseases': Women's Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* IV, no. 1 (Summer 1973): 25-52.
- Wood, Marcus. "Curious and Curiouser: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Anna Leonowens, and *The King and I*." *Common-Place* 4, no. 2 (January 2004), n.p.
- Wylie, Philip. *A Generation of Vipers*. Newly annotated by author. New York: Rinehart and Co., 1955.
- Yoshino, Kenji. *Covering: The Hidden Assault on our Civil Rights*. New York: Random House, 2006.
- Yudkoff, Alvin. *Gene Kelly: A Life of Dance and Dreams*. New York: Back Stage Books, 1999.