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'I am a Camera, Subverted' Reflexivity, Sexuality, and Filming Styles in Bob Fosse's *Sweet Charity* (1969), *Cabaret* (1972), and *All That Jazz* (1979)

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**UNIVERSITY OF
PLYMOUTH**

**‘I am a Camera, Subverted’
Reflexivity, Sexuality, and Filming Styles in Bob Fosse’s
Sweet Charity (1969), *Cabaret* (1972), and *All That Jazz* (1979)**

By

Steven Downes

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Research Masters has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

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Abstract

The musical films of Bob Fosse, *Sweet Charity* (1969), *Cabaret* (1972), and *All That Jazz* (1979) offer a radical alternative to the ‘arcadian’ musical format with edgier and darker themes as a response to the rapidly developing socio-political climate and the sexual revolution. However, although *Cabaret* remains well documented, his other musical films *Sweet Charity* and *All That Jazz*, remain primarily neglected in academia, which I will rectify. Moreover, while many prolific writers and scholars, including Laura Mulvey and Rick Altman, have previously analysed the movie and film musical from a heteronormative male gaze perspective, this is at odds with Fosse’s approach to filmmaking, which often subverts such a hypothesis. My line of enquiry consequently developed to explore the link between filming styles and representations of gender and sexuality in Fosse’s films over a ten-year period and observe the various shifts in register. This approach eschews the more bibliographical texts, monographs, and documentaries about Fosse, allowing me to study his films critically from a unique perspective. Using a variety of methodologies and theories, including the social history of art, semiotics, feminism, formalism, and film studies, I will analyse selected case studies where the intersection between filming styles and representations of sexuality are most pertinent/interesting to my central argument. In the process, I will often refer to the terminologies ‘visual reflexivity’ and ‘theatrical reflexivity’ to explore this phenomenon and examine how they interact with gender in *Sweet Charity*, *Cabaret*, and *All That Jazz* through techniques such as film editing and camera angles, as well as performative arts. Furthermore, Fosse’s radical use of cinematic space, including altered states of consciousness, is also explored coinciding with the backstage musicals’ shift from the ‘book musical’ to ‘concept musical’, in line with modern audiences’ expectations and avant-garde approaches to the genre.

Table of Contents

List of Images	vii
Introduction.....	1
<i>Sweet Charity</i> (1969)	15
<i>Cabaret</i> (1972).....	39
<i>All That Jazz</i> (1979).....	67
Conclusion	88
Bibliography/List of Resources	95
Appendices: Images	103

List of Images

- Figure 1: A screenshot from the opening ‘Personal Property’ segment in *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) with Charity Hope Valentine (Shirley MacLaine) and Charlie (Dante di Paolo) in Central Park demonstrating the contrast to the cinematic landscape in *Le Notti di Cabiria* (Federico Fellini, 1957) on which the work is based.
- Figure 2: A screenshot from the opening ‘Personal Property’ segment in *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) with Charity (Shirley MacLaine) and Charlie (Dante di Paolo) in Central Park before he pushes her off Gapstow Bridge.
- Figure 3: A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) illustrating the ‘lens flare’ phenomenon after Charlie (Dante di Paolo) pushes Charity (Shirley MacLaine) into the lake, creating a ‘documentary materialist aesthetic’ towards the end of the ‘Personal Property’ routine.
- Figure 4: A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) with Helene (Paula Kelly), Nickie (Chita Rivera), and Charity (Shirley MacLaine) contemplating their lives while observing themselves in the changing room mirror of the Fandango Ballroom.
- Figure 5: A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) with Helene (Paula Kelly), Nickie (Chita Rivera) and the principal dancers of the Fandango Ballroom performing the musical number ‘Big Spender’.
- Figure 6: A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) demonstrating the atmospheric use of dissolves and visual reflexivity during the ‘Big Spender’ routine.
- Figure 7: A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) with performer Suzanne Charny (centre) surrounded by the ensemble of the Pompeii Club as Charity (Shirley MacLaine) enters a new world in the ‘Rich Man’s Frug’ routine.
- Figure 8: A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) highlighting the film’s psychedelic effects, drawing attention to the visual reflexivity that permeates the production during the ‘Rich Man’s Frug’ number.
- Figure 9: A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) of Oscar (John McMartin) and Charity (Shirley MacLaine) running through the streets of a billboarded New York City as superimposition dominates the cinematic landscape in the ‘Sweet Charity’ number.
- Figure 10: A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) of an emotional Charity (Shirley MacLaine) in a close-up after she is jilted, leading to the ‘Where Am I Going?’ routine.
- Figure 11: A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) illustrating how the technical use of dissolves powerfully contributes to the film’s visual storytelling during ‘Where Am I Going?’ as Charity (Shirley MacLaine) navigates the New York subway.

- Figure 12: A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of the distorted mirror hanging over the stage of the Kit Kat Klub in the film's opening sequence as the titles morph from black and white to Technicolor.
- Figure 13: A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of the master of ceremonies (Joel Grey) in the mirror of the Kit Kat Klub as he breaks the fourth wall convention in the opening 'Willkommen' number.
- Figure 14: A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) illustrating the *tableau vivant* of painter Otto Dix's *Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia Von Harden* (1926) used in the opening 'Willkommen' routine.
- Figure 15: A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) demonstrating the movie's use of cross-cutting as Brian Roberts (Michael York) arrives in Berlin during the opening number 'Willkommen'.
- Figure 16: A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of the lesbian and gay clientele of the Kit Kat Klub during the opening number 'Willkommen'.
- Figure 17: A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of the female impersonator Elke (Ricky Renée) putting on their blonde wig in the dressing room mirror of the Kit Kat Klub during the opening number 'Willkommen'.
- Figure 18: A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of the Kit Kat Klub dancers in the opening number 'Willkommen' and the use of the large mirror looming above the stage.
- Figure 19: A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) with the Emcee (Joel Grey) again breaking the fourth wall convention as he poses between the stockinged legs of one of the dancers at the Kit Kat Klub during the 'Willkommen' routine.
- Figure 20: A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of the Emcee (Joel Grey) flanked by two of the Kit Kat Klub dancers during the 'Two Ladies' routine filmed from the back of the stage and demonstrating the movie's complex blurring of spectatorship and reflexivity.
- Figure 21: A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of the Emcee (Joel Grey) in drag and the Kit Kat Klub dancers during the 'Tiller Girls' routine, a scene juxtaposed with violent scenes of the outside world and Nazism.
- Figure 22: A screenshot of the dream sequence from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) illustrating the backstage area of the Kit Kat Klub as the Emcee (Joel Grey) provocatively fondles the bosom of Sally Bowles (Liza Minnelli) from behind, reflecting the scene's voyeuristic qualities.
- Figure 23: A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of the mirror device in the 'Finale' number and the clientele of the Kit Kat Klub trapped within it.
- Figure 24: A screenshot from *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) of Broadway director Joe Gideon (Roy Scheider) as he announces, 'It's Showtime Folks!' while looking in the mirror and striking an Al Jolson pose.

- Figure 25: A screenshot from *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) of lead performer Sandahl Bergman in the centre of the vast rehearsal studio space surrounded by the ensemble in the 'Take Off With Us' routine.
- Figure 26: A screenshot from *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) of two male dancers in ballet mode during the 'Airotica' segment, demonstrating the film's progressive approach to sexuality.
- Figure 27: A screenshot from *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) as Joe Gideon (Roy Scheider) and his creative team shine torches on the dancers during the 'Airotica' number, creating an atmospheric, Felliniesque effect heightening the sexual ambience.
- Figure 28: A screenshot from *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) of the ensemble as the 'Airotica' routine builds to a climax.
- Figure 29: A screenshot from *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) with Sandahl Bergman in the last moments of the 'Airotica' segment as she appears topless on the scaffold tower surrounded by the dancers who appear to be in a trance.

Introduction

The idiosyncratic *Sweet Charity* (1969), *Cabaret* (1972), and *All That Jazz* (1979) are outstanding examples of the movie musical by visionary director and choreographer Bob Fosse (1927-1987). It is unfortunate, therefore, that time has isolated them from contemporary audiences and that the much-lauded *Cabaret* often eclipses the other works. Furthermore, although the immensely stylish and critically acclaimed 2019 miniseries *Fosse/Verdon* spotlighted Fosse and the complex relationship with his wife, Gwen Verdon (1925-2000), the commercial format failed to explore these films as significant works of art in their own right.¹ Moreover, the painstakingly accurate and affectionately reconstructed reworkings of his iconic dance numbers in the series were missing a significant dynamic, that of Fosse himself.²

Watching the magnificent movie musical *Cabaret* again last year on its 50th anniversary forces me to concede with scholar Rick Altman's opening statement in his seminal book *The American Film Musical* that '[a]s the most complex art form ever devised, the American film musical presents an unprecedented challenge to the critic and historian'.³ This glorious two-folded affirmation finally eschews the clichéd rhetoric that the form is frivolous and inferior escapism and could never be 'thoughtful and meaningful', which Fosse's *Sweet Charity*, *Cabaret*, and *All That Jazz* demonstrate with aplomb.⁴ It also acknowledges that as the film musical is the only medium that has plundered practically every known art and entertainment

¹ The series was based on Sam Wasson's opus, *Fosse: The Bibliography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014); *Fosse/Verdon*, Series 1: *Life is a Cabaret*, directed by Thomas Kail, BBC2, 29 April 2019; *Who's Got The Pain?* directed by Thomas Kail, BBC2, aired 16 April 2019; *Me and My Baby*, directed by Adam Bernstein, BBC2, aired 23 April 2019; *Glory*, directed by Yessica Yu, BBC2, aired 30 April 2019; *Where Am I Going?* directed by Thomas Kail, BBC2, aired 7 May 2019; *All I Care about Is Love*, directed by Minkie Spiro, BBC2, aired 14 May 2019; *Nowadays*, directed by Thomas Kail, BBC2, aired 21 May 2019; *Providence*, directed by Thomas Kail, BBC2, aired 28 May 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/m00077ck/fosseverdon>.

² I refer here to the reconstructions of 'Big Spender' from *Sweet Charity* (1969) in episode one and 'Mein Herr' from *Cabaret* (1972) in episode two of *Fosse/Verdon*, 2019.

³ Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), Preface ix.

⁴ Jeanine Basinger, *The Movie Musical!* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), Ebook, '1. About Musicals'.

form in its creation, including vaudeville, theatre, opera, television, and art, it is a highly ambitious subject for the intrepid historian to tackle adroitly.⁵ My subsequent dilemma was finding an appropriate niche to present the three musical films while encapsulating contemporary issues and my own interests in film and the genre. It became apparent that Fosse's reinterpretation of the musical film was a reaction to numerous factors: societal change, a heightened awareness of sexuality and gender identity, and a fervent interest in filming techniques. Therefore, it is the purpose of this thesis to explore this phenomenon further. Firstly, I offer a brief biography of his life and career, a creative energy that underscores the very foundations of my research.⁶

In a telling and utterly fascinating interview for the BBC in 1984, three years before his death, Fosse confessed to talk show host Terry Wogan that he was raised in a large family in Chicago with three athletic older brothers obsessed with sports and athletics. His interest in theatre and dance began because of a teenage infatuation with a girl he followed one day to a dance class which he then joined. She soon quit the lessons, but Fosse continued and developed his interest and technique in the form.⁷ While studying as a high school student, he also worked late at night in the second-rate burlesque and vaudeville houses leading up to and during World War II in his hometown, themes Fosse later explored in *All That Jazz*.⁸ After graduation, Fosse entered the Navy on 20 June 1945 and was placed in an entertainment unit

⁵ Altman, *American*, Preface ix; Jerome Delamater further corroborates this argument and states that historically '[f]rom its invention the motion picture has incorporated all the other arts' whereby 'theatrical spectacle, narrative fiction (in all its forms), painting and design, dance, and ultimately music into motion pictures came to mean integrating them into the system, making each as viable a filmic code as those codes which had emerged as a result of the technological and stylistic developments of the medium—photography and editing primarily. Dance is 'one example of another art form becoming an essential cinematic code'. In Jerome Delamater *Dance in the Hollywood Musical*, (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1981), 1.

⁶ It is impossible to fully explore the life and career of Bob Fosse in this introductory section. I would highly recommend the following publication in this regard: Martin Gottfried, *All His Jazz; The Life & Death of Bob Fosse* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1998).

⁷ Interview with Bob Fosse, *The Wogan Show*, BBC1, first aired 11 February 1984. <https://www.facebook.com/BBCArchive/videos/198-wogan-bob-fosse/249325046634699/>.

⁸ Kevin Winkler, *Big Deal: Bob Fosse and Dance in the American Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 13.

appearing in an all-navy review, *Hook, Line, and Sinker*, and spent fourteen months in service before finding his first job in New York as a feature dancer in a touring production of *Call Me Mister*.⁹ Fosse's Broadway debut was on 20 January 1950 in a show called *Dance Me a Song* at the Royale Theatre, where he met the dancer Joan McCracken, whom he later married (and then divorced). She became a significant creative influence in his early life and career.¹⁰ At 23, Fosse went to Hollywood as the musical film genre was beginning to wane, with dreams of becoming the new Fred Astaire, whom he idolised. Director Stanley Donen subsequently arranged for a screen test at MGM, but his appearance proved problematic with the studio.¹¹ Fosse states that his distinctive form of dancing was born out of his physical defects. For example, he had hunched shoulders, pigeon toes, and was prematurely balding. He consequently began experimenting with hats and subverting traditional ballet moves to help counteract these imperfections.¹²

After Fosse's first major film, *Give a Girl a Break* (Stanley Donen, 1953), he was offered a role in *Kiss Me Kate* (George Sidney, 1953), whereby he observed '[his] parts were getting smaller', forcing him to shift creative direction.¹³ It was the 1954 Broadway musical *The Pajama Game* where Fosse finally had his breakthrough as a choreographer in his own right. In 1955 he also choreographed *Damn Yankees*, where he met his muse, Gwen Verdon, whom he later married in 1960 and had a child.¹⁴ When *Damn Yankees* was adapted for the screen by George Abbott and Stanley Donen in 1958, Fosse developed an interest in the technical aspects of filmmaking. Verdon reminisces in a documentary that he understood that film dance had to be different from the stage and consequently learnt about cutting, camera

⁹ Winkler, *Big Deal*, 18-19.

¹⁰ Winkler, *Big Deal*, 22-23.

¹¹ Fosse, *Wogan Show*, BBC1; On 19 April 1951 he signed a seven-year contract with MGM. In Winkler, *Big Deal*, 26.

¹² Fosse, *Wogan Show*, BBC1.

¹³ Paul Rosenfield, 'Fosse, Verdon and 'Charity' Together Again', *Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1985; Winkler, *Big Deal*, 31.

¹⁴ Gottfried, *All*, 74, 95 and 116.

angles, and technical matters, which later underscored all of his cinematic works.¹⁵ Fosse's later 1966 Broadway production *Sweet Charity* was significant as it was the first production he conceived, directed, and choreographed entirely, and he was later hired for the screen adaptation in 1969.¹⁶ During this epoch, Fosse began experimenting with miscellaneous 'poems, sketches and outlines for film or stage projects'. His *Coda for a Dancer* illustrates obsessions with themes incongruous with quintessential musical comedy conventions. Indeed, there appears to be an infatuation with strip clubs, sex, death, abortion, and narcotics.¹⁷ These edgier narrative cycles went on to punctuate Fosse's *oeuvre* and, almost prophetically, his personal life as his infidelities and addictions to narcotics demonstrate.¹⁸ His critically acclaimed adaptation of *Cabaret* was released in 1972, and in 1973 he became the only director to win the Triple Crown of awards in the same year: an Oscar for *Cabaret*, a Tony award for his Broadway production *Pippin* (1972), and an Emmy for his revered TV special *Liza with a Z* (1972).¹⁹ His last musical feature was *All That Jazz* (1979), which won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Before his untimely passing, Fosse made two other non-musical moving pictures, *Lenny* (1974) and *Star 80* (1983); the latter received

¹⁵ 'Bob Fosse documentary', YouTube video, 101:21, https://youtu.be/t14vhjUwe_o?t=1440.

¹⁶ Winkler, *Big Deal*, 164-166.

¹⁷ The cited *Coda for a Dancer* is as follows:

1. Auditioning – compete against young girls
2. Working on a show (flop or fired)
3. Child – foster home – mother takes care of – husband gone
4. Love with younger man (beautiful)
5. Talked into – dirty movie – nude pictures? Going out with someone important – in need of money
6. Realisation there's no future....
7. Working a cheap niteclub in Pa. – strip?
8. Give child to a couple who love it and take care of it – goodbye to child
9. Death? Abortion? Drugs?
10. Date with unattractive man

Undated writing, box 53b, Fob Fosse and Gwen Verdon Collection, Thomas Jefferson Building, Library of Congress, Washington DC. In Winkler, *Big Deal*, 166.

¹⁸ Wasson, *Fosse*, 155. Verdon observed that whilst choreographing the Broadway production of *The Conquering Hero* Fosse's behaviour was very erratic because of his amphetamine addiction.

¹⁹ Kevin Boyd Grubb, *Razzle Dazzle: The Life and Work of Bob Fosse* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989), 174.

scathing reviews. However, these works triumphantly demonstrate his technical prowess in filmmaking.

Before examining the central themes of my thesis, it is necessary to clarify the terminology used throughout. ‘Reflexivity’ is often referred to as ‘self-referentiality’, ‘metafiction’, and ‘anti-illusionism’.²⁰ Such words embed theoretical and academic studies regarding visual culture with their etymological roots in philosophical and psychological discourse, referring to the mind’s ability to be the subject and object. Many art forms, including theatre and film, have adopted the concept of reflexivity, thus allowing the mediums to turn themselves inside out. In this thesis, it refers to the process in which theatre and films ‘foreground their own production’ and subvert the ideology that art can be merely a ‘transparent medium of communication’, creating an exceedingly perplexing product.²¹ However, we must first observe the distinction between theatre and film reflexivity, which are disparate forms. As a genre, the backstage musical is a reflexive art medium, whether filmed or not, because its narrative and structure allow the spectator to navigate behind the scenes of theatrical production.²² In the translation from stage to screen, these dynamics become intensified by reflexive filming techniques, which include ‘...intrusive camera work or lighting, rapid montage, striking colour-scheme, oblique camera angles, slow and accelerated motion, breakdown of the spatio-temporal unity, contamination of diegetic levels, narrative, discontinuity...’²³ Furthermore, because it is tempting to bundle references such as ‘theatricality’ or ‘theatrical spectacle’ and ‘camera’ together in one hypothesis without fully exploring their complex relationship, it became apparent that reflexive performance and filming styles needed their own terminology: ‘theatrical reflexivity’ and ‘visual reflexivity’,

²⁰ Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Massachusetts & Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 151.

²¹ Stam, *Film Theory*, 151.

²² Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 90.

²³ Lisa Konrath, *Metafilm: Forms and Functions of Self-Reflexivity in Postmodern Film* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2010), 42.

allowing for a more nuanced interrogation and comparison of the two forms. At its most reductive, theatrical reflexivity refers to staging, while visual reflexivity belongs to filming. However, as I explore, these dynamics often intersect as a reaction to both. Finally, we must also consider the reflexive spaces in which the productions are set, including real world-locations, the stage itself, and, more surreally, the content of film acting as a content of consciousness.²⁴ These abstract cinematic moments relate to the mind and are often filmed using distinctive reflexive filming techniques, heightening their effect. All these various dynamics create highly avant-garde aesthetics, which can be considered new cinematic spaces. As nobody believes that people burst into song and dance with orchestra along the streets of New York in films like *West Side Story* (Robert Wise, 1961 and Steven Spielberg, 2021), the film musical already operates on a metaphysical level of consciousness.²⁵ These dynamics are further amplified in the works of Bob Fosse, as he subverts these codings even further. Kelly Kessler, in her extraordinary book, *Destabilizing the Hollywood Musical: Music, Masculinity and Mayhem*, also examines ‘visual reflexivity’ as a reaction to the perfect visual world created by the so-called ‘arcadian’ movie musical as texts became more nuanced and sophisticated, a phenomenon epitomised in *Sweet Charity*, *Cabaret*, and *All That Jazz*.²⁶

While considering the relationship between gender and filming styles, Jerome Delamater, in his book *Dance in the Hollywood Musical*, acknowledges that choreographers like Busby Berkeley in the 1930s were trailblazers guiding the genre towards a more

²⁴ The immensely complicated and compelling relationship between Western audience, film, art and consciousness is explored in William C. Johnson. Jr, ‘Literature, Film, and the Evolution of Consciousness’, *The Journal of Art Criticism* 38, no. 1 (Autumn, 1979): 29-38.

²⁵ Stam, *Reflexivity*, 90.

²⁶ Kelly Kessler, *Destabilizing the Hollywood Musical: Music, Masculinity and Mayhem* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 61. The author examines the phenomenon of the ‘arcadias’ whereby she states that the nostalgic feel-good musical gave way to more edgier works in line with social and industrial change. By way of example, in Fosse’s *Sweet Charity* love loses its revered status acknowledging that relationships often fail and in *All That Jazz* failure, death and sex are brought into the arena. These movies, in turn, highlight ‘social unrest through racial difference’ and question the appeasing narratives and endings of the traditional arcadian musicals before them. Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 23-24.

progressive approach heightened by his interest in the technical aspect of filming and the mechanical camera.²⁷ In this process, he also learnt how to exploit women's sexuality, as demonstrated by his scantily-clad chorus girls dancing against a voyeuristic dreamscape of sexual symbolism.²⁸ However, although his approach was deemed radical, he merely created heteronormative and surreal phallic routines of women that looked like 'wallpaper' for the male gaze indicative of the epoch.²⁹ The 1940s and 1950s saw the birth of the quintessential MGM musical and its thus termed 'house style' with exaggerated mise-en-scènes interreacting performance and choreography, creating rather 'camp' aesthetics.³⁰ While male and 'virile' performers such as Gene Kelly tried to divert attention away from their 'sissy dancer' image, female performers Lucille Ball and Cyd Charisse were filmed by auteurs Vincent Minnelli to exploit their camp femininity, with a focus on whiteness and glamour through flamboyant theatrical reflexivity.³¹ As film scholar Jane Feuer asserts, the MGM musical 'uses reflexivity to perpetuate rather than deconstruct the codes of the genre', thus creating highly conservative texts.³² It was not until the 1960s that the genre was, fortuitously, beginning to address more contentious matters of love, sex, and human relationships set against the real world and the sexual revolution, which imbued post-drug and pre-AIDS society.³³ Furthermore, with the 1960s came the so-called 'second wave' of

²⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the problems facing the musical film genre from a technical and creative perspective please see: Ken Dancyger, *The Technique of Film and Video Editing: History, Theory, and Practice*, Third Edition (London, New York, Oxford: Focal Press, 2002), 74-75; Delamater, *Dance*, 29.

²⁸ Delamater, *Dance*, 37.

²⁹ It was the choreographer Jack Cole who stated that Berkeley 'had no involvement in dancing' and he was more interested in the technical aspects of film making such as photographing designs and filming long travel shots. He was merely creating scenic 'wallpaper' whereby he would film shapes in relation to music. In Delamater, *Dance*, 31; The Cambridge Dictionary online states that 'heteronormative' means 'suggesting or believing that only heterosexual relationships are normal or right and that men and women have naturally different roles'. In the Cambridge Dictionary online, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/heteronormative>.

³⁰ Steven Cohan, *Incongruous Entertainment: Camp, Cultural Value, and the MGM Musical* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 45.

³¹ Cohan, *Incongruous*, 56-60, 152; Linda Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 9-10 in Cohan, *Incongruous*, 57.

³² Jane Feuer, 'The Self-reflexive musical and the myth of entertainment', in *Film Genre Reader II*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press), 454.

³³ Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 32.

feminism that emerged after World War II, exacerbated by the burgeoning Gay Liberation Movement as a response to the Stonewall Riots in New York in 1969, the year of *Sweet Charity*'s theatrical release.³⁴ The shifting attitudes towards gender and sexuality would continue through to the 1970s and tinge the cinematic landscape of *Cabaret* and *All That Jazz* through avant-garde filming styles and techniques. Below I now set out a literature review of salient works that have helped me in my research.

Various key publications regarding Bob Fosse include populist accounts of his life and *oeuvre*. One of the earliest and most concise books that identify his entire creative output is Kevin Boyd Grubb's *Razzle Dazzle: the life and work of Bob Fosse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), which includes an interview with the choreographer/director from a dance perspective. Grubb's book catalogues Fosse's early life and career and critical moments, such as his first foray as a performer in Hollywood during the 1950s. Its main strength lies in identifying and analysing Federico Fellini's influence in *Sweet Charity* but fails to expand on this phenomenon in the Felliniesque *All That Jazz*. It is well-written, and the author offers astute analysis, but sometimes Grubb steers away from his exciting hypothesis to focus on Fosse's interpersonal relationships with actors, setting a more sensationalist tone. The publication, however, contains stimulating and never-before-seen stills from his works.

Martin Gottfried's *All his Jazz: The Life and Death of Bob Fosse* (New York, NY: Da Capo Books Inc., 1998) similarly offers a comprehensive account of Fosse's career and personal life interspersed with anecdotal information but does not provide an in-depth critical analysis of his final works. In addition, both books omit a bibliography and referencing, often weakening their academic credibility. On the other hand, Sam Wasson's *Fosse* (Boston:

³⁴ For a primer on this subject, I recommend Margaret Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 77-88.

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2013) has been intensely researched and referenced. The bibliography functions as a countdown to the director's death in 28 chapters of his life and inspired the miniseries *Fosse/Verdon*. Unfortunately, the author has a penchant for creating hypothetical chatty dialogue that peppers the entire text. However, Wasson, at times, demonstrates an incredible talent for offering valuable, indeed quotable, critiques of Fosse's artistic work, such as his analysis of *All That Jazz*.

Kevin Winkler is a curator and archivist at the New York Public Library. His well-received book *Big Deal: Bob Fosse and Dance in the American Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) is painstakingly referenced in *Chicago Style*, and it analyses his choreography in film and looks at how these experiences influenced his stage work and vice versa. This compact but densely informative book artfully explores Fosse's key relationships with three women and his evolution as an artist. In addition, it examines how social and political changes enabled him to develop his unique approach and style in the musical theatre and film form. Being a scholar, Winkler has naturally included copious and well-presented chapter-by-chapter footnotes with additional relevant information about Fosse and his work.

Robert Stam's *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1985) is an indispensable and lucid publication examining how reflexivity in literary, theatre, and filmic texts draws attention to a work's artifice and often foregrounds the very construction of its own production, as in the backstage musical. Stam observes this phenomenon from distinct perspectives and includes a lively discussion about the musical, highlighting the genre's complexities using *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952) as a case study. In addition, Stam considers Brechtian theatre's influence on visual culture and examines avant-garde cinema from the 1960s.

Rick Altman's trailblazing opus *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) offers an analytical and comprehensive academic study of the genre from *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crossland, 1927) forwards. He historically explores various themes, including the musical's structure and codings within a heteronormative society. Altman also considers the backstage musical and the audience's voyeuristic desires to navigate behind the scenes. In addition, he uncovers that filming styles and techniques link to the objectification of women, which started in Busby Berkeley's musicals in the 1930s. Finally, he also acknowledges Fosse's influence in moving the genre forwards and offers an analysis of his works in line with changing attitudes towards sexuality and gender.

Jane Feuer's influential *The Hollywood Musical: Second Edition* (Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press, 1993) explores the musical's heyday, decline, and renaissance. She asserts that the musical is far from an inferior form and, in the updated edition, acknowledges sexual and gender politics by considering the genre through Gay Studies and the cult of the diva. She also explores dream sequences in musicals and their symbolic meanings, an in-depth analysis extending to *Cabaret*. Finally, the book's forte considers the state of the musical through 'conservative reflexivity', a phenomenon which she adroitly tackles. She tracks how typical backstage musical comedies like *42nd Street* gradually shifted with the socio-political climate culminating with Fosse's provocative take on the genre with *All That Jazz*.

Kenneth Vance Gargaro's 'The Works of Bob Fosse and the Choreographer-Directors in the Translation of Musicals to the Screen' (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1979) offers a radical reworking of the Fosse cult with a focus on his filming styles and techniques exploring the shift from his unsuccessful foray into cinema with *Sweet Charity* to his critical and artistic triumph in *Cabaret*. Gargaro uncovers how Fosse's mechanical camera and dance interact as he links camera angles, editing, mise-en-scène, and lenses with theatrical performance while acknowledging filmmaker and essayist Sergei Eisenstein's influence,

particularly that of cinematic montage and the framing of shots giving nuanced examples. However, in such an inspirational work, it is lamentable that Gargaro does not include an analysis of *All That Jazz*, which was theatrically released just a year after publication.

Dara Milovanović's timely 'The Fosse Woman: Analysis of femininity, aesthetics, and corporeality' (PhD diss., Kingston University, 2019) bridges the time gap between Gargaro's dissertation and takes into consideration more contemporary themes to include gender identity with a focus on dance and movement. Using an interdisciplinary methodology, she examines through a feminist lens depictions of femininity and beauty in Fosse's work and elucidates this through excellent case studies, including musical numbers from *Sweet Charity*, *Cabaret*, and *All That Jazz*. More importantly, and imperative to the core themes of my dissertation, Milovanović connects the dynamic of the human body within the parameters of theatrical and visual reflexivity and states:

'[t]heatricity is one of the major aesthetic strategies in Fosse's work, which supports and communicates spectacle. As one of the main features of the musical film genre, spectacle occurs in Fosse's work as cinematic excess and excess of the body. The possibilities of the body are exaggerated through the apparatus of the camera, hyperbole of gender performance, and hyperbole of corporeality exhibited with virtuosity'.³⁵

Where she adroitly posits that theatrical spectacle is an amalgamation of gender performance and filming techniques has forced me to reconsider how the various elements interact. Indeed, as I explore these concepts further, it has become clear that these dynamics often fight for hegemony within Fosse's three musical films as a

³⁵ Dara Milovanović, 'The Fosse Woman: Analysis of femininity, aesthetics, and corporeality,' (PhD diss., Kingston University, 2019), 204.

reaction to the socio-political climate and attitudes towards sexuality and gender, further distorting the visual reflexivity and theatrical reflexivity framework.

In examining the link between filming styles and representations of sexuality in *Sweet Charity*, *Cabaret*, and *All That Jazz*, I have had to re-evaluate these films from various perspectives while building a comprehensive library of stills to elucidate this point and record the visualisation of shifting registers, which form part of this thesis. Thus, I have incorporated multiple methodologies to understand and explore this complicated relationship, including the social history of art, semiotics, feminism, and film studies. The social history of art includes public and critical responses to artworks and investigates various relationships: artist and patron, artist and audience. Since Vasari's game-changing *Lives*, the artist has been aggrandised, and their works catalogued and analysed from a historical timeline perspective against a backdrop of social implications.³⁶ Feminism theory, rooted in Marxism, was forged to eschew patriarchy and sexism, underscoring society's foundations. Later, Michel Foucault became an important figure in the development of queer and gender-based studies as feminism became a more complex subject.³⁷ Writers such as Laura Mulvey and Judith Butler wrote compelling texts observing the world from new perspectives on sexuality. To avoid doubt, I sometimes refer to the human body and the act of performance as 'the gendered self', a nod to Butler's hypothesis on gender.³⁸ Roland Barthes' revered text hailing 'the death of the author' and 'the birth of the reader' signifies new ways of observing art, relinquishing clichéd approaches. Semiotics examines signs and asks how meaning is possible rather than

³⁶ I cite here the original 1550 publication charting the lives of the trailblazing Italian renaissance artists from Cimabue onwards. Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

³⁷ The Cambridge Dictionary website states the meaning of queer as 'having or relating to a gender identity or a sexuality that does not fit society's traditional ideas about gender or sexuality'. In the Cambridge Dictionary Online, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/queer?q=Queer>.

³⁸ Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory' in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London & New York: Routledge). Butler states gender is 'an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylised repetition of acts*'. [author's emphasis added], 392.

what a work might mean per se, allowing a broad scope of analysis from visual perspectives to include social and cultural phenomena.³⁹ Through film studies, writers such as Sergei Eisenstein, in their revered book *Film Form* studied the impact of cinematic effects, including ‘Soviet theory montage’, within visual culture. Later, film theorists Rick Altman, Jane Feuer, and Robert Stam adopted a more semiotic approach to analysing musical film, including dynamics such as reflexivity, its complex variations, and the alienation effect. These principal methodologies allow a diverse and thorough analysis of the central themes of my dissertation.

My thesis is staged chronologically around Fosse’s three cinematic musical works: *Sweet Charity*, *Cabaret*, and *All That Jazz*. Its central premise is to observe how filming styles and techniques intersect with representations of gender and sexuality as a response to the socio-politico climate over a ten-year period. *Sweet Charity* as a direct stage-to-screen adaptation, while hinting at new approaches to sexuality with adult themes such as prostitution, its musical format was out of sync with the 1960s climate. However, Fosse began experimenting with various techniques and cinematic spaces that coincided with the epoch’s attitudes to sexuality which my chapter documents through the case studies ‘Personal Property’, ‘Big Spender’, ‘Rich Man’s Frug’, and ‘Where Am I Going?’. In *Cabaret*, Fosse convincingly recreated 1930s Berlin in a work that resonated with the 1970s zeitgeist by rejecting the ‘book’ musical form in a narrative awash with transgressive sexuality and dark themes. Through the musical numbers ‘Willkommen’, ‘Two Ladies’, and various surreal dreamscapes and spaces, I will analyse the dynamic technical effects and editing which underscore the work. Finally, in *All That Jazz*, Fosse’s autobiographical bleak musical fable, he astutely plays homage to the arcadian musical format in the number ‘Take Off With Us’ as it shifts into a highly sensual routine, ‘Airotica’, eschewing previous portrayals of dance on screen. It also cunningly subverts the male gaze narrative that often underscores the film

³⁹ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 142-148.

musical as Fosse's camera explores new and exciting territories and approaches to sexualities. By analysing visual and theatrical reflexivity, it is possible to link how gender and filming styles react with the spatio-temporal continuum as Fosse's three films shift register from book musical format in *Sweet Charity* to more avant-garde post-modern variations in the concept musical, *All That Jazz*.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The musical *Showboat* (1927) is cited as one of the first examples of the book musical whereby songs are integrated with the main narrative. The book musical usually follows more wholesome or 'arcadian' narratives. It was the trailblazing *Oklahoma!* (1943) that merged dance, song and libretto seamlessly, forging the framework for the quintessential musical play as it is known today; The concept musical is rather more unorthodox and complex whereby the concept or vision and/or the subject drives all elements of the production instead of the narrative. In Geoffrey Block, 'Integration', *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, ed. Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris and Stacy Wolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 97-110; Kurt Weill Scholar Kim H. Kowalke adds that concept musicals 'tend to be non-linear in structure and unconventional in their use of diegetic musical numbers, rely on the cumulative effects of vignettes rather than plot, concern themselves with social or political issues and revolve around a central concept or metaphor that informs virtually every aspect of content and presentation'. In Kim H. Kowalke, 'Today's Invention, Tomorrow's Cliché: Love Life and the Concept Musical', Kurt Weill Foundation, accessed 10 December 2022, <https://www.kwf.org/wp-content/uploads/Kowalke-Todays-Invention-Tomorrows-Cliche-Love-Life-and-the-Concept-Musical.pdf>.

Sweet Charity (1969)

Although critics who revered the original 1966 Broadway production of *Sweet Charity* slated the film adaptation, it remains an essential artefact in the history of the genre. A recent viewing of the 2021 4K Blu-ray restoration reveals a movie of astonishing beauty awash with fascinating colours and hues, allowing for a visually nuanced exploration of this work, abandoning previous interpretations.⁴¹ The picture's shortcomings were often attributable to the director and choreographer Bob Fosse and his excessive use of the camera and filming techniques, which Kenneth Vance Gargaro's PhD paper critiques: 'Fosse falls victim to every film cliché imaginable. He opens up the show needlessly and relies on technical tricks to supplement uninspired scenic reconstitution. Like a child with a new toy, he explores it without due respect. The result is a movie musical that calls attention to itself, but one that also contains moments of cinematic brilliance'.⁴² However, these audacious 'technical tricks' or 'visual reflexivity' intrigue and form the basis for this chapter documenting the fledgling film director's technical involvement in filmmaking while registering ever-changing social attitudes and portrayals of gender, which I will explore.⁴³ This trailblazing grittier backstage movie musical would change the musical film landscape and observe the world in ways that question the traditional Hollywood modus operandi.

Conceived, directed, and choreographed by Bob Fosse, the stage version of *Sweet Charity* opened at the Palace Theatre, Broadway, on 29 January 1966 and was, in turn, based on the film *Le Notti di Cabiria* (*The Nights of Cabiria*, Federico Fellini, 1957) with a screenplay by Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, and Ennio Flaiano. The playwright Neil Simon subsequently adapted the source material with music by Cy Coleman and lyrics by Dorothy

⁴¹ *Sweet Charity*, directed by Bob Fosse (1969, Universal Pictures), Blu-ray Disc, 1080p, HD.

⁴² Kenneth Vance Gargaro, 'The Works of Bob Fosse and the Choreographer-Directors in the Translation of Musicals to the Screen' (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1979), 88.

⁴³ Wasson, *Fosse*, 204-213.

Fields. Lew Wasserman, head of Universal Pictures, greenlit the 1969 film version with Fosse again as director and choreographer, but Shirley MacLaine replaced Gwen Verdon's Broadway turn in the title role.⁴⁴ Principal photography began in January 1968 on the Universal Studios lot and wrapped in New York in June 1968.⁴⁵

The picture tells the story of 'The Adventures of a Girl Who Wanted to be Loved' in the form of Charity Hope Valentine, a naïve dance hall hostess during the swinging 1960s in Manhattan. However, in her escapades, she discovers the world can be a perplexing environment, with men forever taking advantage of her kind heart and generosity. In the opening musical sequence ('Personal Property'), she meets her boyfriend, Charlie, in Central Park on the premise of marriage and settling down, but he steals her life savings and pushes her into the lake. In the following scene, we are invited into Charity's tawdry world of the Fandango Ballroom, where she works ('Big Spender'). Charity then meets the Italian screen idol Vittorio Vitale outside the Pompeii Club, who has been stood up by his girlfriend Ursula, and he invites her inside ('Rich Man's Frug') and then back to his apartment, where she reflects on her luck ('If They Could See Me Now'). Rather than being seduced by Vittorio, Charity is humiliated by having to spend the night in his closet after Ursula returns. She finds solace in her co-workers Nickie (Chita Rivera) and Helene (Paula Kelly) as they share their hopes and aspirations for a better world ('There's Gotta Be Something Better Than This'), dancing on the rooftop of the Fandango Ballroom. In her quest to find more 'conventional' work, Charity goes to an employment agency but is rejected because she lacks transferable skills. On the way out in the elevator, Charity meets the neurotic Oscar Lindquist (John McMartin), who collapses in claustrophobic fear after it breaks down ('It's a Nice Face'), and

⁴⁴ Shirley MacLaine was already an established film actor and although Gwen Verdon was well known in theatrical circles, she was not considered for the musical's transfer to celluloid. The argument of 'star power' and sexuality on film is explored by scholar Andrew Dix, *Beginning Film Studies* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), 207.

⁴⁵ American Film Institute Catalogue accessed 17 May 2022, <https://catalog.afi.com/Catalog/MovieDetails/23493>.

the two consequently begin dating seriously. He takes her to a cult hippy gathering with Sammy Davis Jr. as Big Daddy ('The Rhythm of Life') until police sirens disband the meeting. Hiding in a tiny space to avoid arrest, Oscar is suddenly cured of his anxiety disorder ('Sweet Charity'). He is oblivious to Charity's work, but after he proposes to her, she confesses all, yet he insists it is not a problem. Elated, Charity morphs into a fantasy production number ('I'm a Brass Band') before going with Oscar to the Fandango Ballroom for the final goodbyes and to meet her cantankerous boss, Stubby Kaye ('I Love to Cry at Weddings'). At the marriage bureau, Oscar jilts her at the last minute. Heartbroken and alone, Charity returns to the bridge in the original opening sequence and throws her 'just married' suitcase into the lake below ('Where Am I Going?'). On the brink of collapse, she meets a group of new-age revellers in the early morning who motivate her as the final titles roll with the tagline, 'And She Lived Hopefully Ever After'. The film opened at the Rivoli Theatre, New York City, on 1 April 1969.

In *Sweet Charity*, the self-reflexive musical becomes ever more complex due to Fosse's insistence on incorporating avant-garde filming techniques and visual reflexivity to heighten the film's register, *de rigueur*, during the 1960s. Additionally, in an unexpected and perplexing volte-face, Italian director Fellini's fascination with fantasy juxtaposed with realism further inspired Fosse's musical films, exacerbating an already highly artificial product.⁴⁶ These conflated dynamics create a challenging and beguiling tension where filming techniques and deeper societal issues intersect. Accordingly, I will consider *Sweet Charity* through four case studies based around the musical segments: 'Personal Property', 'Big Spender', 'The Rich Man's Frug', and 'Where Am I Going?' to examine how aesthetics and filming techniques are often

⁴⁶ 'Interview with Italian Cinema expert Phil Kemp', *Nights of Cabiria*, directed by Federico Fellini, (1957, Paris: StudioCanal, 2009), DVD; Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz* (1979) which I discuss in chapter 3, is a musical reworking of Fellini's drama/fantasy *8½* (1963).

linked to various objectifications of the human body and representations of gender, or ‘the reflexive gendered self’. This phenomenon becomes further amplified through the lens of the mechanical camera operating within a society historically dominated by the male gaze and heteronormativity.⁴⁷

The first case study interrogates the opening reel and musical number ‘Personal Property’, which functions as a cinematic portal to Fosse’s vision conflating Felliniesque-inspired neo-realism with staged performance or ‘theatrical reflexivity’. It spotlights the duality of the Fosse musical film framework, whereby visual reflexivity and depictions of gender collide against a real-life setting. Fosse, it seems, is keen to exploit the best of both realms by contrasting the traditional theatrical musical framework with a *cinéma vérité* style.⁴⁸ Thus, although Fosse’s film mirrors *Le Notti di Cabiria* in its trajectory, the visualisation of 1960s commerce-driven New York in Technicolor strikes a different tone to Fellini’s desolate black and white Roman wasteland (**Fig. 1**).⁴⁹ The use of saturated Technicolor heightens the film’s cinematic landscape, as does the 35mm camera, which sharpens the visualisation of the human form, enabling us to observe and, at times, objectify the role of Charity Hope

⁴⁷ The feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey (1941-) and her much-revered 1975 critique ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ explores the objectification of women, the male gaze and its ramifications within visual culture. Indeed, she states that ‘In *reality* the phantasy [sic] world of the screen is subject to the law which produces it’ [author’s emphasis added]. In Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 11. Consequently, the self-reflexive image of Charity in the film functions as a mirror of the outside world and the male gaze that permeates it. In this regard, observing the movie’s credits reveals a culture predominantly underscored by heterosexual and influential men within the industry; ‘Heteronormative’ according to the online Cambridge Dictionary is defined as: ‘suggesting or believing that only heterosexual relationships are normal or right and that men and women have naturally different roles’. Source: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/heteronormative>; This argument in relation to motion pictures becomes relevant when we consider Hollywood has been governed by such dogma since its creation.

⁴⁸ According to academic Cindy Wong, ‘*Cinéma-vérité* is interactionist cinema – ‘flies in the soup’ as opposed to observational/direct cinema – ‘flies on the wall’. The term is a French translation of Dziga Vertov’s title for his newsreels, *Kino-Pravda* (‘Film-Truth’). The filmmaker is, then, an avowed participant in his/her own film. Jean Rouch, and his collaborative work with Edgar Morin, for example *Chronique d’un été* (1961), are representatives of this movement. The camera and the filmmakers are to elicit truth by acting as a catalyst, to provide people to articulate a truth that is more revealing than the everyday truth’. Cindy Wong, *Critical Dictionary of Film and Television Theory*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and Philip Simpson (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 79.

⁴⁹ ‘Generations of filmgoers, for example, found black-and-white more ‘realistic’ than color film, even though reality itself came in color’. Stam, *Film Theory*, 142.

Valentine.⁵⁰ She joyously skips through a bucolic Central Park against a utopian blue sky to meet her boyfriend before teasingly showing him skimpy black lingerie she has bought for her ‘trousseau’, alluding to the new sexual freedom of the time. Fosse’s filming techniques further exacerbate this encounter, punctuated from the opening credits with effects such as freeze frames and psychedelic colour tints.

By way of example, some of these effects appear influenced by the pigment of Charlie’s shirt and the children’s balloons as they play in the park, and it draws attention to the protagonists (**Fig. 2**). Charity Hope Valentine is an artificial construct whose image is cinematic fantasy; however, the setting and the film extras in this segment belong to the natural world, thus creating a backdrop of contrasting aesthetics. I refer to Charity’s carrot-dyed hair and her short black dress, framing her body and complimenting the film’s intense visual landscape.⁵¹ The use of red further exacerbates this dynamic, a colour that permeates the entire movie’s mise-en-scène, including the film’s main title font, Charity’s make-up, the interiors, costumes, and lighting.⁵² Indeed, our first exposure to Charity shows her wearing vibrant red earrings and a matching beaded necklace, functioning as a metaphor for her profession. Later, while the camera tracks Charity walking to work, the male-dominated mise-en-scène is saturated with a boozy scarlet colour palette which also tints the backstage changing room walls of the

⁵⁰ The Technicolor filming process that underscored the classical Hollywood musicals created bright vivid colours affecting the costumes and settings. It brought an artificial and dreamlike quality to the genre which can be observed in *Sweet Charity* and other works including *Singin’ in the Rain* (Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly, 1952). Although Technicolor is no longer in use, the creative team in Damien Chazelle’s *La Land* (2016) imitated its qualities as a form of homage and visual effect. David Bardwell, Kristin Thompson, Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction*, Twelfth Edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2020), 5-6.

⁵¹ Milovanović states that ‘The artificial space of “Big Spender” is highlighted by the contrast of the previous scene filmed in New York City Central Park emphasizing the natural environment and daylight. In Milovanović, ‘Fosse Woman’, 99.

⁵² As in the opening title sequence, the composition strikes a documentary-style tone as various pedestrian figures snatch glances at the mechanical camera and protagonist as MacLaine passes by. It is unclear whether they are actual bystanders caught looking by the lens or part of the movie-making process, adding to the duality of meaning and scopophilic ambient within the picture.

Fandango Ballroom. Colour becomes a visual reflexive device within the coding of the film to heighten its sexual ambient.

An unusual use of visual reflexivity follows our introduction to MacLaine. When she segues from one register to another through the song ‘My Personal Property’, the diegetic sound of background activity and distant voices in the park fade as an orchestra strikes up on the soundtrack creating dissonance. In the last few ethereal chords, the vibrant colour palette of summer becomes more sombre and menacing as she and her boyfriend enter a dark tunnel embedded with chiaroscuro shadows, challenging her ebullient mood.⁵³ The scene then dissolves into a shot of a murky river with floating debris amongst swimming ducks. Utopian tranquillity returns briefly as the camera pans up to Charity sitting on Gapstow Bridge. The blue sky fills the landscape as she looks to her boyfriend to make a wish ‘for luck’, but he pushes her into the water and then makes off with her handbag and \$427 life savings. These bittersweet moments permeate the entire diegesis, as in *Nights of Cabiria* before, and to elucidate this point, a shot of Charity in the muddy water splashing and screaming ‘I can’t swim’ in desperation is contrary to the euphoric moments before and we can share her sensory sensations through close-up shots. In many ways, it is the antithesis of an Esther Williams (1921-2013) nautical film fantasy of Hollywood twenty years earlier.⁵⁴ Fosse’s mechanical camera then fractures the immersive cinematic landscape as Charity becomes a passive object struggling for life as two young males heroically dive into the water to save her and bring her to the safety of the sandy riverbank as concerned yet

⁵³ To some extent, Fosse would later exploit these dour colour tones in *Cabaret* (1972).

⁵⁴ These bittersweet moments permeate the entire diegesis as in *Nights of Cabiria* before, and as film historian, Pamela Hutchinson acknowledges, ‘And nothing Charity encounters lives up to its promise.... The tawdry follows a step behind the terrific....’ In Pamela Hutchinson, ‘Sweet Charity: A Pretty Girl in the Orchestra Pit’, *Sweet Charity* Indicator Release Booklet (Oakhanger: Limewood Media Ltd, 2020), 8; Esther Williams (1921-2013) was known as ‘Hollywood’s Mermaid’ and a popular actress and swimmer in MGM musicals during the 1940s and 1950s. She managed to combine acting with nautical aerobics in hyper camp routines which made her famous. Source: Ronald Bergan, ‘Esther Williams Obituary’, *The Guardian*, 6 June 2013, accessed 5 June 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/jun/06/esther-williams-dies-91>.

gossipy onlookers surround her. At the same time, the sun catches the low-positioned camera, creating the phenomenon known as ‘lens flare’, whereby dazzling rays and scattered shapes momentarily blind the audience as they attempt to assimilate the images on the screen (**Fig. 3**). Initially, lens flare was prohibited within classical filmmaking conventions. Still, it was ‘popularised as a live-action cinematographic technique in the 1960s and 1970s as part of a documentary materialist aesthetic’ and imbued idiosyncratic pictures such as *Easy Rider*.⁵⁵ Rejecting studio camera configurations using ‘the aesthetic effect of light artifacts’ for artistic expression, lens flare creates a distinctive *cinéma vérité* style, which Julie Turnock calls ‘poetic docurealism’ and is now ubiquitous in contemporary visual culture. The overall effect is paradoxical as it creates a realistic *mise-en-scène* yet never tries to hide its self-reflexive nature.⁵⁶ The shift in visual register forces a different objectification of the female body, creating a type of ‘reality effect’ which also underscores the following scene.

For example, following Charity’s drowning incident, where she is dazed, wet, and covered in debris with makeup streaming down her face, two armed police officers take a statement, and it highlights how women are often represented on the screen within the constraints of a phallogentric industry and society. She looks like a drenched circus clown as she fends off questions regarding her name, address, and occupation, to which she drolly replies, ‘social consultant’. The policeman’s tone of voice becomes sarcastic and curt when he discovers she is a ‘dance hall hostess’. The framing and composition of the shot with MacLaine posed like a crouched angel against the rustic

⁵⁵ Julie Turnock, ‘The ILM Version: Recent Digital Effects and the Aesthetics of the 1970s Cinematography,’ *Film History* 24, no. 2 (2012): 161; The cinematographer credited with *Sweet Charity* is Robert Surtees (1906-1985) whose previous works include the musical picture *Oklahoma!* (Fred Zinnemann, 1955) and an Oscar win for the epic *Ben Hur* (William Wyler, 1959). In *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967) Surtees was also director of photographer and it is interesting to note that in the swimming pool scene towards the beginning of the movie he also allows lens flare to embed the *mise-en-scène*. As Turnock elucidates it was a popular device during the epoch.

⁵⁶ For a more nuanced reading of this fascinating film technique and its influences of popular culture read: Turnock, ‘ILM’, 158-168.

stone bridge and dominated by two armed men of power recalls the trope of the so-called fallen woman, popularised by Victorian art and a society governed by ancient heteronormative laws and dogma.⁵⁷ The feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey (1941-) and her much-revered 1975 critique ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ explores the objectification of women, the male gaze and its ramifications within visual culture. Indeed, she states, ‘In *reality* the fantasy world of the screen is subject to the law which produces it’ [author’s emphasis added].⁵⁸ Consequently, Charity’s self-reflexive image in the film mirrors the outside world and the male gaze that permeates it. Observing the movie’s credits reveals a culture predominantly underscored by heterosexual and influential men within the industry. If celluloid represents the real world’s socio-politico-cultural landscape, segments within *Sweet Charity* exist as a constant reminder of attitudes towards women on and off the screen. Although Fosse’s approach to the film musical is deemed radical, he also worked within an established framework of complicated patriarchal rule and encodings which embedded the Hollywood filmmaking tradition.

Before discussing the ‘Big Spender’ number, it is worthwhile to consider another dynamic of significant importance within *Sweet Charity*. In his pioneering book, *The American Film Musical*, Rick Altman posits that the show musical depends on ‘the viewers’ ability to see backstage, to see through curtains and behind sets into the private lives of the stars....’⁵⁹ In this regard, the dressing room of the Fandango Ballroom functions as a perfect environment to observe this phenomenon. On the one hand, as in the first commercial talking picture, *The Jazz Singer*, where the audience felt privileged to hear a supposed private

⁵⁷ The phenomenon of visual dominance within the movie frame is briefly discussed in Hans P. Bacher and Santan Suryavashi, *Color and Composition for Film* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2018), 220.

⁵⁸ Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 11.

⁵⁹ However, as Altman further elucidates, this experience is limited as we only have access to a theatrical world but not the film studio conventions that contains it. In Altman, *American*, 223.

conversation between Al Jolson and his mother, there is a certain satisfaction in observing an ever-optimistic, even deluded Charity fending off questions from her co-workers as they change into their stage personas for the imminent musical number.⁶⁰ On the other hand, this is also a world dominated by mirrors. Their use within the *mise-en-scène* creates additional complexities within the text as we enter an alternative space as labyrinthine as the mind itself. Although artists have historically used mirrors extensively in their work, primarily as props and room decoration,⁶¹ in Fosse's work, they create an extraordinary metalepsis as the various images within images, or *mise-en-abîme*, strike different registers, offering a plethora of possibilities, routes, and interpretations of meaning. The mirror as a leitmotif is used more explicitly in *Cabaret* and *All That Jazz*.

Altman adds that '[f]undamental to the backstage musical tradition, the stock casting of woman as visible and man as viewer has far wider ramifications for the society in which the musical flourished'.⁶² This would also align with Mulvey's hypothesis of the male gaze and John Berger's simplistic yet profound argument that in visual culture, 'men act' and 'women appear'.⁶³ However, I would like to posit that in these backstage scenes, when the characters are at their most vulnerable, the smudged mirrors of the tawdry Fandango Ballroom mirrors create alternative aesthetics rejecting these stereotypes as Charity, Nickie, and Helene metaphysically interrogate themselves and their predicament (**Fig. 4**). As the

⁶⁰ When the character of Nickie (Chita Rivera, 1933-) enters the scene, a female dancer shouts, 'Hey Nickie, did you hear about Charity and her boyfriend? And she responds optimistically, 'You're gonna get married? All the luck in the world, baby' as she hugs her. The dancer responds, 'He stole her money and pushed her in the lake!' Although the banter is droll, it creates tension within the diegesis as it highlights a world dominated by heteronormative ideas based on the pretext of marriage as an ideal. Charity believes that her naïve desire to be loved and marriage will save her from her predicament. Indeed, as Kessler states, 'Charity can only aspire to be the heroine of the arcadian musical,' a vision of utopia, which I would like to add, was always contrary to Fosse's vision. In Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 33; Professor and philosopher Cheshire Calhoun posits that marriage as a normative ideal is morally accepted as '... *the* normative ideal of how sexuality, companionship, affection, personal economics, and child rearing should be organized' [author's emphasis added]. In Cheshire Calhoun, *Feminism, the Family, and the Politics of the Closet: Lesbian and Gay Displacement* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 110; Of course, Charity's immoral profession creates friction with the archaic romantic values she aspires to and the sordid male-dominated world she is desperate to escape.

⁶¹ John K.D. Cooper, 'Mirrors in art', *RSA Journal* 145, no. 5481 (July 1997): 84.

⁶² Altman, *American*, 223.

⁶³ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 47.

backstage musical operates within a framework where reality versus illusion, then the mirrors metaphorically act as portals to these realms, but also allow for a more intricate reading of female sexuality within the *mise-en-scène*, since they amplify our perception. Moreover, mirrors also function as reflective devices to capture the performers' movements and bodies, which become more fragmented through theatrical and visual reflexivity, as I discuss below.

Fosse's complex staging and filming of the iconic 'Big Spender' segment deftly challenges previous representations of sexuality and women through dance on film and offers an alternative cinematic space to the previous musical scenes set in the real world.⁶⁴ As a preamble, the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of Charity opening her locker and singing to Charlie's monochrome profile picture, a few refrains from the opening number before bursting into tears.⁶⁵ Then, as the outline of Charity and Charlie's profile dominates the aesthetic, it is gradually superimposed with a painted sign blaring 'Dancing WITH Beautiful Girls'.⁶⁶ This transitioning dissolve momentarily explores Charity's existential inner world before shifting back into the diegesis and becomes a visual trope of Fosse's throughout the film.⁶⁷ Concurrently, the muted opening bars of the song 'Big Spender' ripple through the soundtrack as the camera pans down onto the reflection of an unfortunately diminutive client lighting a cigarette. When he swings open the door to the main dancehall to the sound of brassy trumpets, the camera briefly shows us the taxi dancers' point of view as they appear hyper-posed in their glittering multicoloured sequined short dresses, vibrant stockings, and accessories. The overall effect unifies theatrical razzmatazz with urban 1960s chic. It is a dizzying *mise-en-scène* of outlandish clashing colours and tones amplified by large mirrors

⁶⁴ The song and dance routine 'Big Spender' from *Sweet Charity* has been popularized in contemporary culture with recordings and performances by singers and performers such as Diana Ross in 1970, Shirley Bassey in 1971, and The Pussycat Dolls in 2004. Surprisingly, even Freddie Mercury sang a rock version in a 1974 concert at the Rainbow Theatre, London. It has also been subject to various queer interpretations with all-male ensembles, including *Twisted Broadway*, Melbourne in 2013 and *Broadway Backwards* in 2019.

⁶⁵ Bacher and Santan, *Color*, 185.

⁶⁶ The dissolve process when two images blend is known as 'superimposition'. Bardwell, Thompson, Smith, *Film Art*, G-2 Glossary.

⁶⁷ For an overview of various editing techniques please see Bardwell, Thompson, Smith, *Film Art*, 216-254.

hanging on the walls, adding to the film's extraordinarily complex aesthetics. Finally, a montage of cuts and close-ups follows the dancer's hands stumping out cigarette butts into ashtrays and heads turning in anticipation of money. These few minutes of film introduce Fosse's idiosyncratic technical style, where visual and theatrical reflexivity intersect within the musical film framework. Together they intensify the film's artificial nature and sexuality of the dancers through a kaleidoscope of colour, movement, and music, yet are contrasted with other suggestive filmmaking techniques, such as tracking shots discussed below, highlighting the split in register between conventional and avant-garde interpretations of gender identity.

For example, a partition wall divides the *mise-en-scène* between the male gaze and female performance as the camera follows the silhouetted profile of the customer surveying the line-up of female talent who try to entice him with tired and overstated erotic gestures and dialogue. Amusingly, the penultimate dancer says, 'Oooh, you're so tall', while the last one blankly says, devoid of conviction, 'Let's have some fun'. Finally, a significant shift in visual style when they begin to sing the main song, and it becomes evident that Fosse's camera is not merely recording a dance segment, as in previous Hollywood offerings; choreography is essential to the filmmaking process itself. Indeed, it conflates with visual reflexivity and creates new ways of observing and interpreting the human form.⁶⁸ This phenomenon is further corroborated by academic Dara Milovanović in her PhD paper, who asserts:

Fragmentation of the body that occurs via movements and steps, such as isolations, is magnified and aided by the use of the camera. This alters the way

⁶⁸ Bob Fosse's wife Gwen Verdon reminisces that he knew film dance had to be different from the stage and consequently learnt about cutting, camera angles and technical matters whilst transferring the Broadway musical *Damn Yankees* (George Abbott and Stanley Donen, 1958) to film. 'All That Jazz' documentary. *Damn Yankees* was first staged in 1955 and is a reimagining of the Faust legend against the backdrop of baseball during the 1950s when the New York Yankees dominated the sport in the USA.

Fosse captures the dancing body on screen so that it is not only simply documenting a dance piece but rather designing choreography for the camera and screen. His treatment of choreographic material with the positioning of the camera, use of the lateral and jump-shot, editing that directly corresponds to the needs of the dance and music, are some of the methods that have informed future dance on screen practices.⁶⁹

Indeed, the fragmentation that Milovanović describes becomes evident in the shots of the dancers. Their stilettoed feet turned painfully inwards as they stomp on the floor, choreography, and music in perfect accord, creating a routine that not only pulsates and excites but also points to a new agenda through the immediacy of intense and powerful editing techniques (**Fig. 5**).⁷⁰ The dancers do not simply appear and perform, but demand to be recognised and acknowledged in a world that is dramatically changing, abandoning stereotypes of female identity, fracturing the arcadian musical film framework.

Kessler observes that Fosse's choreography eschews studio conventions through filmic technique alone and raises awareness of deeper societal issues, including isolation and displacement: 'Fosse's style separates bodies from meaningful human contact and mobilises them in patterns illustrative of social division and superficial human bonding'.⁷¹ This phenomenon can be further observed when four performers tower above the gold-tasselled dance bar that separates them from their lecherous public below as they stare into their mirrored reflections. With motionless bodies that never touch nor integrate, Nickie's right hand appears 'dismembered' from her body. She

⁶⁹ Milovanović, 'Fosse Woman', 20.

⁷⁰ Altman states that '[t]he American film musical seems to suggest that the natural state of the adult human being is in the arms of an adult human being of the opposite sex. Pairing-off is the natural impulse of the musical, whether it be in the presentation of the plot, the splitting of the screen, the choreography of the dance, or even the repetition of the melody. Image follows image according to the nearly iron-clad law requiring each sequence to uphold interest in male-female coupling by including parallel scenes and shared activities'. In Altman, *American*, 32.

⁷¹ Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 121.

drums her fingers on her protruding hip from behind to the beat of castanets, ‘Do you wanna have fun’ while the first dancer flicks out her index finger and raises her arm as if a pistol whispering a ‘psssssst’ sound. Knowingly, she arches her eyebrow and stares into the dark space for a few moments.⁷² Then, using medium close-ups to shift from the ‘external to the character’s internal world’, the scene builds to a point whereby the audience is transported into an alternative reality governed by female identity and power.⁷³ Towards the number’s climax, the dancers slither across the stage with hands stretching up and down, their bodies writhing and cavorting with feigned and exaggerated ecstasy.⁷⁴ Fosse uniquely abandons standard cutting techniques for slow-motion superimposed shots creating a dreamlike red sea of movement as complex layers upon layers of images fade in and out of each other, creating a hypnotically beautiful aesthetic (**Fig. 6**). The fragmented light from the red spinning mirror ball inside the dance hall catches the tacky gold tinsel that adorns the black interior walls creating a captivating *mise-en-scène* of colliding colours heightening the film’s artificial quality.

Fosse’s filming techniques force a more nuanced reading of the gendered reflexive self from the physical to the psychological as the routine evolves. Indeed, the superimposed shots manipulate cinematic space where the dancers’ bodies have palimpsestic qualities punctuating essential issues such as identity and gender. The overall visual effects suggest these women have existed before, constantly observed and working in an industry as female objects of desire. As Butler posits, gender ‘is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts’.⁷⁵ She elucidates further that the ‘acts by which gender is constituted

⁷² I have borrowed the idea of a dismembered hand from Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 121.

⁷³ Bacher and Santan, *Color*, 185.

⁷⁴ Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 121.

⁷⁵ Butler, ‘Performative’, 392.

bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts'.⁷⁶ Therefore, the closed stage setting of Fosse's *Sweet Charity* is a perfect environment to observe this phenomenon where '... the body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed for historical convention. In other words, the body is a historical situation, as de Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatising, and *reproducing* a historical situation' [author's emphasis added].⁷⁷ Consequently, the body is a 'cultural construction' representing its spatio-temporal continuum. Butler's hypothesis that 'the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time', becomes amplified through the artifice of Fosse's visual reflexivity.⁷⁸

Even the taxi dancers' appearance within *Sweet Charity*, with their beehive wigs and heavy make-up, exposes society's expectations of female identity during the epoch. Indeed, this 'artifice and exaggeration' also encourages us to consider why the number appeals to the LGBTQ+ community, particularly gay men and drag queens.⁷⁹ Butler further states that drag queens' impersonations of women: 'implicitly suggest... that gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real. [Their] performance destabilises the very distinctions between natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders almost always operate'.⁸⁰ Milovanović further argues that drag queens, and even the female dancers in 'Big Spender' themselves, 'ridicule, not women, but gender assumptions as a whole'.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Butler, 'Performative', 393.

⁷⁷ Butler, 'Performative', 394.

⁷⁸ Butler, 'Performative', 395.

⁷⁹ Susan Sontag, Notes on 'Camp' (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 1; I am referring here to a queer interpretation of 'Big Spender' performed by Broadway Backwards 2019 for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS and the LGBTQ community in New York City. The dance hall hostesses are replaced by an all-male chorus with choreography by Mimi Quillin. <https://youtu.be/BQIZbwz6ii8>.

⁸⁰ Judith Butler spoke about the drag queen Divine in this context whose film *Female Trouble* (John Waters, 1974) inspired the name of her book. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London, 1990), xxviii – xxix.

⁸¹ Milovanović, 'Fosse Woman', 101.

Subsequently, the segment offers a unique opportunity to study Fosse's alternative world, enabling women to be observed as objects of power and not as victims. These aesthetics were later appropriated by groups such as the LGBTQ+, whereby the number works to invert the male gaze hypothesis, which also informs the following case study.

Returning to Altman's argument that the backstage musical depends on the spectator's ability to traverse behind the scenes of the theatre setting, he further posits that the 'voyeurism of overt sexuality' joins 'mental voyeurism' in enabling such 'scopophilic' pleasures.⁸² While a valid argument, it assumes that the camera is always an invisible heterosexual viewer and that a female performer is always an object of his sexual desire. However, 'The Rich Man's Frug', which I now discuss, is a subversive detour because Fosse understands that sexuality, in reality, is more complex and fluid than this. Indeed, his camera functions to fracture the classical visual order that has governed the film industry for years and acknowledges the extreme changing tide of sexual attitudes synonymous with the 1960s through avant-garde filming techniques as the segment traverses various registers.

Charity enters the hyper-stylised and appropriately named Pompeii Club, echoing the remains of a Roman city with pillars, Hellenistic sculptures, and burning fires permeating the *mise-en-scène*, complete with toga-wearing waiters with gold-leaved crowns adorning their heads. Adding to the complex visual landscape is contemporary electric spotlighting, chandeliers, twirling vibrant colours, and film projections showing a montage of iconic 1920s movie clips, creating a polymorphous world linking ancient and modern cultures (**Fig. 7**). Fosse's ensemble is dressed in chic black and white costumes complemented by multicoloured plume headdresses by designer Edith Head (1893-1981). The overall effect is a world that recalls the transgressive sexual nature of the ancient epoch juxtaposed with the freedom of the 1960s visual subculture. Fosse's intricate choreography accentuates this

⁸² Altman, *American*, 223.

phenomenon with extravagantly posed bodies and pulsating limbs that pepper the scene. In particular, I refer here to the lead dancer Suzanne Charny (1944-), with her black sequined mini-dress and waist-length ponytail hair, flanked by two other male dancers in ‘The “Aloof”’ segment. Her short dress follows the same form as MacLaine’s, but the glittering fabric draws attention to her elongated female figure. With their foppish and limp-wristed poses, the male dancers amplify her sexuality while subverting the heteronormative Hollywood male stereotypes. Milovanović creates a compelling argument:

[Fosse] complicates the display of gender in film that posits the female body as passive and available for voyeuristic consumption. Fosse applies similar choreographic, film, and stylistic methods for men and women to question the gender binary and show the fluidity of gender performance. Fosse’s choreography rejects sexual difference as a gender defining ideology therefore allowing a feminist reading of female and male dancers, as he gives the same dance vocabulary to women and men.⁸³

The scene, therefore, acknowledges ‘otherness’ and wildly builds to express the social tensions and newfound sexual freedom permeating the 1960s.⁸⁴ Notably, in ‘The ‘Heavyweight’’ section, the register flips into a frantic battle of the sexes with the pairings of the male and female performers striking punching poses as if in a boxing competition, synchronised to the ringing sound of a steel trip gong. A comic and effeminate character juxtaposes this spectacle with deliriously camp movements, acting as the orchestrator and referee while the dancers form the final knockout line. The editing is appropriately cut to the performer’s action and musical soundtrack, with eyes staring directly into the camera lens as they throw punches, intensifying the film’s visual and theatrical reflexivity. As the number

⁸³ Milovanović, ‘Fosse Woman’, 182.

⁸⁴ The Cambridge Dictionary online defines ‘otherness’ as ‘being or feeling different in appearance or character from what is familiar, expected or generally accepted’. Cambridge Dictionary online, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/otherness>.

progresses, the aesthetic becomes more hallucinatory, alluding to a more underground and subversive society, which the art historian Alexander Alberro explores in his 1995 'The Psychedelic Fantasies of the Sixties' essay: '[This] new tribal culture broke with the nuclear family structure in favour of a new communal structure primary underpinned by various forms of Dionysian excess: casual sex, psychedelic drugs, and very loud rock music'.⁸⁵

Fosse consequently thrusts us into the actual vortex of an alternative visual culture with a montage that assaults the senses through projected film, movement, music, trippy colours, and visual effects synonymous with the era (**Fig. 8**). Again, Fosse exploits lens flare juxtaposed with frantic shaking heads and primitive drumbeats. The scene cleverly rejects the trappings of its high-definition 35mm format and works like a segment of arthouse movie footage, recalling directors Kenneth Anger (1927-), Stan Brakhage (1933-2003), and Derek Jarman (1942-1994).⁸⁶ In her essay 'Film and Theatre', Susan Sontag states that since the beginning of film history, painters and sculptures argued that cinema's true vocation 'resided in artifice, construction' and should reject 'figurative narration or storytelling of any kind....'⁸⁷ Even the artist Theo Van Doesburg envisaged in his 1929 paper 'Film as Pure Form' that celluloid should function as a vehicle for 'optical poetry' and 'dynamic light architecture' and that it will one day realise 'Bach's dream of finding an optical equivalent for the temporal structure of a musical composition'.⁸⁸ As the hippy manifesto wanted to break the heteronormative status quo through sex, drugs, and music while offering a new

⁸⁵ Alexander Alberro, 'The Psychedelic Fantasies of the Sixties', *Frieze*, 11 September 1995, accessed 24 May 2022, <https://www.frieze.com/article/psychedelic-fantasies-sixties>.

⁸⁶ Kenneth Anger is a filmmaker who has been crafting avant-garde works since the 1940s, underscoring his works with themes of sexuality and the occult. Derek Jarman was an English film director, writer and activist often referred to as the 'King of Queer Cinema', and his lesser-known grainy experimental super 8mm film clips often incorporated psychedelic visual effects as well as mirrors to create complex mise-en-scènes. Stan Brakhage is regarded as one of the most influential filmmakers of the 20th Century who used abstract images as a means of visual storytelling in his works. He also authored various books about film, including *Film Biographies* in 1977.

⁸⁷ Susan Sontag, 'Film and Theatre', in *Theater and Film: A Comparative Anthology*, ed. Robert Knopf (New Haven & London: Yale University Press), 137.

⁸⁸ Sontag, 'Film', 137.

world order, this self-reflexive abstract segment recognises that the human body is momentarily sexually liberated from the archaic societal values that have historically underscored the archetypal Hollywood film musical.⁸⁹

The last case study examines how dissolves in *Sweet Charity* aid storytelling and create nuances within the narrative amplified by Fosse's use of the close-ups to open up new and altruistic representations of gender within the film's bittersweet *denouement*. Such visual reflexivity effectively registers nuanced emotions, including joy and melancholia, as characters fade from one scene into another, creating highly transcendent moments that strike their own idiosyncratic register. For example, the 'Sweet Charity' segment after Oscar has been cured of his claustrophobia is a montage of dissolves as he and Charity gleefully run through the streets of New York in slow-motion, demonstrating how a profusion of superimposed images becomes astonishingly 'rhythmic' and 'poetic' for a few fleeting cinematic moments (**Fig. 9**).⁹⁰ The ethereal characters are captured, entering, and exiting the *mise-en-scène* as if ghosts caught in time. As utilised in the 'Big Spender' segment, the dreamlike aesthetic caused by these filming techniques shifts our interpretation of the characters from corporeal readings to psychological and vice versa. This sensation is further amplified by the tattered and ripped posters pasted to the wooden cladding surrounding the Manhattan buildings that frame the characters. The overall effect acknowledges the epoch's visual culture creating a work reminiscent of Dadaesque photomontage yet is further subverted by the lens flare flickering through the landscape.⁹¹ Towards the movie's finale, visual reflexivity is again the dominant aesthetic as the camera records Charity's tears and

⁸⁹ Alberro, 'Psychedelic'.

⁹⁰ Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen R. Lane (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), 41. Burch's chapter, 'Editing as a Plastic Art', explores the use of dissolves from the 1920s as a means of a 'soft transition' and for more plastic purposes. Years later, dissolves were used to manipulate the passing of time, 41-42.

⁹¹ The Dada model was based around an ideology of nihilism and anti-aesthetics underscored with a political agenda as a response to World War I. The first Dada exhibition was held in Berlin in June 1920. For a comprehensive reading please see Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alaine Bois et. al, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 186-191.

pain after being jilted at the Registry Office, highlighting the impact of the human face, effects further amplified by dissolve transitioning effects (**Figs. 10 & 11**). It also accentuates the importance of the camera and close-up to fully explore psychological themes, which I would like to discuss briefly with its origins.

The close-up can be traced back to Carl Theodor Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne D'Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1928) and the face of Maria Falconetti as the lead character conveying suppressed and inner turmoil during her trial and execution in 15th century England.⁹² In this regard, the first articulated theory of the close-up was written by the film critic, theoretician, writer, and poet Béla Balázs, who acknowledged that 'In a truly artistic film the dramatic climax between two people will always be shown as a dialogue of facial expressions in close-up'.⁹³ He astutely asserts that, at one time, culture was primarily visual until the invention of the printing press transformed this into a world influenced by books and the written word. Then, thanks to the creation of the cinema, visual dialogue was once again reinstated into the cultural sphere. In his article 'Visible Man, or the Culture of Film' from 1924, he wrote:

The discovery of printing has gradually rendered the human face illegible. People have been able to glean so much from reading that they could afford to neglect other forms of communication.... Well, the situation now is that once again our culture is being given a radically new direction – this time by film.... The whole of mankind is now busy relearning the long-forgotten language of gestures and facial expressions. This language is not the substitute for words characteristic of sign language for the deaf-and-dumb, but the visual corollary of human souls

⁹² Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: an introduction through the senses* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010), 57.

⁹³ Béla Balázs, 'Visible Man, or the Culture of Film', trans. Rodney Livingstone, *Screen* 48, no. 1 (2007): 91-108.

immediately made flesh. *Man will become visible once again* [author's emphasis added].⁹⁴

Whereas the representation of the human body on film often lacks psychological explanations, the actor's face becomes a portal to study such a phenomenon as we acknowledge Charity's inner emotions. In addition, the lyrics and musical score accompanying the segment reflect changing shifts in the musical film format to address existential issues as MacLaine's tears and running mascara become etched on the screen in superimposed shots against the urban decay of New York City's subway. Fosse resists having the character burst into song; instead, MacLaine's vocals form part of the soundtrack acting like a poetic soliloquy, which, together with the hypnotic visual effects, create a far more satisfying aesthetic than the incongruous 'Personal Property', which clashed with its real-world setting.

Looking inside me, what do I see?

Anger and hope and doubt,

What am I all about?

And Where Am I Going?

You tell me.⁹⁵

Reviewing the ideology that filming styles and representations of sexuality and gender are inherently linked, the case studies 'Personal Property', 'Big Spender', 'The Rich Man's Frug', and 'Where Am I Going?' demonstrate this phenomenon. Fosse's fledgling camera in *Sweet Charity* is far more exaggerated than in any of his other films, whereby visual reflexivity becomes the dominant aesthetic over theatrical reflexivity, which I later explore in *Cabaret* and *All That Jazz*. In many ways, as we follow the

⁹⁴ Balázs, 'Visible Man', 96.

⁹⁵ 'Where Am I Going?' with lyrics by Dorothy Fields and music by Cy Coleman.

picture's trajectory, it becomes evident that film as a text can express a variety of emotions as we shift from objectifications of the female form to more intense psychological studies of characters, heightened by Fosse's interest in technical effects and exploring new cinematic spaces.

As with film mirroring or functioning within the environment that contains it, the negative critical response *Sweet Charity* attracted can also be considered part of a much bigger reaction to the problems underscoring the socio-political climate that Matthew Kennedy examines in *Roadshow! The Fall of the Film Musicals in the 1960s*. Inspired by the idiosyncratic success of *Mary Poppins* (Robert Stevenson, 1964), *My Fair Lady* (George Cukor, 1964), and *The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, 1965), film studios invested millions to cash in on their box office fervour.⁹⁶ However, towards the end of the era, musical pictures gradually represented a world disconnected from reality, and the public was also becoming less predictable in their behaviour.⁹⁷ Additionally, the musical format of the characters bursting into song was beginning to look *démodé*. Parents, who were still adhering to traditional values, were overwritten by their children, who related more to the Beatles. Unfortunately, as Kennedy elucidates, the studios failed to acknowledge the shifting mood and the ominous shadow of death.⁹⁸ As noted in a 2007 *Newsweek* cover story talking about the repercussion of 1968:

It is fashionable to see the boomer's '60s obsession as a reflection of their own narcissism, their inability to get over themselves, but this does not do justice to a truly traumatic decade. In the midst of adolescence, an entire generation was presented with repeated reminders of its own mortality: the Cuban missile crisis;

⁹⁶ Matthew Kennedy, *Roadshow! The Fall of Film Musicals in the 1960s* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5.

⁹⁷ Pamela Hutchinson states that '... *Sweet Charity* is not entirely frothy. It's a story about loneliness, broken hearts, dashed illusions, and the seedier side of the street – territory Fosse knew well from a youth spent dancing in nightclubs and strip joints'. Hutchinson, 'Sweet Charity', 8.

⁹⁸ Kennedy, *Roadshow!* 7.

the assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King Jr.; the violence in the cities; the 58,193 Vietnam War dead, So much death and killing, too much to simply put aside.⁹⁹

Vincent Canby from *The New York Times* lamented that '[the film version] has been so enlarged and so inflated that it has become another maximal movie: a long, noisy and, finally dim imitation of its source material.... Despite attempts to utilise the film form (still photographs in montage, stop-motion photography, monochromatic footage), the movie alternates between the painfully literal and the self-consciously cinematic'.¹⁰⁰ On this side of the pond, Tom Milne in *Sight and Sound* magazine was generally more enthusiastic and, as with other critics, thought 'Big Spender' and 'Rich Man's Frug' were the movie's finest choreographic moments. However, he also doubted Fosse's other role in the picture's creation: 'For doubling as director, he pulls constantly against himself, undermining his own meticulous algebraics by inserting choppy efforts at *mise en scène* instead of choreographing his way out of difficulties. For instance, in the opening number, as Charity tears gleefully through the city singing 'New York is My Personal Property', the camera rudely punctuates each line by zooming in, dissolving out, and picking her up again against some new background. Subsequently, the direction settles down to become much less queasy, but there is still a plethora of irritatingly unnecessary dissolves, zooms, frozen shots and pretty montages, usually illustrating the extremes of happiness or despair that Charity has already expressed, or *should* express in dance' [author's emphasis added].¹⁰¹ Thus, this acknowledges that visual reflexivity dominated theatrical reflexivity within the film's sophisticated codings.

⁹⁹ Newsweek article quoted in Kennedy, *Roadshow!* 77.

¹⁰⁰ Vincent Canby, 'Screen: A Blow-Up of 'Sweet Charity'', *The New York Times*, 2 April 1969, 38.

¹⁰¹ Tom Milne, 'Sweet Charity', *Sight and Sound* 38, no. 2, (Spring 1969): 98. Screen Studies Collection.

In summarising Fosse's contribution to *Sweet Charity*, I am reminded of André Bazin's landmark book *What is Cinema: Volume 1*, where the critic refers to 'filmed theater' as a type of 'heresy'.¹⁰² He posits that the usual reason for adapting a contemporary theatre production to film is rooted in its box office success, based on the audience's familiarity with the text becoming 'crystallized' within their consciousness.¹⁰³ It will therefore be what they want to see on screen. As *Sweet Charity* was a mere transfer from theatre to celluloid, it relied on Fosse's visual effects to heighten its presence and cinematic form. Although they appeared extraneous to the film critics, they did, however, give the movie its unique quality and, more importantly, are indicative of a world desperate for social, political, and cultural change. Furthermore, the techniques employed by Fosse function as a portal to the film's production and skilfully explore new depictions of gender on-screen as his style alternated from conventional filming mode to a more self-reflexive, experimental visual style, hinting at alternative perspectives.

After *Sweet Charity*'s release, the harsh reviews left Fosse depressed and without work for some time.¹⁰⁴ He soon became aware that the stage musical *Cabaret* was about to begin pre-production yet was still without a director.¹⁰⁵ It was Fosse's opportunity to create a work of astounding duplicity and beauty without reverting to controversial avant-garde filming techniques to make a statement. Furthermore, where sex and deviance within *Sweet Charity* were only alluded to within the constraints of the traditional musical comedy format, it became a more explicit beast by virtue of its

¹⁰² André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1967), 76.

¹⁰³ Bazin, *Cinema 1*, 83.

¹⁰⁴ Wasson, *Fosse*, 238-240.

¹⁰⁵ Harold Prince told Bob Fosse that a film version of *Cabaret* was in the pipeline, but the exact date of the meeting is not known. However, it would have been after May 1969 when the rights were purchased. Stephen Tropiano, *Music on Film: Cabaret* (Milwaukee: Limelight Editions, 2011), Ebook, Chapter 3, 'Divine Decadence': From Broadway to Berlin, The Kit Kat Klub Goes Hollywood.

transgressive foundations, creating a most fortunate constellation with Fosse's vision, which I explore in the proceeding chapter.

Cabaret (1972)

It is just over fifty years since the release of Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*. A landmark in the history of the film musical representing a radical departure from anything before it, including the director's other theatre-to-film transfer, *Sweet Charity*. Adapted from author Christopher Isherwood's revered 1939 novel *Goodbye to Berlin* about the diminishing Weimar Republic in the early 1930s and John Van Druten's subsequent 1951 play *I am a Camera*, the subversive source material was progressive and provocative enough for Fosse to filmise without reverting to avant-garde visual effects or exaggerated visual reflexivity, which underscored, indeed, undermined, his previous picture.¹⁰⁶ The film's power lay in its ability to capture the raw landscape of a city drowning in deluded decadent success against the milieu of a third-rate and 'gender fluid' Kit Kat Klub.¹⁰⁷ In achieving this, Fosse incorporated a plethora of techniques such as close-ups, colour, and lighting, capturing the decay of Isherwood's world heightened by razor-sharp editing techniques, which often collaborated with the movie's overall mood and narrative and surprising plot turns. The resulting film is one where the camera is no longer the focus of attention.¹⁰⁸ This is not to say that *Cabaret* is neither self-reflexive nor aware of its artifice. On the contrary, as filmmaker and writer William Bayer asserts, it is as fantastical as *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), but it 'is not disguised by the pseudo-naturalism of the integrated musical' format, of which Fosse's earlier *Sweet Charity* belongs.¹⁰⁹ In *Cabaret*, Fosse's camera wisely exploits theatrical reflexivity above visual reflexivity, but occasionally he inverts this order, creating an exceptionally sophisticated and intriguing behemoth.

¹⁰⁶ Boyd Grubb, *Razzle*, 141.

¹⁰⁷ Kevin Maher, 'Classic Film: Cabaret (1972) review – castigating political complacency with knockout showtunes', Friday 6 May 2022, accessed 10 July 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/classic-film-cabaret-1972-review-3vg76sd2k>.

¹⁰⁸ Gargaro, 'Works', 59.

¹⁰⁹ William Bayer, *The Great Movies* (London & New York: The Ridge Press, Inc, Hamlyn, 1973), 96.

The movie's success is also partly due to its positive portrayal of bisexuality and awareness of 'otherness' sparked by the Stonewall Riots, which subsequently led to the Gay Liberation Movement in the USA.¹¹⁰ But, of course, the film's text is also heightened by historical fact and the unspeakable horrors inflicted on the Jewish population, later extended to 'bohemians - gay people and communists', a chilling premise which embeds not only Isherwood's novel but also Fosse's *mise-en-scène*.¹¹¹ Moreover, it is impossible to deny the underlying dark sexuality in the film, which renowned film critic Pauline Kael reviewed as a 'satire of temptations. We see the decadence as garish and sleazy; yet we also see the animal energy in it – everything seems to be sexualized. The movie does not exploit decadence; rather, it gives it its due'.¹¹² Before I discuss depictions of sexuality with filming techniques against such a complex backdrop, a few words about the production, the final on-screen synopsis, and musical numbers.

Marty Baum, Head of ABC Pictures Corp., and Emanuel Wolf, President of Allied Artists Pictures Corporation, bought the film rights to *Cabaret* for \$1.5 million. It was produced by Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin on a modest budget of \$3.4 million.¹¹³ From the outset, astute decisions were made to reject much of John Kander and Fred Ebb's conventional non-diegetic 'plot' numbers from director Harold Prince's 1966 Broadway production, creating two distinct realms whereby the 'diegetic' performances on the Kit Kat Klub stage comment on the non-musical world outside it.¹¹⁴ This non-linear approach

¹¹⁰ Dr Emmie McFadden, film lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University in Sam Moore, 'Cabaret: How the X-rated musical became a hit', BBC Culture, 11 February 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20220210-how-the-x-rated-musical-cabaret-became-a-hit>, accessed 9.7.22.

¹¹¹ Moore, 'Cabaret'.

¹¹² Pauline Kael, *5001 Nights at the Movies* (Arrow Books, London, 1984), 86.

¹¹³ Cy Feuer and Ken Gross, *I Got the Show Right Here* (New York, London & Toronto: Simon & Schuster, 2003), Kindle, Chapter Twenty-five; Wasson, *Fosse*, 246.

¹¹⁴ The original theatrical production of *Cabaret* was rather schizophrenic in style, part 'book' and part 'concept' musical, creating two different modes: the twilight world of the Kit Kat Klub and its exterior realm. Fosse eliminated the musicalised sections from the outside world creating a more realistic format. This in turn, thrust the self-reflexive movie paradigm into more sophisticated and nuanced territory, with other films such as *Chicago* (Rob Marshall, 2002) following *Cabaret's* lead. For a more comprehensive analysis and history of

rejected the traditional storytelling model embedding classic musical films such as *Oklahoma!* (Fred Zinnemann, 1955) to create a more accessible and sophisticated product.¹¹⁵ Fosse consequently incorporated the musical numbers within the plot as a ‘visual metaphor’ for the crumbling exterior society forming the context of the film’s narrative.¹¹⁶ The mischievous and deviant master of ceremonies (Emcee) survived almost intact from the various changes in the trajectory from theatre to screen, which I later explore.¹¹⁷ Screenwriter Jay Presson Allen was hired and incorporated elements from Prince’s work, Isherwood’s stories, and Druten’s play, heightening the film’s sexual register and ambiguity.¹¹⁸ In the translation to film, the nationalities of English eccentric Sally Bowles and her American partner Brian Roberts were reversed, amplifying the phenomenon of identity and displacement, which also tinge *Cabaret*’s plot.¹¹⁹ These dynamics coincided with evolving attitudes to gender and sexuality within the visual culture of the 1970s, whereby Brian’s bisexuality became far more explicit on film. Shooting began at the Bavaria Studios in Munich on 22 February 1971 and wrapped on 9 July 1971.¹²⁰

this phenomenon please read: Kim H. Kowalke, ‘Today’s Invention, Tomorrow’s Cliché: Love Life and the Concept Musical’, Kurt Weill Foundation, accessed 25 April 2022, <https://www.kwf.org/wp-content/uploads/Kowalke-Todays-Invention-Tomorrows-Cliche-Love-Life-and-the-Concept-Musical.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ Professor James Leve, *Yale Broadway Masters Series: Kander and Ebb* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), Kindle, Introduction.

¹¹⁶ Gargaro, ‘Works’, 9.

¹¹⁷ Harold Prince also found the inspiration for the Emcee after being stationed with the army close to Stuttgart, Germany in 1951. He reminisces seeing various productions at a nightclub called Maxims:

‘There was a dwarf MC, hair parted in the middle, and hair lacquered down with brilliantine, his mouth made a bright red cupid’s bow, who wore heavy false eyelashes and sand, danced, goosed, tickled and pawed four lumpen Valkyres [sic] waving diaphanous butterfly wings’. These images forged the concept of *Cabaret*, and the diminutive figure consequently transmorphed into the Emcee, who linked various components of the entire musical. In Hal Prince, *Contradictions: Notes on Twenty-six Years in the Theatre* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1974), 126; In Carol Ilson, *Harold Prince: A Director’s Journey* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2000), 140.

¹¹⁸ The British playwright, novelist, and screenwriter Hugh Wheeler (1912-1987) is credited as research consultant on the film; however, many sources cite him as also being the co-author of the screenplay. Peter H. Kemp, ‘Cabaret’, *Senses of Cinema*, CTEQ Annotations on Film, Issue 5, accessed 25 July 2022, <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2000/cteq/cabaret/#1>.

¹¹⁹ Linda Mizejewski, *Divine Decadence: Fascism, Female Spectacle, and the Makings of Sally Bowles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 202; In *The Making of Cabaret*, the author states that Hugh Wheeler was ‘commissioned to improve the screenplay’ and ‘agreed to make Sally Bowles American and transplant her, like Louise Brooks, to Germany. Keith Garebian, *The Making of Cabaret*, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Kindle, Chapter 9, Reincarnations and Revisions, The 1972 Fosse Film.

¹²⁰ Tropiano, *Music on Film*, Kindle, Chapter 4, Shooting Cabaret: ‘A Most Strange and Extraordinary Journey’.

Cambridge scholar Brian Roberts (Michael York) arrives in Berlin in 1931 and is welcomed to the tawdry Kit Kat Klub by the Mephistophelian Emcee (Joel Grey) with the Kurt Weill inspired 'Willkommen'. Brian takes lodgings in the decaying boarding house of Fräulien Schneider (Elisabeth Neumann-Viertel), where he meets the American extrovert Sally Bowles (Liza Minnelli), a 'femme fatale' singer at the club, and he goes to see her star turn, 'Mein Herr'. She introduces him to gigolo fortune hunter Fritz Wendel (Fritz Wepper), and Brian gives him English lessons to help pay the rent. By chance, Fritz meets the beautiful Jewish heiress Natalia Landauer (Marisa Berenson) at Fräulien Schneider's and becomes infatuated with her. Unfortunately, she is rich, and he is poor. Sally strikes up a relationship with Brian after making a clumsy attempt to seduce him earlier, and she sings 'Maybe This Time' as a reflection of her neediness. She later meets debonair and super-rich playboy Maximilian von Heune (Helmut Griem). Sally and the Emcee sing 'Money, Money', representative of the hyperinflation engulfing the Weimar Republic at the time. Maximilian becomes a regular presence in the lives of Sally and Brian, and the Emcee and two girl dancers hint at a ménage à trois with 'Two Ladies'. Maximilian consequently showers Sally and Brian with expensive presents and pays for luxurious meals and champagne. After staying at his country mansion, Maximilian and Sally have sexual relations after Brian passes out to the 'Sitting Pretty' record playing on the gramophone. Later, and in Sally's absence, Brian and Maximilian go to a *Biergarten* and witness the rise of Nazism as the initially innocent folk song 'Tomorrow Belongs to Me', sung by an Arian youth, morphs into a powerful and arousing anthem, hinting at the horrors to come. Meanwhile, Natalia and Fritz begin to fall in love. After antisemitic thugs kill her dog, the Emcee and ensemble perform 'Tiller Girls' as they goose-step off the stage. Fritz confesses to Brian that he, too, is Jewish. The Emcee sings 'If They Could See Her' as an ode to racism and prejudice, with a dancer dressed as a gorilla. Fritz and Natalia consequently get married. Dumped by Maximilian, who

leaves for Argentina, Sally and Brian argue, and she confesses to having shared his bed, to which Brian also admits. He storms out of the apartment and is beaten up by Nazis on the streets after an altercation with them. Sally and Brian rekindle their relationship, later confessing that she will have a baby. In a romantic scene decorated with candles, a gramophone plays the song ‘Heiraten’, and they plan to marry, although she is still unsure who the father is. After a dream fantasy sequence with a shattered vamp from ‘Willkommen’, Sally has misgivings and decides to have an abortion at the last minute. Brian abandons her in Berlin, and she sings the title song ‘Cabaret’. The Emcee appears one last time to bid us farewell with distorted chords of the opening number before he takes a final bow and exits.

Whereas *Sweet Charity*’s genesis and stage-to-screen adaptation can be considered a response to the sexual revolution, *Cabaret*’s origins were a reaction against the social injustice, prejudice, and hatred permeating the USA during the epoch.¹²¹ Thus, Prince and his creative team linked the Isherwood stories with their underlying themes of antisemitism in Germany during the 1920s to the racial problems leading to assassinations and bloodshed on the streets of the USA sparked by the notorious 1965 march in Selma.¹²² The title *Cabaret* was playwright Joe Masteroff’s idea who wrote the original book for the 1966 stage production whereby ‘he saw the life of the cabaret as a metaphor for Germany’.¹²³ Consequently, the Kit Kat Klub in the film is a spectacular space functioning like ‘a fictional burlesque theater as a forum to showcase a distinct narrative of Berlin hedonism, sexual expression and confronting social commentary’.¹²⁴ These dynamics are further exacerbated by the trope of the distorted mirror hovering over the Kit Kat Klub stage and the vivid and

¹²¹ Harold Prince and the authors of *Cabaret* saw the parallel between the ‘spiritual bankruptcy of Germany in the 1920s and [the USA] in the 1960s’. To demonstrate this hypothesis, Prince took a centerfold from *Life* magazine dated 19 August 1966 of American students opposing the integration of a school to a stage rehearsal of *Cabaret*. The image recalled the political rallies held in Munich in 1928 and would later inform the political subtext of the plot and also screenplay of the film. Prince, *Contradictions*, 125-126.

¹²² Ilson, *Prince*, 137.

¹²³ Gerrard Carter, ‘Willkommen, Bienvenue, Welcome: The Emcee and the Master of Metaphors in Bob Fosse’s *Cabaret*’, *Miranda* 19 (2019): 2, DOI: 10.4000/miranda.21233; Prince, *Contradictions*, 126.

¹²⁴ Carter, ‘Willkommen’, 2.

candid depictions of the transgressive characters, which scholar Linda Mizejewski refers to as ‘gender fuck’ in her remarkable book *Divine Decadence: Fascism, Female Spectacle, and the Makings of Sally Bowles*.¹²⁵ By way of example, ‘[p]residing over this cabaret of sublime decadence is the Emcee, an omnipresent force that encapsulates the many and varied facets of human nature’.¹²⁶ As Fosse’s so-called ‘camera obscura’ is often attributable to giving *Cabaret* its unique quality that ‘added an extra layer of ambiguity to Prince’s original stage production’ and ‘transformed the genre’s structuring concepts’, this chapter seeks to analyse such phenomena, and in particular link his reflexive filming techniques and the multifarious environments his camera navigates with sexuality and gender through the staged musical numbers, ‘Willkommen’, ‘Two Ladies’ and ‘Tiller Girls’.¹²⁷ I will also explore two other segments: the opening title credits and Sally’s dream sequence leading to her final ‘Cabaret’ anthem, further subverting the framework of the movie musical.

The opening title credits of *Cabaret* function as a framing device for the complicated dynamics of the Kit Kat Klub and the duality of its world. In many ways, it is the most reflexive, or artificial, part of the film, creating a tension between abstraction and representation, yet never aesthetically intruding or attempting to upstage the movie as a work. Solid black fills the screen, underscored by an eerie silence, eschewing a full-colour palette and a musical overture that typically embeds the genre. Sparse white titles in a stylish art deco inspired ‘ITC Busorama’ title font fade in and out, contrasting with the darkness.¹²⁸ After a few moments, a tiny flicker of light breaks through and gradually becomes brighter, while other abstract images slowly appear randomly in the frame. A definitive solid form of what seems to be illuminated light bulbs in a pearl necklace shape hangs in the centre of the

¹²⁵ Mizejewski, *Divine*, 204.

¹²⁶ Carter, ‘Willkommen’, 2.

¹²⁷ Anouk Bottero, ‘Redefining the musical: adapting *Cabaret* for the screen’, 5-6, accessed 23 June 2022, <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02442517/document>. The author refers to Fosse’s ‘camera obscura’.

¹²⁸ The typeface was created by American typographer Tom Carnase (1939-) in 1970 by International Typeface Corporation. ‘Tom Carnase, Identifont,’ accessed 26.2.23, https://www.myfonts.com/person/Tom_Carnase/.

landscape, resembling grotesquely exposed teeth.¹²⁹ Then, appearing like a vortex of movement in slow motion, irregular images gradually intermingle, framed by slivering biomorphic static shapes around them, creating a dream-like atmosphere in monochrome. Concurrently, the sounds of low voices and laughter pierce the silence together with the soft clinking sound of glasses while the moving images on the screen take on a more recognisable form as a blurred figure shifts from the centre to the bottom left of the frame. Then a slight pink tinge appears with the cacophony of a small third-rate band warming up as the chattering voices become louder. We are spectators to the life of a cabaret bar through the lens of a distorted mirror while colour and sound gradually intensify.¹³⁰ Again, there is a moment of silence, and a voluptuous figure in a vibrant crimson hat and dress sashays across the screen, crossing paths with a waiter holding a menu. Technicolor now dominates the landscape, and we are transfixed as if a spectator observing the magnification of an abstract or impressionist artwork with deep red and dark colour tones juxtaposed with snatches of flickering light. Throughout this process, the images remain hazy and in slow motion. The distant sound of a protracted drum roll builds to a crescendo as the final title, 'Berlin 1931', appears on screen (**Fig. 12**). To a resonating cymbal clash, the 'Emcee', with a ghostly pale face, false eyelashes, rouged cheeks, patent leather hair, and cupid's bow appears in a close-up shot. The distorted reflection creates a beguiling but unsettling vision. He briefly stares directly into the lens, breaking the theatrical fourth wall convention (**Fig. 13**).¹³¹

¹²⁹ Mizejewski, *Divine*, 204.

¹³⁰ The onstage mirror was the brainchild of scenic designer Boris Aronson (1898-1980). According to Harold Prince, Aronson designed a scale model of the set which included a large trapezoid mirror suspended above the centre of the stage and slanted to reflect the audience, thus creating various complex aesthetics within the theatrical production. These dynamics became more amplified within the film version whereby the mirror was physically distorted as a representation of society itself. Prince, *Contradictions*, 133.

¹³¹ The fourth wall is the screen between audience and performers championed by Bertolt Brecht who did not want the spectators to become emotionally connected with characters on stage and he consequently developed various techniques known as '*verfremdungseffekt*' or 'alienation-effect', also referred to as the 'V-effect' to fracture this connection. Carol Martin and Henry Bial, ed, *Brecht Sourcebook* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 5; Brecht talks about this process in an essay: Bertolt Brecht, 'Theatre for Learning: Bertolt Brecht', trans. Eric Bentley, in *Brecht*, 15-22.

Before analysing ‘Willkommen’, I will briefly discuss the leitmotif of the mirror in the opening sequence and the use of close-up. Academics Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, in their book *Film Theory: an introduction through the senses*, state that ‘window and door’ devices in moving pictures often function as a portal to observe the world by ‘crossing thresholds and traversing liminal space’.¹³² The authors further posit that film generally ‘has various entry points’, creating a complex relationship between ‘spectator and screen’.¹³³ Fosse’s literal use of a distorted mirror on the Kit Kat Klub stage through which we enter his subversive world is a fascinating gateway; it both entices but denies complete access, disrupting our immersive experience. Thus, unveiling this device in the opening sequence is a radical gesture considering we are observing a society’s microcosm.

Fosse’s use of visual and theatrical reflexivity adds complexities to the *mise-en-scène*.¹³⁴ When for a few fleeting moments, the mischievous and smirking face of the Emcee fills the frame, his androgynous appearance abandons previous representations of male sexuality in the film musical; dynamics magnified using mirrors and close-ups. In just a few minutes, Fosse has reestablished the genre. The techniques he and cinematographer Christopher Unsworth utilised in this sequence are rudimentary yet incredibly effective; the camera remains static throughout in one long shot, with post-production effects added in the shift from monochrome to polychrome.¹³⁵ The black and white titles complement the cabaret’s twilight setting and the film’s serious themes. Furthermore, the theatrical drum roll echoing through the soundtrack builds anticipation and recalls a military march, heightening the film’s duality before the Emcee’s startling entrance. This eerie image lingers while he

¹³² The authors are referring here to perennial classics like Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954). Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 56.

¹³³ Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 56.

¹³⁴ Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 56.

¹³⁵ The black and white photographic print *Gala Soirée at Maxim’s* (Brassaï, 1949) and the depiction of post-war decadent Parisian nightlife may have had a noteworthy influence in the filming of this sequence, which is further heightened by the ‘ITC Busorama’ art deco font creating a café society ambient. The photographer Brassaï (1899-1984) was from Hungarian-French origins who lived in Berlin in the 1920s before moving to Paris.

observes us silently before smirking as the film segues into ‘Willkommen’, which I now discuss.

‘Willkommen’ is pivotal in *Cabaret* as it introduces the film’s unique and distinctive structure. It informs the audience that the contents of the songs within the Kit Kat Klub environment will reflect on the story as the movie unfolds and that the lyrics also provide ‘discours aimed at both the diegetic and the film audience’.¹³⁶ More importantly, it introduces Fosse’s filming styles and associated cross-cutting techniques, vital to the movie’s storytelling. Additionally, it presents the role of the Emcee as a narrator/commentator and the cabaret performers, whose appearance broaches issues relating to portrayals of gender and sexuality from the outset. All these elements are framed by the film’s provocative and authentic production design.¹³⁷ Finally, ‘Willkommen’ demonstrates the principles of visual versus theatrical reflexivity within the picture, which also underscores my other case studies.

When the Weillesque musical vamp begins, the camera pans back for the first time, revealing the Emcee’s pink bow tie matching his rouged face.¹³⁸ He flutters his heavy false eyelashes as he beckons us in German, French, and English, ‘Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome. Fremde, étranger, stranger. Glücklich zu sehen. Je suis enchanté’. The number works seamlessly, suturing theatrical performance with filming techniques. Mizejewski deftly analyses this constellation:

In this brief backward-tracking shot, which includes his turn to the camera, the frame is split between the representational emcee—gaudy, leering, but

¹³⁶ Randy Clark, ‘Bending the Genre: The Stage and Screen Versions of Cabaret,’ *Literature/Film Quarterly* 19, no. 1, Arts Premium Collection (1991): 54.

¹³⁷ Credited with the art direction and production design of the film are Rolf Zehetbauer, Hans Jürgen Kiebach and Herbert Strubel who won Oscars for their work in 1973.

¹³⁸ Additionally, John Kander’s mechanical music and Fred Ebb’s acerbic lyrics compliment the Emcee’s persona and the film’s milieu. This dynamic can be observed in the superbly evocative opening song ‘Willkommen’, which hints at mischief and recalls the Weimar Republic itself. It also reinforces Joel Grey’s lascivious and provocative performance with an underlying vamp that functions as a recurring motif within the film’s complex musical soundtrack. For example, it connects asynchronously the two distinct realms of *Cabaret*’s framework: the outside world, as in Sally’s fantasy sequence before her abortion, and then in the ‘Finale’ of the Kit Kat Klub in the last reel.

recognisable as a kind of campy performer—and his reflection as a colourful abstraction in the mirror that includes the cabaret audience. Directly addressed by his performance, the film audience is also positioned with the reflective crowd, in that shot, creating an uneasy relationship between the two audiences which the text both courts and attempts to occlude.¹³⁹

Furthermore, it is an aesthetic that underscores the hypothesis that ‘a look in the mirror [or cinema screen] necessitates a confrontation with one’s own face as the window to one’s own interior self’. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze poetically reflects on the use of close-ups and their psychological effect:

As Balázs has already demonstrated, the close-up does *not* tear away its object from a set of which it would form part, of which it would be a part, but on the contrary it abstracts it from spatialization-temporal co-ordinates, that is to say it raises it to the state of Entity. The close-up is not an enlargement and, if it implies a change of dimension, this is an absolute change: a mutation of movement which ceases to be translation in order to become expression [emphasis in original].¹⁴⁰

To add to this dynamic, the tuxedoed Emcee abruptly shuns the camera lens and the non-diegetic audience to acknowledge the Kit Kat Klub’s patrons for the first time, ‘Happy to see you. Bleiben, reste stay’, creating a highly duplicitous landscape that ricochets between registers of spectatorship. Moreover, Fosse’s *mise-en-scène* is permeated with subversive aesthetics synonymous with the Weimar Republic, adding to the film’s radical coding. For example, instead of showing a generic shot of the audience in the first scene, Fosse replaces this with a *tableau vivant* of painter Otto Dix’s *Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia Von Harden*

¹³⁹ Mizejewski, *Divine*, 204.

¹⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze: *Cinema 1: the Movement-Image* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 96.

(1926), whereby the eponymous and androgynous figure sits smoking as she watches the Emcee's performance and the cabaret spring to life (**Fig. 14**).¹⁴¹ It is a riveting choice, not just because of its queer undertones, but because it works as a 'frame within a frame' and directly connects to the era.¹⁴² Moreover, as the film slips further into decay and the characters become more sexually nuanced and corrupted, the dark and sombre colour palette, which shuns the Hollywood musical arcadian format, accentuates this phenomenon. This aesthetic is particularly evident in Sally's dream sequence, which I analyse later.¹⁴³ I now shift from the film's alluring mise-en-scène and use of artworks to an important visual reflexive technique that distinguishes *Cabaret* from other works.

The film's unorthodox use of cross-cutting to propel the plot is also introduced in 'Willkommen' as the camera cuts from the stage setting to Brian's arrival in Berlin on a train during daylight. At the same time, the narrator beckons him, 'Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome, Im cabaret, au cabaret, to cabaret', creating a fascinating juxtaposition of refrained English gent with the debauched aesthetic of the nocturnal club (**Fig. 15**).¹⁴⁴ As Terri J. Gordon asserts in his outstanding essay, 'Film in the Second Degree: 'Cabaret' and the Dark Side of Laughter', the movie also functions as a coming-of-age story about Brian Roberts and his exploration of his homosexual tendencies as the city entices and then corrupts him.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Sabine Rewald, *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 134. *Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia Von Harden* (1926) is a permanent exhibit at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, France. Otto Dix (1891-1969) was a German painter and print maker whose artworks depicted the aftermath of WWI and the Weimar Republic. Contrary to belief, he was actually opposed to the expressionist movement, which Berthold Brecht thought was superficial and constrained and he associated himself more to the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) movement. 'Otto Dix: German, 1892-1969', MoMA, accessed 26.2.23, <https://www.moma.org/artists/1559>.

¹⁴² When Dix first saw his subject, he enthused, 'I must paint you! I simply must! You are representative of an entire epoch'. In Sergiusz Michalski, *New Objectivity: Painting, Graphic Art and Photography in Weimar Germany 1919-1933, Big Series Art* (Köln, Tachen, 1994), 56 in Carter, 'Willkommen', 3.

¹⁴³ Throughout rehearsals and filming, Fosse carried a catalogue of George Grosz paintings which he studied ardently and inspired the lighting concept within the mise-en-scène. In Wasson, *Fosse*, 250; In his introduction dated 26 November 1965 to *Ecce Homo* by George Grosz, Henry Miller states: 'Do you want to look at dementia, a taste of sadism, a fillip of unadulterated sex, a sample of transmogrification, a reminder of the price of war, just rifle these pages'. George Grosz, *Ecce Homo* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1967), xiv.

¹⁴⁴ Terri J. Gordon, 'Film in the Second Degree: 'Cabaret' and the Dark Side of Laughter', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 152, no. 4. (December 2008): 443.

¹⁴⁵ Gordon, 'Film', 444.

Moreover, the constant cross-cutting between Brian and the Emcee ‘suggests that they may be similar in their sexual ambiguity’.¹⁴⁶ His arrival is shot through the glass of the train carriage, the distorted reflection of the outside world functioning as a conduit to the warped mirrored glass of the Kit Kat Klub stage and its multifarious environment. *En passant*, it is also at the train station where Brian bids farewell to Berlin, in the last reel, having been tainted by his experiences in Berlin. Throughout *Cabaret*, there is a constant tension between theatrical and visual reflexivity, or that of performance and editing, amplifying the film’s underlying themes of transgression and sexuality, discussed below.

The Emcee’s enticing rhetoric of decadent fun is underscored with a subversive agenda, ‘Leave your troubles outside! So life is disappointing? Forget it! In here, life is beautiful. The girls are beautiful. Even the orchestra is beautiful’. These lyrics create ‘an ironic register’ as we are introduced to Fosse’s distorted form of beauty, further amplified by the film’s editing techniques.¹⁴⁷ For example, the camera immediately cuts to the lesbian patrons and the outlandish bartender, followed by a close-up of crossdresser Elke putting on a blond wig in the blemished and dirty dressing room mirror (**Figs. 16 & 17**). When he introduces the Kit Kat Klub dancers on the premise that ‘Each and every one [is] a virgin’, their appearance recalls tawdry and destitute street prostitutes or men in drag, creating additional layers of sexual ambiguity. As scholar Gerrard Carter articulates, ‘[their] fixed gazed is devoid of emotion. The sick pallor of their skin, their clown-like makeup and eyes perturbably encircled in dark smoky rings exude a disturbing eroticism as they execute a series of slow-motion seductive moves... [they] look spent, down and out, and disturbingly intriguing (**Fig. 18**).¹⁴⁸ They thrust their pelvises into the camera with their tattered eclectic costumes of miscellaneous hats and shorts peppered with multicoloured sparkling sequins,

¹⁴⁶ Mizejewski, *Divine*, 214.

¹⁴⁷ Gordon, ‘Film’, 451.

¹⁴⁸ Carter, ‘Willkommen’, 3.

drawing attention to their genitalia, thus heightening the sexualised theme of the number and, indeed, the cabaret itself. These movements also call attention to Fosse's deliberately mechanical and sleazy choreography as the dancers appear disengaged from each other, slowly lifting their upturned feet and legs to make geometric shapes with pointed fingers twirling towards the mirrored ceiling of the club, recalling the very nature and form of Expressionism itself.¹⁴⁹ Giving heed to the film's visual reflexivity, Fosse's camera is placed directly at the audience level for most of the 'Willkommen' spot, a technique that encompasses many of the musical numbers in *Cabaret*, highlighting the film's scopophilic qualities and the male gaze. I refer here to the shots of the Kit Kat Klub dancers, focusing on the area between the abdomen and the knees or so-called 'crotch' shots, which have formed 'the very foundation of the show musical's syntax' whereby the camera is male, and the show is female.¹⁵⁰

Another example of this phenomenon is when the Emcee introduces us to the ensemble of the Kit Kat Klub; he unexpectedly crouches down on stage and fractures the fourth wall again by looking directly into the camera lens. He is framed, flanked by one of the Kit Kat Klub dancer's stockinged legs, and points his phallic cane towards her genitalia for our voyeuristic pleasure. Again, Fosse uses low camera angles, placing us within the milieu of the Kit Kat Klub itself as we are seduced into the Emcee's world. It is a shot that ingeniously demonstrates where the dynamics of sexuality intersect with theatrical and visual reflexivity, as all elements are exposed in the frame (**Fig. 19**).

Utilising Altman's heteronormative hypothesis that the audience represents the 'passionate male eye' and the performers on stage are an 'unattainable female vision', the Kit

¹⁴⁹ The Expressionist movement permeated not only painting but also literature, drama, stage design, dance, film, and architecture. It was a style that eschewed dominant social and political structures. Elger Dietmar, *Expressionism: A Revolution in German Art*, ed. Ingo F. Walther (Benedikt Taschen, Köln: Germany), 8-9. It can therefore be considered that Fosse's anarchic artistic vision for the musical film followed this trajectory in disrupting the Hollywood status quo.

¹⁵⁰ Altman, *American*, 213-214.

Kat Klub functions as ‘burlesque’ and therefore forms part of what he calls ‘theatrical illusion’, whereby ‘the woman on stage is willing to lend her body to all who ask, when in fact she is available only to the male eye—for just as poetry is displaced passion, so is the eye a figure for, a fiction for, the phallus.... She must remain like a dream vision—higher, bigger, brighter, and sexier than life, yet utterly unreal and unattainable’.¹⁵¹ However, Fosse destabilises such an argument by creating a transgressive world questioning ideologies of beauty and, indeed, representations of gender roles, blurred like the images trapped within the trapezoidal mirror hovering above the stage.

Thus, we return to Grey’s unforgettable appearance in close-up in the mirror device at the beginning of ‘Willkommen’. It is a particularly ‘shocking’ vision, fracturing traditional spectatorship conventions.¹⁵² As Mizejewski points out, in 1972, audiences were already beginning to acknowledge new and radical sensibilities in visual culture, especially regarding ‘the highly publicized theatrics of ‘gender fuck’ and camp’.¹⁵³ Moreover, although the narrator’s role is often perceived as ambiguous, his leering mannerisms and effeminate exaggerated gestures also represent the explicit queerness that embeds the film’s narrative. Susan Sontag’s foundational 1964 essay, ‘Notes on Camp’, encapsulates the allure of the Emcee:

What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine.... Allied to the Camp taste for the androgynous is something that seems quite

¹⁵¹ Altman, *American*, 213-214.

¹⁵² In Stephen F. Bauer’s astonishing and profound essay examining the relationship between historical events, memory, and the film *Cabaret*, the author refers to the distorted face of the Master of Ceremonies as a ‘spectacle, shocking, as though out of an expressionist painting (Otto Dix, George Grosz, or Emil Nolde come to mind)’. He further states that ‘most of all, [the Emcee] is knowing. He seems to say: You, ladies and gentlemen, think yourself to know reality. I am a clown, a brief distraction. We’ll see.’ In Stephen F. Bauer, ‘Cultural History and the Film *Cabaret*: A Study in Psychoanalytic Criticism’, in *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society, V. 12: Essays in Honor of George Devereux*, ed. Bryce Boyer, and Simon A. Grolnick (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1987), 179.

¹⁵³ Mizejewski, *Divine*, 214.

different but isn't: a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms.¹⁵⁴

The New York Times theatre critic, Walter Kerr, wrote of Grey's interpretation of the Emcee: '[C]heerful, charming, soulless and conspiratorially wicked. In a pink vest, with sunburst eyes gleaming out of a cold-cream face, he is the silencer of bad dreams, the gleeful puppet of pretended joy, sin on a string'.¹⁵⁵ He embodies the magnetic sexual energy that underpins the film and the Kit Kat Klub, linking performance to filming techniques as Fosse's camera shifts from the inner intensity of close-ups to more explicit long shots to study his deviant, yet alluring, persona.¹⁵⁶

Rarely discussed in scholarly literature and often overshadowed by more iconic and hyper-stylised numbers from *Cabaret*, 'Two Ladies' is a riveting case study demonstrating Fosse's use of abstract cinematic space against the Kit Kat Klub's sexualised milieu. In doing so, he reverts momentarily to a heightened sense of visual and theatrical reflexivity whereby the diegetic audience becomes encoded in the *mise-en-scène*. The number also highlights how audio effects manipulate the film's various registers, underscored by Fred Ebb's lewd lyrics and John Kander's uptempo music, which I now explore.

'Two Ladies' remains relatively intact from theatre to screen, but the significant changes in the plot trigger different meanings. Whereby on stage, it reflected the decadence engulfing Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s; in the film, it directly comments on the 'ménage a trois' developing between Sally, Max, and Brian.¹⁵⁷ Functioning to bring 'the cabaret and the outside world in juxtaposition', the Emcee's voice can be 'heard asynchronously' in the introduction to the number. At the same time, the three characters appear intoxicated, sweaty,

¹⁵⁴ Sontag, *Camp*, 9.

¹⁵⁵ Walter Kerr, 'The Theater: 'Cabaret' Opens at the Broadhurst', *The New York Times*, November 21, 1966.

¹⁵⁶ I am referring here to Pauline Kael's comments of the sexualised energy that underscores the entire film in her already cited book, *5001 Nights at the Movies* (Arrow Books, London, 1984), 86.

¹⁵⁷ Clark, 'Bending', 54.

and dishevelled while sipping champagne at the back of Maximilian's Rolls Royce, 'Berlin makes strange bedfellows these days'.¹⁵⁸ Then an abrupt cut to the Kit Kat Klub as the purple-lipped Emcee addresses the camera directly, 'Some people have one people. Some have two' before segueing into the bawdy number whereby the impish narrator rejoices about sexual threesomes with two of the Kit Kat Klub dancers dressed in traditional German folk village costumes. Keith Garebian, in his exceptional book *The Making of Cabaret*, refers to the number as a 'novelty act verg[ing] on soft porn. Tacky and smutty, the number revels in kitsch and is an effective expression of the impulses towards perversion that were shamelessly satisfied by hordes of young people who considered it a disgrace to be suspected of virginity or chastity'.¹⁵⁹ This effect is heightened by the honky tonk piano and sassy brass accompaniment, recalling burlesque and vaudeville.¹⁶⁰ The provocative lyrics suggest a 'spectrum of sexuality' as the performers sing, 'We switch partners daily to play as we please, twosie beats onesie, but nothing beats threes. I sleep in the middle, I'm left foot, I'm right, but there's room on the bottom if you drop in one night'.¹⁶¹ It also demonstrates how *Cabaret* eschews the standard male and female 'coupling' template dominating the genre for years.¹⁶² In a bizarre twist of theatricality, the three characters cavort under white bed linen on stage while a stroboscope creates a stark black-and-white effect as the Emcee appears, with a cigar dangling from his mouth, triumphant after having lost his trousers in sexual activity, cutting a macabre vision.¹⁶³ The jarring use of a flickering spotlight on the performers reflects the transgressive nature of the number that recalls vaudeville and, indeed, the origins of cinema itself, accentuated by the low camera angles and severe close-ups of the

¹⁵⁸ Blades, 'Evolution', 226.

¹⁵⁹ Garebian, *Cabaret*, Kindle, Chapter 5: Kander and Ebb.

¹⁶⁰ Garebian, *Cabaret*, Kindle, Chapter 5: Kander and Ebb.

¹⁶¹ Garebian, *Cabaret*, Kindle, Chapter 9, Reincarnations and Revisions, The 1998 Sam Mendes Broadway Production.

¹⁶² Altman, *American*, 32.

¹⁶³ Gargaro, 'Works', 189.

audience laughing grotesquely as they watch the routine evolve like a highly sexualised slapstick comedy.

Then, in a significant shift of register, Fosse's camera shows the performers' point of view from the back of the stage in a *mise-en-scène* blinded with multiple colour spotlights and lens-flare, aesthetics which become fused with the diegetic audience watching the cabaret performance behind. For a few sublime seconds, visual and theatrical reflexivity subvert levels of spectatorship whereby the Kit Kat Klub patrons become observed by us, the non-diegetic audience, as if caught in an impressionist landscape of light and wonder (**Fig. 20**). Gargaro states that 'In Cabaret, ... a handheld camera would view the audience from the perspective of the emcee and a strongly tilted camera would emphasise the distortion of the emcee from a spectator's viewpoint'. Thus, Fosse's filming techniques encourage a sophisticated three-way psychological discourse between performer, diegetic, and film audience.¹⁶⁴ 'Film', Gargaro also asserts, 'has always favored directors with a flair for the painterly (Renoir, Kurosawa, Berman, etc.), but it is choreographers who seem to create musical films with style. They form patterns that ebb and flow with time; the camera demands change in forms and patterns'.¹⁶⁵ As with *Sweet Charity*, the lens flare darting across the camera lens creates again what Turnock refers to as 'materialist docurealism' or 'poetic docurealism', highlighting, not hiding, the filmmaking process.¹⁶⁶ Borrowing from director John Huston who wanted a 'muted post-impressionist' look for his film *Moulin Rouge* (1956), Fosse also shoots the club scenes with filters creating the smoky haze that permeates the *mise-en-scène*.¹⁶⁷ The overall effect creates an ethereal, painterly quality that smudges the 'sexually confused, affected, sightseeing patrons... on the brink of anarchy' with

¹⁶⁴ Gargaro, 'Works', 69.

¹⁶⁵ Viola Swisher, 'Bob Fosse Translates Sweet Charity from Stage to Screen', *Dancemagazine* 43, (February, 1969), 22 in Vance Gargaro, 'Works', 2.

¹⁶⁶ Turnock, 'ILM', 158, 160-161.

¹⁶⁷ Linda K. Brengle, 'Divine Decadence, Darling! The Sixty-Year History of the Kit Kat Klub', *Journal of Popular Culture* 32, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 150-151.

the complex dynamics of the Kit Kat Klub as the two dancers carry the Emcee across the stage screaming and kicking like a naughty schoolboy.¹⁶⁸

Whereby 'Two Ladies' overlapped audio creating a juxtaposition of two realms, 'Tiller Girls' also manipulates visual and audio elements to accentuate the various critical themes underscoring *Cabaret*, that of sexuality and politics, presenting them radically and excitingly. I refer here to Fosse's use of cross-cutting to create a montage of life and stage incorporating theatrical and visual reflexivity. Although this technique was also interspersed throughout other moments in the film, such as in 'Willkommen', the ominous threat of Nazism has by now become more prominent in the diegesis, reflected in the filming process. In Fosse's hands, the macabre fusion of war, death, sexuality, and theatre becomes a powerful and exhilarating dynamic.

After an altercation with Nazis, Brian has a tender scene with Sally as he lies recovering in bed. Sally's 'divinely decadent' green nail polish is the only feminine trope establishing her gender as he caresses her in close-up. His bruised and battered face dominates the mise-en-scène. A cut suddenly to the Kit Kat Klub and the blasting sounds of trumpets creates a fascinating yet disturbing contrast as the dancers appear in bodices and hats on the stage, streaming with coloured ribbons, confetti, and *joie de vivre* in a spectacle recalling the heyday of the Moulin Rouge. The Emcee is at first entirely invisible amongst the female ensemble but then introduces himself to the audience in drag and flirts outrageously with them, highlighting the transgressive nature of the club and the film's subversion of female stereotypes (**Fig. 21**). Fosse's low-angled camera captures the dancers' derrières in close-up wriggling for the salacious delight of the audience(s), exacerbating the film's scopophilic quality. Then, a sudden and unexpected cut to the outside world as fascist thugs

¹⁶⁸ Gargaro, 'Works', 91.

climb over the iron gate of the Landauer mansion with a canvas bundle. Shot mainly with a handheld camera following the perpetrators, the screams of ‘Juden! Juden! Juden!’ becomes more and more prominent. This is juxtaposed with an edit back to the club as the band plays a military drum roll while the ensemble morphs into Nazi Stormtroopers. Finally, a shocking jump to Natalia’s world, as the cadaver of her murdered and bloodied Schnauzer dog is dumped on her doorstep, embossed with the yellow-painted words ‘Juden’ framing the shot, the theatrical sound of the drum roll connecting the two disparate realms. In the Kit Kat Klub, the dancers goose-step off the stage, their canes functioning as rifles and once pink rosetted bowler hats as metal war helmets.

These few minutes of film accentuate fundamental dynamics within *Cabaret*: the underlying threat of fascism, depictions of sexuality, and the filmmaking process itself as a vital component of the film’s storytelling. Mizejewski goes some way to explore this phenomenon and asserts that the film version of *Cabaret* bears the imprint of ‘politics acting as spectacle’ whereby the audience is seduced into an erotically charged and visually exciting world that conflates sexuality with fascism.¹⁶⁹ A hypothesis further expanded on by Garebian, who states: ‘Just as Hitler and his Nazis depended on mixed theatricality and hysteria to cast a spell on their audiences at rallies; the musical draws attention to the role of artifice, fantasy, and spectacle during the creeping fascism of the period.... [T]he kick line goose-stepping of the cabaret girls... show that Nazism has begun its encroachment upon German culture’.¹⁷⁰ Kicklines were also omnipresent entertainment during the Nazi reign, serving as a ‘diversion’ and, more importantly, ‘an aesthetic vehicle for political propaganda’.¹⁷¹ Thus, Mizejewski and Garebian create a persuasive hypothesis about the dangers of ‘spectacle’ within *Cabaret*,

¹⁶⁹ Mizejewski, *Divine*, 212; Note: Selma is a town in Alabama that was entrenched with racism and hundreds of Afro-Americans marched for the right to vote on 7 March 1965 but were met with violence and bloodshed from local authorities and white vigilante groups. ‘Selma to Montgomery March’, History.com, updated 11 January 2022, accessed 22 June 22, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/selma-montgomery-march>.

¹⁷⁰ Garebian, *Cabaret*, Kindle, Chapter 5, Kander & Ebb.

¹⁷¹ Gordon, ‘Film’, 456-457.

particularly evident in the ‘Tiller Girls’ routine. Furthermore, their argument becomes more valid when we consider the period 1970 to 1972 when the movie was being planned, filmed, and demonstrates how the socio-politico climate converses and affects the cultural sphere:

American culture not only had had a new experience of spectacle—often violent spectacle—as politics, but had also heard German fascism rehashed as part of the divisive discourse in fierce struggles that often represented the force of good and evil in terms as absolute as any comic-book plot: the flower children versus the fascist pigs.¹⁷²

Although ‘Tiller Girls’ powerfully demonstrates the modern musical film’s ability to connect with the natural world and the socio-politico climate outside of its own narrative, it also strikes an ironic register considering *Cabaret*’s genesis resulted from a violent spectacle, a political rally in the USA when Harold Prince first had the idea for the original stage production. Furthermore, in this *mélange*, we also need to consider the underlying dynamics of sexuality that also imbue the number and Grey’s performance which:

[R]eveals disturbing gaps in the connection between marginalised sexuality and political oppression. Nazi oppression is specified as anti-Semitic but never as homophobic; it is represented with sadomasochistic iconography and signified as monstrous, secret femaleness that is immediately evident in the emcee’s effeminate mannerisms.... The film specifically reworks a major cultural anxiety that was additionally present in political spectacles [at the time]. This is the challenge to traditional gender identification, certainly visible in the celebrations of the androgynous dress in the counterculture, but also in more radical

¹⁷² Mizejewski, *Divine*, 207-208.

movements of both women's liberation and gay liberation, that crystallised as of 1969 and that emerges as a key historical condition of this text.¹⁷³

Such astute observations highlight the importance of *Cabaret* in its ability to remain relevant even in 2022. Thus, the trope of 'Girls [and indeed Men] in Uniform', towards the end of the number, functions as part 'political parody' and a parody of 'cabaret culture' itself working to critique 'gender norms', not only in the Weimar setting of the film but also the 1970s cultural landscape.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, In *Parody/Meta-Fiction*, Margaret Rose states that parodic texts serve as 'meta-fictional mirrors', forming part of Butler's theory on performativity, related to drag and cross-dressing.¹⁷⁵ In *Gender Trouble*, the author asserts, 'In *imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*' [author's emphasis retained].¹⁷⁶ As 'Tiller Girls' moves through various registers, it reveals its multifarious nature underscored by visual reflexivity, particularly hyperdynamic and exhilarating topsy-turvy editing techniques subverting and magnifying the cinematic landscape, creating an outlandishly complex and intelligent text that assaults our senses.

If at the beginning of the motion picture, 'Willkommen' sets out the unique framework where idiosyncratic filming techniques and aesthetics conflate with the text's premise that 'decadence can be fun'¹⁷⁷, therefore, cunningly seducing Brian and the audience(s) into this sexualised world, then the same complex coding in Sally Bowles' final 'dream sequence' warns of its consequences. Functioning like a narrative summary, the abstract use of images, darkness, and colour juxtaposed with shots of life backstage impact the film's final musicalised moments, including 'Cabaret', which I now consider. As with the surreal moments in *Sweet Charity*, Fosse's camera shifts from the aggrandisement of the

¹⁷³ Mizejewski, *Divine*, 211.

¹⁷⁴ Gordon, 'Film', 457-458.

¹⁷⁵ Margaret A. Rose, *Parody/Meta-Fiction: An Analysis of Parody as a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 61-106 in Gordon, 'Film', 458.

¹⁷⁶ Butler, *Gender*, 137.

¹⁷⁷ Bayer, *Movies*, 96.

female form to more metaphysical perspectives creating a far more involved and complex text.

Feuer asserts through Freudian analysis that the Hollywood musical film is embedded with dream sequences.¹⁷⁸ Thus, they function like a ‘kind of exorcism, leading to the actual fulfilment of desires’.¹⁷⁹ However, Fosse’s reinterpretation of this phenomenon destabilises the classical trope of the ‘dream ballet’, which often propels a musical’s heteronormative coupling narrative.¹⁸⁰ Unlike the sickly euphoric ‘I’m a Brass Band’ from *Sweet Charity*, where the lead protagonist finally believes she has found true love, Sally’s fantasy moment is the antithesis, expressing her existential crisis leading to the subsequent illegal abortion of her baby. Conveyed in flashback, combining previously unseen footage from the musical numbers with other critical dramatic scenes, Fosse’s camera and rapid editing technique observe the world from Sally’s perspective and predicament as she says, ‘It’ll be a most strange and extraordinary baby, won’t it?’ However, when the lens catches her eyes darting away from Brian’s gaze, we realise she has reservations. Underscored by the film’s musical leitmotif, the catchy vamp from ‘Willkommen’ starts softly at first, becoming increasingly louder and discordant with jarring musical horns, scratching at the viscera while her dream unfolds. The camera hovers over Sally and Brian as they pensively picnic in the park. Combined with the rapid but poetic editing, it creates a surreal ambient shifting from the natural to the artificial world as we enter Sally’s mind and behind the scenes of the Kit Kat Klub through her wide staring eyes. These moments are interspersed with fleeting close-up images of her *ménage à trois* with Max and Brian.

¹⁷⁸ It is outside the scope of this dissertation to offer a comprehensive analysis of dream sequences in movie musicals. Film doyenne Jane Feuer offers an excellent introductory discourse to this phenomenon in her groundbreaking *The Hollywood Musical: The Second Edition* (Hampshire, The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1993), 73-76.

¹⁷⁹ Feuer, *Hollywood*, 73.

Sally ethereally walks up the dark wooden staircase to her apartment, her fur coat floating behind her as she passes a young boy playing on a step who kicks a ball to the sound of a clashing cymbal, another musical trope imbuing the film, informing us that the cabaret is omnipresent. Looking back at him, she stands momentarily and glimpses her future life as an unlikely mother and uncertainty about the father. Ironically, her coat, an expensive gift from Max, will later finance her abortion. It brings to the fore Stam's interrogation of the self-reflexive film musical whereby Humbert Humbert in the film *Lolita* announces it as 'an essentially grief-proof sphere of existence wherefrom death and truth were banned'.¹⁸¹ *Cabaret* perverts this dynamic, whereby Sally appears to acknowledge for the first time the ramifications of both. Within her fleeting thoughts, she stands backstage in the wings, looking childlike and lost but also sexualised in a figure-hugging red dress, emphasising her frame and bosom. This scene follows the traditional musicals' desire to expose 'its own inner gears to the audience' as we explore this new cinematic space and Sally's dilemma.¹⁸² The Emcee enters the frame and starts to fondle Sally's breasts from behind, accentuating sex within the milieu and heeding the audience's voyeuristic desire (**Fig. 22**).¹⁸³ Her 'androgynous' appearance and 'masculine handsomeness' also subvert the film's sexual register. Indeed, whereas Brian and the Emcee's resemblance functions like 'a distorted mirror image', Sally and the Emcee are more directly aligned with their heavily painted faces, yet Grey's fine features are 'prettier' than hers.¹⁸⁴ Moments later, we observe Sally lit from above with a single spot whereby she appears vulnerable and lost in the twilight world she inhabits. Minnelli's appearance closely resembles the dancer Anita Berber by Otto Dix in his

¹⁸¹ Stam, *Reflexivity*, 90.

¹⁸² Feuer, *Hollywood*, 42.

¹⁸³ This complex argument was also analysed in *Sweet Charity* earlier, yet it remains relevant also here. Altman, *American*, 223.

¹⁸⁴ Mizejewski, *Divine*, 210 and 215-216.

painting of 1925.¹⁸⁵ In the background, a dangling lightbulb creates chiaroscuro shadows in an atmospheric and haunting mise-en-scène. It is an overly complex film segment because although it is spatially set in the reflexive backstage of the Kit Kat Klub, it only exists in Sally's altered state of consciousness.

As in the original stage production and Prince's use of limbo as a metaphor, Fosse also exploits alternative cinematic spaces to place Sally to heighten the film's register. Kander and Ebb's penned 'Cabaret' starts up-tempo at first, recalling the arcadian book musical format, with a vibrant atmosphere in the Kit Kat Klub striking an ironic register with the previous melodramatic scenes in the film where she has an abortion and Brian leaves her for England. 'What good is sitting alone in your room? Come hear the music play. Life is a cabaret, old chum. Come to the Cabaret', she enthusiastically sings. However, the song changes direction suddenly and the lighting and ambient also respond accordingly. Chiaroscuro shadows no longer haunt Sally as in the dream sequences; instead, she is engulfed in utter darkness lit only by a single spotlight which interrogates her, forcing a shift in register from the outward spectacle of the cabaret to internal anguish as she existentially confronts her demons before the audience. This effect is accentuated by Minnelli's sensuous purple dress that subliminally hints at mortality, and her green nail polish, a signifier of decay in a world on the brink of collapse.¹⁸⁶ The costume also provocatively clings to her frame accentuating her feminine form and bosom enabling once again the dynamics of sexuality to pollute the mise-en-scène. Thematically, the segment follows 'Where Am I Going?' from *Sweet Charity*, but in *Cabaret*, Fosse resists using sentimental performances amplified by visual effects to aid storytelling. Instead, Minnelli occupies the frame 'working in a space defined only by her gestures and a few colored lights', which, combined with her dynamic

¹⁸⁵ Please see Rewald, *Glitter and Doom*, 142, for a formal analysis of Otto Dix's painting *The Dancer Anita Berber* (1925).

¹⁸⁶ Patti Bellantoni, *If It's Purple, Someone's Gonna Die: The Power of Color in Visual Storytelling* (New York and London: Focal Press, 2005), 197-198.

stage presence captivates us. Alone in this intimate stage area, she reminisces about her dead friend Elsie's penchant for alcohol and narcotics, functioning as a reminder of Sally's destiny.¹⁸⁷ Roger Greenspun from *The New York Times* enthused, 'And when at certain moments that theater is occupied only by Liza Minnelli, ... it becomes by the simplest means of evocation of both the power and fragility of movie performance so beautiful that I can think of nothing to do but give thanks'.¹⁸⁸ Scholar Andrew Dix further explores the cult of the star and their effect on audiences: 'If film can animate us in multiple ways, it is likely to be the star's appearance on screen that stirs the most profound response. Watching and thinking about particular stars, the spectator is traversed powerful desires and aspirations – as well as feelings of antipathy and estrangement'.¹⁸⁹ He further posits the importance of 'the star's body' and that the audience's engagement is often based on human, even carnal desires.¹⁹⁰ However, in *Cabaret*, Minnelli's unconventional and androgynous appearance fractures previous representations of females in the musical film forging a new narrative, which Mizejewski explores below.

Towards the end of the number, Sally surrenders to the world of the Kit Kat Klub over normality and domesticity, and she defiantly beckons us with a powerful voice that resonates and excites. It is a clarion call to the diegetic and the non-diegetic audience to be damned and die with her in the grotesque spectacle of theatre, life, and decadence, and the overall effect is highly seductive. The scene demonstrates how the fundamentals of theatrical reflexivity: stage, bravura performance, and lighting can work independently without visual reflexivity distorting the meaning. Moreover, it allows us to observe the considerable talents

¹⁸⁷ Roger Greenspun, 'Liza Minnelli Stirs A Lively 'Cabaret'', *The New York Times*, February 14, 1972.

¹⁸⁸ Greenspun, 'Minnelli'.

¹⁸⁹ Dix, *Film*, 207.

¹⁹⁰ Dix, *Film*, 207; Even the respected critic Roger Greenspun made reference to Liza Minnelli's physique in the final paragraph of his 1972 review of *Cabaret* in *The New York Times*. Indeed, he cites her 'wonderful (and wonderfully costumed) body' bringing Mulvey's male gaze hypothesis to the fore where women are constantly observed and objectified in a phallogocentric society. Greenspun, 'Minnelli'.

of Minnelli. The performance entertains, but also warns of the dangers of Dionysian excess and complacency, creating an underlying tension in the movie's diegesis.

Undoubtedly, Minnelli as Sally Bowles adds various levels to the film's text which Mizejewski acknowledges: 'Along with her sleazy nail paint, Minnelli wears Louise Brooks' bobbed hair, mama Judy Garland's frazzled would-be glamour, and rings of eyeliner that match that of the emcee character, Joel Grey. When she dons her black boots and garters to perch on a high-back chair at the Kit Kat Klub, the Dietrichesque touch completes her capsulation of camp touchstones and codes: licentious Weimer Berlin, drag-queen iconicity, gay cult celebrity, and divinely shocking taste'.¹⁹¹ Sally Bowles, the *femme fatale*, 'reinforces the stereotypes of Weimar decadence, the richness of its temptations, the multiplicities of its sexualities-a disruption of 'natural order' which leaves the society vulnerable to Nazism'.¹⁹² After she disappears backstage in a blinding display of theatrical lighting, the Emcee appears for the last time, interspersed with a montage of debauched and ethereal slow-motion images from the Kit Kat Klub. As he reiterates, 'here life is beautiful', the camera pans over the all-girl band, their bodies perspiring and faces smudged with tacky makeup, their instruments now hopelessly dissonant, creating an unsettling ambient that challenges ideas of beauty. Grey bids us farewell, 'Auf wiedersehen. Au bientôt' before bowing like a collapsed marionette and exiting suddenly through the backstage curtain. Then, a haunting silence while the camera slowly pans across to the distorted mirror for the last time. The Nazi threat is blatantly evident in the mise-en-scène, now permeated with blurred swastika armbands while the images of the highly sexualised world permeate our consciousness (**Fig. 23**).¹⁹³ A

¹⁹¹ Linda Mizejewski, 'Camp Among the Swastikas: Isherwood, Sally Bowles, and "Good Heter Stuff"' in *Camp, Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 237.

¹⁹² Mizejewski, *Divine*, 4; Mizejewski further posits that '[p]ost war struggles to understand Nazism in terms of performance and spectatorship, the triumph of image over language, are evident in subsequent adaptations of *Goodbye to Berlin*. In the 1972 Fosse film, Sally Bowles is part of the spectacle on-stage which visually 'mirrors' the swastika armbands in the audience'. In 'Camp', 253.

¹⁹³ Mizejewski, *Divine*, 4.

long hypnotic drum roll and a cymbal clash resonate through the soundtrack while the final titles roll to a new world order.

While considering the main themes of this thesis, the prevailing mood in *Cabaret* was influenced by Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (1930), which authentically absorbs and reflects the Weimar Republic, its decadence, decline, and transgressive nature. Moreover, 'the sexualisation of fascism' in contemporary films such as Luchino Visconti's *The Damned* (1969) appears to have also guided Fosse's filmmaking aesthetics, whereby the dynamics of 'sexuality, power and politics' intersect with narratives of female performance, such as Minnelli's Sally Bowles, who is one of the film's characters 'adrift in Berlin'.¹⁹⁴ Thus, the movie is not only about sexual identity but also a constant reminder of those displaced in time and space, especially by ethnicity and sexuality. *Cabaret* is a sublime constellation of talents, that of British author Christopher Isherwood and his 1939 novel *Goodbye to Berlin* and American film director Bob Fosse's cinematic reimagining of this text thirty-three years later.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, the movie appears to be a rare example of a celluloid translation acknowledging the 'thematic content' of Isherwood's prose while transforming the musical film framework.¹⁹⁶ In his chapter entitled *A Berlin Diary: Autumn 1930*, the narrator states: 'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking.... Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed.'¹⁹⁷ Academic Arlene Rodda astutely observes that the 'camera metaphor' takes on a new significance when considering *Cabaret* as a literal product of the mechanical camera.¹⁹⁸ Thus, Isherwood's 'passive recording

¹⁹⁴ Gordon, 'Film', 441.

¹⁹⁵ This statement does not infer that Fosse's *Cabaret* was necessarily *faithful* to Isherwood's book, especially in the controversial casting of American Liza Minnelli as the very British Sally Bowles, who many considered too brash and wrong for the role. However, Fosse's artistic vision fortuitously aligned with the source material in offering a new type of Hollywood film musical that captured the zeitgeist.

¹⁹⁶ Robert Osborne, *Academy Awards Oscar Annual* (La Habra: ESE California, 1973) in Arlene Rodda, 'Cabaret: Utilizing the Film Medium to Create a Unique Adaptation', *Literature/Film Quarterly* 22, no.1 (1994): 37.

¹⁹⁷ Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (London: Vintage Books, 1992), Kindle, A Berlin Diary (Autumn 1930).

¹⁹⁸ Rodda, 'Cabaret', 36.

mechanism' develops into an 'active' process in Fosse's hands, whereby 'creative editing, lighting and camera techniques' visually bring the text to life in innovative and inspired ways heightening the film's intensely dark sexual undertones.¹⁹⁹ Prince's concept of the gender morphing Emcee and large distorted mirror as metaphors in the Kit Kat Klub also adds to the film's exceptionally labyrinthine aesthetics with Minnelli's iconic star turn, channelling both her mother's and father's sensibility throughout.²⁰⁰

Cabaret destabilises and reconstructs the arcadian movie musical format forcing those who disdain musical films to re-evaluate it as a serious art form, a remarkable achievement considering Fosse was not the first choice as director.²⁰¹ It demonstrated how proficient this form could be with the right artistic team and understanding of the source material. Moreover, Fosse resisted incorporating ostentatious visual reflexivity, as in *Sweet Charity* but relied on highly effective cross-editing to heighten the film's dual narrative and depictions of gender identity. His next musical film, the autobiographical *All That Jazz* is an attempt to expose the avaricious greed of showbusiness against the premise of death functioning as a hallucinogenic spectacle while embracing a contemporary sexual agenda, which I discuss in the next chapter.

¹⁹⁹ Bottero, 'Redefining', 5-6; Rodda, 'Cabaret', 36.

²⁰⁰ Liza May Minnelli was born on 12 March 1946 and is the daughter of actress and performer Judy Garland (1922-1969) and Hollywood director Vincent Minnelli (1903-1906), who had directed many classic MGM 'arcadian' musicals. The couple met when Minnelli directed Garland in *Meet Me in St. Louis* in 1944.

²⁰¹ Producer Cy Feuer initially approached director Billy Wilder, an old colleague, who turned *Cabaret* down because he had already fled the Nazis to Hollywood and simply was not interested in pursuing it as project. Feuer later met with Gene Kelly, but his conventional Hollywood approach would not have explored the movie's darker side. Garebian, *Cabaret*, Kindle, Chapter 9, Reincarnations and Revisions, The 1972 Fosse Film.

All That Jazz (1979)

Returning to Kenneth Vance Gargaro's innovative 1979 PhD paper, he acknowledges how advances in cinematic technology should contribute significantly to the 'continued advancement of the filmed musical form'.²⁰² The scholar also cites an informative article by Hugh Fordin and Robin Chase in *The New York Times* on 25 June 1978, 'Hollywood Reaches For Its Dancing Shoes Again', in which the theatre writers examine the 'renaissance of dance on screen' during the 1970s.²⁰³ Consequently, major movies like *The Turning Point* (Herbert Ross, 1977) and *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977), together with Broadway musicals *A Chorus Line* (Michael Bennett, 1975) and Fosse's *Dancin'* (1978), reestablished the medium of dance for popular audiences to a level not seen since the 'integrated dance musical' years before.²⁰⁴ When considering the 'rhythmic potential' of dance and film,²⁰⁵ Fordin and Chase adroitly posit that 'the art of movement and the medium of movement should form the perfect synthesis' and prophesied that the 'great 80s musical' could only be made possible 'by filmmakers who fuse the newer idioms of dance and music together with advanced cinema technology to produce a new form of the musical that expresses our time ...'.²⁰⁶ They did not, it seems, anticipate the release of Fosse's *All That Jazz* a year later, which delivers on all counts while accentuating fascinating variations of theatrical and visual reflexivity forming the foundations for this chapter.

Whereas Fosse's *Cabaret* presented music and dance in a credible yet distinctive manner, in line with its realistic Weimar Berlin stage setting, *All That Jazz* amplifies it to new

²⁰² Gargaro, 'Works', 196-197.

²⁰³ Hugh Fordin and Robin Chase, 'Hollywood Puts On Its Dancing Shoes Again,' *The New York Times*, 25 June 1978, 1.

²⁰⁴ The writers refer to the film *On the Town* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1949) as being the template for the dance musical. Originally a ballet by Jerome Robbins, it appeared 'organically created for film'. In Fordin and Chase, 'Hollywood', 8.

²⁰⁵ Gargaro, 'Works', 195.

²⁰⁶ Fordin and Chase, 'Hollywood', 8.

dimensions, becoming the dominant aesthetic within new ‘scenic space[s]’ acknowledging new spectators and sensibilities.²⁰⁷ However, it is notable that *All That Jazz* certainly follows *Cabaret*’s complex coding in creating dual worlds, yet there are also significant differences. For example, *All That Jazz* has no integrated musical score to link different realms. Instead, it relies on a myriad of songs and music, traversing a spectrum of styles performed in real and artificial settings. In *Cabaret*, all musical pieces except for the folk song/Nazi anthem ‘Tomorrow Belongs To Me’ are performed in the more logical environment of the Kit Kat Klub stage. Furthermore, the rehearsal routines in *All That Jazz* circumvent being associated with musical film numbers by ‘being related to the dramatic action’.²⁰⁸ Finally, although *Cabaret* briefly enters surreal territory through Sally Bowles’ dream sequence, *All That Jazz* is keen to exploit this cinematic space further. We are no longer voyeurs peeping behind the wings but fully immersed in the performers’ world and, in a radical move, the director’s troubled, drugged, and sexualised headspace.²⁰⁹

Bazin once wrote that filmed theatre is doomed to fail if the mechanical camera is utilised to ‘try and make us forget the footlights and the backstage area’.²¹⁰ Thus, the camera should always try to exploit and explore this space and grant the audience access to it. Although musical films like *Singin’ in the Rain* ‘foreground the work of their signifiers’ whereby spectacle and artifice are exposed, they remained, as Jane Feuer states, artefacts of ‘conservative reflexivity’,²¹¹ functioning ‘within an illusionistic aesthetic devoid of any

²⁰⁷ Gargaro quotes André Bazin in exploring the link between film and theatre: ‘Bazin posited a few years ago that there was absolutely no dramatic vehicle that could not be translated as long as it was realized in terms of the new medium and a suitable scenic space was created’. Gargaro, ‘Works’, 192.

²⁰⁸ Gottfried, *All*, 386; The film also bears a striking resemblance to Michael Bennett’s *A Chorus Line* which opened on Broadway in 1975 in its attempt to depict dancer’s lives in a candid and realistic way, especially in the opening ‘On Broadway’ routine where Fosse interviews them.

²⁰⁹ I am again drawn here to Rick Altman’s hypothesis of voyeurism whereby the backstage musical enables the spectators’ indulgence in peering into the lives of the stars and the ability to observe a theatrical world behind the curtains and sets. This phenomenon is described in more detail in Altman, *American*, 200-271.

²¹⁰ Bazin, *Cinema 1*, 107.

²¹¹ Feuer, *Hollywood*, 102.

subversive, demystificatory, or revolutionary thrust'.²¹² On the basis that 'audiences seem to accept theatrical conventions on the screen if they can see that the stage is authentic', *All That Jazz* is a 'rhythmic collage' that evolves logically from Fosse's previous films extending the traditional backstage musical framework and, indeed physical theatrical space to more explicit levels of spectatorship.²¹³

As *All That Jazz* demonstrates Fosse's affinity with dance, it functions as a meditation on movement, corporeality, and indeed depictions of gender itself which 'takes on more inconclusive characteristics'.²¹⁴ As Fordin and Chase elucidate, dance is also indicative of a modern society obsessed with everything relating to the human body, including carnal feelings and desires, or, in other words, all things associated with 'sex'.²¹⁵ Consequently, this phenomenon intensifies in *All That Jazz* because of Fosse's own highly libidinous nature, which tinges the film, as we will observe in the 'Take Off With Us/Airotica' number.²¹⁶ Furthermore, as *All That Jazz* is Fosse's *cinéma à clef*, prophetically reflecting Fosse's life and death, the picture allows us to also explore his career through the lens of the film itself. I first briefly discuss the film's production, synopsis, and musical numbers.

The movie's genesis can be traced back to 1975 when Fosse read Hilma Wolizer's novel *Ending* while recovering from multiple heart attacks. The story of a woman whose husband is dying of cancer struck a nerve with his own 'precarious existence, and he subsequently purchased the film rights'.²¹⁷ Co-written with Robert Alan Arthur, *All That Jazz* is a nod to Fellini's revered *8½* (1963) and traverses the life of Fosse's alter ego, a self-destructive Broadway and film director-choreographer Joe Gideon, who 'chases pills, liquor,

²¹² Stam, *Film Theory*, 153.

²¹³ Vance Gargaro, 'Works', 127.

²¹⁴ Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 140.

²¹⁵ Fordin and Chase, 'Hollywood', 8.

²¹⁶ The miniseries *Fosse/Verdon* emphasizes Bob Fosse's many affairs whilst married to Gwen Verdon; During the shooting of his last film *Star 80* the actor Mariel Hemingway recalls that Fosse attempted to have sex with her insisting that he always had sex with his leading ladies. He also bragged about how his various girlfriends were often the same age as his daughter, Nicole. In Winkler, *Big Deal*, 248.

²¹⁷ Boyd Grubb, *Razzle*, 216.

and skirts' in between bouts of creative block and suffering from an existential crisis. On top of this, he is also directing and choreographing a major Broadway show while finishing editing a movie.²¹⁸ It was principally shot at the Astoria Studios, Queens, and on location around New York for an estimated \$12-\$20 million, a budget shared between Columbia Pictures and 20th Century Fox.²¹⁹ The film was shown at the 1979 Cannes Film Festival and picked up the Palme d'Or award before opening in the United States in late December. In addition, it won four Oscars for technical achievements, including costume design (Albert Wolksy), art direction (Philip Rosenberg, Tony Walton, Edward Stewart, and Gary J. Brink), editing (Alan Heim), and music (Ralph Burns) in 1980.²²⁰

We are introduced to Joe Gideon by his morning routine in a montage of close-up shots: coughing, dripping eye lotion into his jaundiced and tired whites, showering with a soaked cigarette in his mouth, and popping amphetamines as he listens to Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*.²²¹ Enter Angelique, the seductive Angel of Death in Gideon's imagination, whose appearance often punctuates the film's narrative.²²² Then, a return to reality with Gideon framed in a mirror surrounded by illuminated bulbs. He announces 'It's Showtime, folks' as his hands strike a theatrical jazz pose, recalling Al Jolson (**Fig. 24**).²²³ At a 'giant cattle-call

²¹⁸ Boyd Grubb, *Razzle*, 215; The screenwriter, film producer and director Robert Alan Aurthur died from lung cancer on 22 November 1978 aged fifty-six. In Gottfried, *All*, 382; Note: In Fellini's meta-narrative, the memories of the film director, Guido Anselmi, played by Marcello Mastroianni, return at the end of the film in surreal screen tests which allows the audience to assemble a coherent narrative. In this regard, we have the difference between the direct presentation of memory in the first part, and then the distanced and staged and sometimes weak screenings of the screen test. These moments include scenes with Claudia Cardinale and contain themes based around relationships and sexuality. In *All That Jazz* the director's memories are played out in fantasy song and dance numbers, particularly towards the end of the picture in 'Bye Bye Life' whereby characters in his life, including his past lovers and family, appear in the amphitheatre of death before his ultimate passing over.

²¹⁹ The film was desperately over its budget of \$6 million with Columbia on the brink of closing the production. A deal was consequently struck with 20th Century Fox and the costs were divided between the two studios. Boyd Grubb, *Razzle*, 225.

²²⁰ Boyd Grubb, *Razzle*, 228. Note: The film also won two BAFTA awards in 1981 for best cinematography (Giuseppe Rotunno) and best editing (Alan Heim).

²²¹ Dissatisfied with Roy Scheider's cough, Fosse later recorded this himself in post-production, adding a macabre twist to the film's art imitates life quality. In Wasson, *Fosse*, 489.

²²² Fosse's daily routine emerges often during the film as he slips further into bad health and decline. For a more comprehensive and beautifully written analysis please see Gottfried, *All*, 385.

²²³ Mirrors as devices permeate the film and are indicative of a 'heightened self-consciousness of the impression one is making'. In Seltzer, 'Jazz', 100.

audition' in the Palace Theatre, New York, Gideon is searching for performers for his new production, 'On Broadway'.²²⁴ We meet Audrey (Leland Palmer), his ex-wife, and their daughter Michelle (Erzsebet Foldi) with the producers and creative team watching the proceedings in the theatre stalls.²²⁵ In the audition, the principal dancers are presented individually, particularly seductive Victoria Porter (Deborah Geffner), with whom Gideon later has a one-night stand. While cutting his latest film, *The Stand-Up*, his current girlfriend Kate (Ann Reinking) enters the editing suite and wants to meet later, but Gideon has other plans.²²⁶ After an ethereal seduction scene in Gideon's apartment, Kate catches him in bed with Victoria, who appears unexpectedly in the morning. In a surreal theatrical junkyard of a space, Joe's mother appears talking to Angelique while a burlesque dancer performs on the black stage behind her. Three strippers then seduce the teenage Gideon (Keith Gordon) before appearing on stage in a top hat and tails, his crotch soaked with semen, as the audience ridicules him.²²⁷

The producers of Gideon's show are keen not to lose their investment and take him for a health check, which he passes, although it is apparent, he is seriously ill. Between various existential fantasy interludes and intimate moments with the female leads, Gideon rehearses a schmaltzy theatrical number, 'Take Off With Us', which later segues into a highly erotic routine, 'Airotica', leaving the producers somewhat baffled and indeed worried.²²⁸

²²⁴ Wasson, *Fosse*, 465.

²²⁵ The characters resemble Fosse's real-life wife, Gwen Verdon and daughter, Nicole Fosse. Also, the character of Kate, is played by Ann Reinking, his lover in real life. In Boyd Grubb, *Razzle*, 216; In the audio commentary of the 2009 USA Criterion Collection Blu-ray release of the film, the editor Alan Heim states that 'Bob had a passion for being in real spaces'. *All That Jazz*, directed by Bob Fosse (1979, Los Angeles & Culver City, LA: Twentieth Century Fox and Columbia Pictures, 2019), Blu-ray.

²²⁶ The picture being edited is similar to Fosse's earlier work *Lenny* (1974) about comedian Lenny Bruce and shows a macabre comedy monologue about death and the five stages of dying 'Anger', 'Denial,' 'Bargaining,' 'Depression', and 'Acceptance'. This strengthens the film's underlying theme. In Gottfried, *All*, 386.

²²⁷ The actor Danny Ruvolo who had been originally cast was killed in a car crash. In Wasson, *Fosse*, 471. One of the strippers in the film was a man, whilst another was a 'haggard middle aged woman' who later tried to seduce the young actor playing Gideon in reality. In Wasson, *Fosse*, 472.

²²⁸ Moira Hodgson, 'When Bob Fosse's Art Imitates Life, It's Just 'All That Jazz'', *The New York Times*, 30 December 1979, 15.

While continuing to edit *The Stand-Up*, he juggles the demands of relationships, work, and a reckless lifestyle. In his apartment, Kate and his daughter perform a rehearsed routine, ‘Everything Old is New Again’, demonstrating a more family-centred façade eschewing his obsession with women and sex.²²⁹ After a read-through of the show with Audrey and the cast, he suffers his first heart attack and is taken to hospital. The ruthless producers are naturally concerned, and the show is postponed for four months as they sneakily look to an alternative director, Lucas Sergeant, ‘Gideon’s nemesis’ (John Lithgow), to replace him.²³⁰ Refusing to rest, Gideon audaciously continues his destructive lifestyle and has forbidden parties in his private hospital room, despite the doctors’ advice.

Meanwhile, watching a scathing review of *The Stand-Up* on television from his hospital bed forces Gideon to suffer another cardiac arrest.²³¹ He begins hallucinating after undergoing open heart surgery, juxtaposed with a scene of the producers discovering they can make a profit on their show if he dies before opening. Next, he is ‘perched atop a camera boom’ in a cavernous film studio with a film crew, and then ‘photographs and even gives notes to his dying self’ as he lies in the centre of the set, medical props surrounding him.²³² Finally, Gideon directs the four musicalised fantasy numbers that accentuate the last 45 minutes of the film: ‘After You’ve Gone’, ‘There’ll Be Some Changes Made’, ‘Some of These Days’ performed by Kate, Audrey, and Michelle, and ‘Whose Sorry Now’ performed by ‘Ziegfeldian’ fan dancers circling his hospital bed.²³³

²²⁹ The insertion of this number was a deliberate attempt to ‘soften’ Gideon’s character as per the request of the film’s executive producer, Daniel Melnick. In Wasson, *Fosse*, 464; Fosse also told Tony Walton, the set designer, that he only included the duet in the film because ‘The L.A. people are scared I’m doing a death and dance musical. This’ll keep us going for another couple of weeks’. In Gottfried, *All*, 390.

²³⁰ Wasson, *Fosse*, 459.

²³¹ Model and actor turned critic Chris Chase (1924-2013) plays herself and Fosse takes this opportunity to write a full critique of his film *Lenny* (1974), which has become *The Stand-Up* in *All That Jazz*. A full transcript of her review can be read in Gottfried, *All*, 391.

²³² Gottfried, *All*, 384.

²³³ Wasson, *Fosse*, 467.

Gideon is scheduled to continue production two months after the operation, and the alternative producer is consequently fired. However, Gideon relapses before being found in the hospital basement, chronically sick, wearing only his white operating gown. Now tied to a bed, he prepares for his ultimate showstopper. In one final fantasy moment, Gideon sings a rock-inspired anthem, 'Bye Bye Life', with veteran entertainer Ben Vereen to a macabre hospital amphitheatre audience, an eclectic mixture of characters from his life and memories.²³⁴ We hear the final beeps of the life support system as he draws closer to Angelique, who is beckoning him. Then, an abrupt cut to the hospital as his cadaver is zipped into a plastic body bag. The end titles appear while Broadway diva Ethel Merman sings 'There's No Business-Like Show Business' on the soundtrack, followed by a deathly silence, white letters rolling against a black background.

In analysing *All That Jazz*, it is essential to mention that as a cinematic work, it forgoes a linear approach to filmmaking which might be challenging for some spectators. Instead, it is relayed in what is often affectionately called 'Fosse time', a poetic montage of real-time, flashback, and fantasy that academic Alvin J. Seltzer posits: 'is breathlessly kinetic, almost kaleidoscopic. Rather than presented in a discursive way, the story is virtually hurled at us—past, present, and future converging as explosively as fireworks. This is no narrative line but rather a narrative whirlpool. Whipping us around in a way that assaults our senses, bombarding them with colours, costumes, characters, music, dances and plot fragments'.²³⁵ An abstract storytelling format further accentuated by Fosse's skilful arrangement of musical numbers, which 'describes a feature length surrender of outer razzle-dazzle to inner. From the opening cattle-call number, 'On Broadway', to Gideon's imagined 'Bye Bye Life', *All That*

²³⁴ In Gottfried, *All*, 386 and 395, the author states, 'Ben Vereen appears on television doing a Sammy Davis-like routine, which had been cropping up on several screens in the movie, but now appears on the screen of Gideon's heart monitor. Vereen introduces Joe Gideon for his 'final appearance. The introduction itself is Bob Fosse's summary of his life in the language of his realm'.

²³⁵ Alvin J. Seltzer, 'All That Jazz: Bob Fosse's Solipsistic Masterpiece', *Literature/Film Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (1996): 99.

Jazz fades from stage-bound numbers set in naturalistic theatrical environments to performances staged in the cluttered proscenium of Gideon's mind, a descent from consciousness to the surreal'.²³⁶ Moreover, as Gideon's life is 'hopelessly fragmented' and trapped in a narrative that 'jumps and bounces', Fosse acknowledges this sensibility by approaching the film through the medium of dance, or spectacle, in the creative process.²³⁷ Thus, Fosse creates a new dynamic to observe representations of gender and sexuality on screen with progressive filming styles and techniques. However, rather than causing incongruous combinations, these dynamics work mellifluously together, particularly in the 'Take Off with Us/Airotica' number exacerbated by Fosse's avant-garde choreography. Moreover, as I shall demonstrate, visual reflexivity also finds exciting ways to respond, in line with ever-changing approaches to musical film storytelling and modern audience expectations of gender identity.

After lyricist/composer Paul Dann (Anthony Holland) 'stridently' performs the hopelessly upbeat and conventional 'Take Off With Us' song for the production team with piano, Gideon later seeks solace in the company of his ex-wife Audrey as she rehearses in an adjoining studio.²³⁸ During their droll exchange about monogamy versus infidelity, which they almost dance out, it becomes apparent that Gideon is incapable of remaining faithful and, rather than demonstrating remorse, has an epiphany about the number.²³⁹

Set in a spacious dilapidated Manhattan rehearsal room, the type synonymous with theatre and dance in the 1970s (*Saturday Night Fever*), with peeling tape on wooden floors, nicotine-stained walls, and a brutalist grey concrete ceiling hovering above like a foreboding storm cloud. The mise-en-scène is heightened by the oxidised metal surfaces and worn ballet

²³⁶ Wasson, *Fosse*, 474.

²³⁷ Seltzer, 'Jazz', 99-100.

²³⁸ Winkler, *Big Deal*, 236-238.

²³⁹ In the audio commentary the editor Alan Heim states that the number functions like 'the whole dissolution of a marriage done to music'. Fosse, *All That Jazz*.

barres encompassing the hall and the black windows complimenting the sickly green and yellow colour palette, while glass pendant lighting creates a sombre glow untarnished by the effects of vibrant artificial studio lighting. Miscellaneous personal items, eclectic objects, clothes, scripts, cigarette packets, and plastic coffee cups are peppered around the vast room, signalling a work in progress. In the centre is a large metal scaffold tower, and one wall is lined with giant mirrors creating a labyrinthine cinematic space, tropes that are also exploited in his other musical films.²⁴⁰

As a prelude to the number, Gideon announces to the producers, ‘It’s, uh – It’s not quite ready yet. And uh, Paul... it’s not exactly the way we talked about it. It’s a little different’ before dashing to the bathroom to throw up. The routine starts as a homage/parody of his earlier work, recalling *Pajama Game* (George Abbott and Stanley Donen, 1957) and *Damn Yankees* (George Abbott and Stanley Donen, 1958) as a drum beat triggers the dancers’ responses with clicking fingers, ‘start stop rhythms’, followed by ‘whispered vocals’.²⁴¹ We are introduced to the statuesque female lead dancer (Sandahl Bergman) perched provocatively on the scaffold tower, who entices us by whistling the song’s infectious introduction. Her black captain’s pilot cap slanted on her face with grey gloves and leotard creates a sexualised image that playfully hints at sadomasochism.²⁴² In line with the *cinéma vérité* style, the company wears authentic dance rehearsal costumes, hats, and gloves, and a three-piece band of piano, drums and electric keyboard supplies the diegetic minimalist music. The performers raise their flight caps to welcome us with double-entendre lyrics

²⁴⁰ Heim talks about this connection in the audio commentary. Fosse, *All That Jazz*.

²⁴¹ I am indebted to Kevin Winkler whose analysis dissects this number through a dancer’s lens, expanding my knowledge and vocabulary of movement and choreography in the film musical. Winkler, *Big Deal*, 236-238; ‘Forgotten Movie Songs #3: ‘Take Off With Us’ from All That Jazz, filmicability by Dean Treadway, last modified Wednesday 20 April 2011, accessed 29 September 2022; Academic Kelly Kessler also acknowledges that through dance Fosse connected the ‘arcadian’ musical with the more ‘ambivalent’ versions. Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 120.

²⁴² Although Fosse wanted to achieve a more realistic style for the number, it is clear that Bergman is miming this section as the sound is far too voluminous and artificial, shattering any attempt of a completely immersive *cinéma vérité* experience.

‘Meet our friendly eager crew; they only live to service you’²⁴³ while forming the so-called Fosse ‘stack’ with geographic forms, devices synonymous with his work.²⁴⁴ The director isolates Bergman from the other performers as she extends her endless legs and glides across the floor. Later, another male dancer enthusiastically slides an airline snack tray through Bergman’s open legs, and she then turns around and bends over while continuing to sing through them. Fosse’s camera aggrandises Bergman as he focuses on her female form and luminescent tanned skin while she flexes her limbs provocatively, her black mini top revealing her navel and mid-rift, skimpy pants, and flesh-coloured tights accentuating her frame. Although the choreography offers ‘nothing new’, Fosse uses his camera with panache, filming the ensemble from a bird’s eye view, capturing the *joie de vivre* of the dancers spinning around the cavernous rehearsal space.²⁴⁵ The camera and editing forge a seamless partnership with the vortex of movement, constantly accelerating forward.²⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Fosse’s visual effects ‘cannot hide the fact that [the number] is all just a bit tacky—energetic but vulgar’ and appears to be missing a vital component.²⁴⁷ When the performers strike their final pose, the producers, naturally, are delighted with Gideon’s work and respond zealously, while he looks pensive and concerned (**Fig. 25**). Henceforward, the phenomenon of visual and theatrical reflexivity strikes a more post-modernist and radical attitude towards gender and sexuality. Thus, the mechanical camera no longer hides behind the diegetic theatrical audience: the lecherous male Fandango Ballroom patrons in *Sweet Charity* and the debauched and escapist clientele of the Kit Kat Klub in *Cabaret*, but instead, it becomes a voyeuristic

²⁴³ The song was written by Fred Tobias and Stanley Lebowsky in a similar style to *Cabaret* composers, John Kander and Fred Ebb. In Winkler, *Big Deal*, 236.

²⁴⁴ Winkler, *Big Deal*, 236-238; Milovanović’s PhD thesis explores the inherent sexual dynamics underscoring ‘Airotica’ and posits that even the more naïve and prosaic *Take Off With Us* segment is awash with a provocative agenda from the innuendo-ridden lyrics to the choreography. Thus, the overt tension between the aggrandised female soloist and the cavorting dancers is accentuated as Fosse ‘sexualises the body with a playful attitude’ complimentary to the song’s theme. Milovanović, ‘Fosse Woman’, 83-84.

²⁴⁵ Winkler, *Big Deal*, 237.

²⁴⁶ In the commentary Heim states that the ‘camera angles shouldn’t make sense but they do – it has to do with the flow of the eye’. Fosse, *All That Jazz*.

²⁴⁷ Winkler, *Big Deal*, 237.

and vulgar device that does not try to conceal itself as the routine evocatively evolves.

Moreover, the scene rejects the so-called ‘camp’ aesthetics of the quintessential MGM Hollywood musical in favour of a bare-bones sparse environment.²⁴⁸

‘Thanks, thanks a lot, but it’s not exactly over yet’, says Gideon acknowledging the applause, while a male assistant effeminately runs around the rehearsal room with a portable machine emitting billowing smoke. The lights are then lowered, and a close-up of a dancer with a black peaked cap appears in the darkness and announces, ‘Welcome. Welcome aboard Airotica’, his face lit from below by a self-held torch, creating haunting chiaroscuro effect shadows as he beckons us to a world of light, spectacle, and transgression. The mise-en-scène has become distinctively monochromatic, further foregrounding the performers’ bodies. This is intercut with a shot of the performer, Autumn, unzipping his vest, the camera following the movement with razor precision and relishing in scopophilic delight through the mist. As the ensemble seductively murmurs the leitmotif ‘Take off with us’, the lens lingers on their bodies, slowly stripping off their costumes to intimate lingerie and jockstraps, revealing bare flesh. ‘Just reach out your hand and introduce yourself’, another affirms as they call out their names individually, interspersed with a montage of shots of outstretched arms while other bodies entwine and connect. Close-ups of the performers’ heads from oblique and low angles are accentuated by hand-held torches and beams of light, which encircle the dancers’ bodies and the surrounding darkness, adding to the provocative, sexually charged ambience.²⁴⁹ Thus, the entire mise-en-scène and performance acknowledge a world that rejects the traditional male and female coupling narrative, which has historically tinged/tarnished the musical film framework and parodied in the ‘Take Off With Us’ segment.²⁵⁰ As Fosse explores the

²⁴⁸ Steven Cohan, *Incongruous Entertainment: Camp, Cultural Value, and the MGM Musical* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 45.

²⁴⁹ In the amplification of the fantasy song and dance sequences later in the movie, the beams from the torches are replaced by theatrical followspots.

²⁵⁰ Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 60.

variations of gender and sexuality, his trademark style of intricate and fragmented movements ‘draw[s] attention to specific body parts, namely hands, wrists and hips and transforms them into vehicles of sexual desire’.²⁵¹ However, as the camera unashamedly lingers on both male and female bodies intimately, he cunningly subverts Laura Mulvey’s hypothesis regarding the male gaze. These dynamics are magnified by the exclusion of the stage, diegetic audiences, characters, and cluttered theatrical mise-en-scènes, which distract, dilute and distort meaning as in *Sweet Charity* and *Cabaret*. In many respects, the overall effect renders the arcadian movie musical framework redundant as the camera and its voyeuristic lens navigate within new cinematic spaces and narratives, incorporating bold and direct filmmaking techniques to highlight this. Also, Fosse’s use of dance within the film to aid its storytelling contributes to the extremely complex codings, as do the performers who seductively peer directly into the camera lens in close-up, fracturing the fourth wall convention further distorting the laws of spectatorship.²⁵²

Fosse exploits multiracial male and female homosexual couplings, threesomes, and various ‘mini-orgies’ through poetic editing and movement - a perfect combination of visual and theatrical reflexivity, the dancers’ bodies glistening with perspiration in the eerie mist engulfing the nocturnal scene (**Fig. 26**).²⁵³ The producer of Gideon’s show Jonesy Hecht (William Le Massena) is further baffled as he amusingly mutters to his colleague Ted Christopher (Robert Hitt), ‘Uh-oh. I think we lost the family audience’, which is precisely the

²⁵¹ Milovanović, ‘Fosse Woman’, 84.

²⁵² The release of *All That Jazz* coincided with the birth of the MTV generation and the modern pop video, whereby studios and rehearsal spaces became *de rigueur* environments for filming. This new format brashly connected the audience with its pop icons who acknowledged the camera and its voyeuristic qualities by unashamedly singing and pouting into it; The fourth wall is defined in the introduction of this thesis. Please read Carol Martin and Henry Bial, ed, *Brecht Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 5; Brecht talks about this process in an essay: Bertolt Brecht, ‘Theatre for Learning: Bertolt Brecht’, trans. Eric Bentley, in *Brecht*, 15-22.

²⁵³ Gottfried, *All*, 342 & 389. The author notes that Fosse’s ‘Razzle Dazzle’ routine from *Chicago* (1975) and the staged orgy on the staircase also broke with protocol in offering daring variations of the quintessential male and female coupling template which has governed the musical genre historically; In the audio commentary, Alan Heim states that Fosse wanted to show all three couples in the routine through editing and retain the presence of the main characters. In Fosse, *All That Jazz*.

reaction Gideon wants to achieve as the number segues into uncharted territory. With dance movements that react to the tempo of the music, ranging from ballet for the more melodic music passages to mechanicalized twitching and body popping to the intermittent drums, the choreography becomes more frenzied as the number progresses (**Fig. 27**). Indeed, the action seems driven by the (uncredited) bravura intense drumming that forces the ensemble into a trance as the company pounds their fists to the primitive and primal beats on the high metal platform towards the now bare-breasted Sandahl Bergman. She appears God-like, high on the scaffold platform looking down on her disciples, her head and golden hair swirling with the manic tempo, gyrating her hips uncontrollably as if possessed by some clandestine entity (**Fig. 28**). Finally, the number builds to its thrusting climax, an explosion of noise and movement. The whole ambient resembles a sexualised rave as the performers strike their final poses to the last flourishing chords of the music; their bodies exhausted in the ensuing silence and brief blackout.²⁵⁴

The underlying themes of sexual liberation in the routine connect to the ‘Rich Man’s Frug’ ten years earlier, but in ‘Take Off With Us’, theatrical reflexivity is far more prominent as Fosse eschews psychedelic visual effects and allows dance to forge the narrative. While observing the scene, it has become clear that Joe Gideon’s reinterpretation of the number has adroitly taken the ‘frequent, anonymous affairs that ruined [his] marriage and then transformed the whole history of his infidelities into a work of art’.²⁵⁵ However, the tension in the text is exacerbated by the dancers exchanging names with unemotional delivery, the harsh lighting, and the vacuous parting words, ‘Thank you for flying Airotica Airlines; we

²⁵⁴ When historically analysing the connection between dance, raves and primitive rituals with film techniques (herein often referred to as theatrical and visual reflexivity), academic Erin Brannigan states that ‘[e]cstatic dancing at rituals in Brazil (Candomble), Korea (Kut), Morocco (Hadra), Turkey (Sufi), and Nigeria (Orisha), and Western practices including raves, are all treated with mostly in-camera effects such as slow motion, superimposition, and extreme close-up, along with fast-editing and animation in postproduction in an attempt to render the unpredictable and excessive movements of the performers.’ Erin Brannigan, *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 138-139.

²⁵⁵ Seltzer, ‘Jazz’, 102.

take you everywhere and get you nowhere'. It celebrates free love on the one hand yet also points to the 'the ultimate emptiness and depression of one-night stands' on the other.²⁵⁶ As a subtext, it raises various existential issues concerning sexuality and society, which Kessler astutely posits:

In such diegetic societies rife with self-absorption, these dance numbers aptly reinforce the mechanical and posturing nature of those involved. Not developing meaningful romantic relationships, displaying communal bonds that strengthen their overall union, or even serving to activate the conflicts within such communities, Fosse's dance numbers most often further emphasize social estrangement, libidinal desire, and disregard for any true union of groups. Simulated sex, a lack of bodily and ocular engagement between dancers, and contrived jerky, non-human movements compliment the narratives' implications of flawed societies. Rather than bonding, (often) nameless individuals touch fleetingly or wholly avoid contact as they dance through narratives bereft of networks of communal support and rife with ulterior motive and self-indulgence.²⁵⁷

The dancers' epicene movements add further discourse to Butler's hypothesis that gender 'is a repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance or a natural sort of being' that underscored the 'Big Spender' number from *Sweet Charity*. Because Fosse gives both male and female performers the same dance codings, the gender-diverse cast rejects the ancient heteronormative laws that have underscored the Hollywood musical in the routine as they

²⁵⁶ Seltzer, 'Jazz', 102.

²⁵⁷ Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 124.

seek a new agenda forcing considerable changes to the theatrical and visual reflexivity framework.²⁵⁸

I now return to the opening hypothesis that the idiom of dance and advanced cinema technology should be fused in creating the consummate modern movie musical.²⁵⁹ An idea further amplified by Gargaro's eloquent assertion that film has always valued those directors with a panache for 'the painterly', but it is choreographers who create movies with a sophisticated eye whereby their dance and movements form 'patterns that ebb and flow with time' causing discourse with the mechanical camera.²⁶⁰ Indeed, 'life [is] seen as movement' for the camera lens and cinematic translation.²⁶¹ Although dance and film are often considered 'kindred art forms' based on the principle that both forms are propelled by movement alone, it is an immensely complicated relationship, and many disparities exist.²⁶² For example, dance uses '*real* time and *real* space'[author's emphasis retained] while film 'controls and manipulates its time and space'.²⁶³ Furthermore, dance is also 'primarily kinesthetic', whereby film is 'primarily synesthetic'.²⁶⁴ Then, there is the phenomenon of so-called 'choreo-cinema', the synthesis of dance and film recognising the importance of the mechanical camera and its operator, which academic Jerome Delamater analyzes:

'[a] cameraman should film a dancer so that the last object to leave the frame is that portion of the body that moves the energy from space to space. The camera itself should also move the energy from one space to another, or it is not contributing. Timing and framing are the essential tools of a dance cameraman. One must frame on space and let the dancer move into it. Space is the dancer's

²⁵⁸ Butler, *Gender*, 43-44; Milovanović, 'Fosse Woman', 182.

²⁵⁹ Fordin and Chase, 'Hollywood', 8.

²⁶⁰ Swisher, 'Bob', 22 in Vance Gargaro, 'Works', 2.

²⁶¹ Seltzer, 'Jazz', 100.

²⁶² Delamater, *Dance*, 1.

²⁶³ Delamater, *Dance*, 3.

²⁶⁴ Delamater, *Dance*, 3.

canvas, whether on stage or in film. Both space and movement, too, may have to be modified or distorted to make the choreo-cinema effective to an audience'.²⁶⁵

The revered cinematographer Giuseppe Rotunno (1923-2021) acknowledges these dynamics and creates the cinematic space for the 'Take Off With Us/Airotica' ensemble to navigate with sublime fluidity, underscored by Fosse's radical and sensual choreography connecting the theatrical and visual reflexivity model invisibly.²⁶⁶

In *The Technique of Film and Video Editing: History, Theory, and Practice*, scholar Ken Dancyger recognises the movie musical as a *gesamtkunstwerk* of extraordinary proportions whereby various creative processes and dynamics interact.²⁶⁷ Thus, we must also consider the role of the film editor, who aims to 'find a narrative continuity for the visuals and the sound of the film, and to distill those visual and sound shots that will create the dramatic emphasis so that the film will be effective. By choosing particular juxtapositions, editors also layer that narrative with metaphor and subtext'.²⁶⁸ However, these techniques become far more complex in a work such as *All That Jazz* because of the irregular use of the previously discussed 'Fosse time' framework, manipulating time and space at a perplexing pace with a mechanical camera that refuses to conceal itself.²⁶⁹ Indeed, it appears that Fosse wanted to exploit an alternative to the so-called 180° demarcation line that affects spatial comprehension in traditional narrative film storytelling to create a more provocative work

²⁶⁵ Gardner Compton was a dance film maker who has written extensively about the synesthetic possibilities of the film medium and dance. For a further fascinating analysis of this phenomenon please read the introduction to Delamater, *Dance*, 1-9.

²⁶⁶ Giuseppe Rotunno worked extensively with Federico Fellini during his varied career. His work with Bob Fosse is his only foray into musicals. Pasquale Iannone, 'Giuseppe Rotunno was one of the great Italian cinematographers', BFI, Obituaries, last modified 13 February 2021, accessed 24.2.23. <https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound/news/giuseppe-rotunno-obituary-great-italian-cinematographer-fellini-visconti>

²⁶⁷ Dancyger states that 'Film as a narrative form had various influences, particularly the popular novel of the nineteenth-century and the theatrical genres of spectacle, pantomime and melodrama' which effected editing choices in the film making process. Dancyger, *Technique*, 71-75.

²⁶⁸ Dancyger, *Technique*, xxiii.

²⁶⁹ Raymond Spottiswoode, *Film and Its Techniques* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), 104-107. The author states there are two types of film editing, dynamic and continuity.

where even sexuality becomes fragmented and non-linear.²⁷⁰ Again, this would subvert Mulvey's and Berger's hypothesis, where traditional Hollywood films create images of women to appease the heteronormative male gaze through voyeurism and looking at others in a highly sexualised manner.²⁷¹ Traditionally this was created by the editing process, which 'carries and encodes powerful gender dynamics' as the woman becomes objectified for mainly heterosexual men, which Fosse subverts because his camera and editing process explores male and female sexuality equally.²⁷²

Adding additional layers to the film's complexities, *Take Off With Us/Airotica* foregrounds the body as a powerful tool of creative sexual self-expression.²⁷³ Alan Heim, the film's editor, talks about how he and Fosse worked together to achieve the film's unique style. Unlike *Sweet Charity*, Heim rejected the idea of using dissolves except for scenes in the alternative and surreal world in Gideon's mind. He further posits that the various cuts aimed to facilitate the flow of action in the sequences and the dance scenes were only edited *close* to the beat of the music.²⁷⁴ He reiterates this in Wasson's *Fosse*, 'If you stay on the beat, it becomes too rhythmic. But if you go by the motions of the dancers or the dancers' body parts, it becomes a different experience'.²⁷⁵ Although the film's script restricted Heim, he found alternative ways to edit the movie, which ingeniously circumvented 'the linearity of the Hollywood musical....'²⁷⁶ These avant-garde techniques highlight the 'visual rhythms' of

²⁷⁰ Valerie Orpren, *Film Editing: The Art of the Expressive* (London & New York: Wallflower, 2003), 16. For an in-depth analysis of the 180° demarcation line (also known as 'the axis of action; or the 'centre line') and spatial comprehension in continuity editing in Hollywood films please see pages 16 & 17. In summary, the spectator is often discombobulated when these rules are broken, and the imaginary line is crossed.

²⁷¹ Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, Second Edition, (Massachusetts & Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 238-242.

²⁷² Benshoff and Griffin, *America*, 243.

²⁷³ When analysing the editing techniques used in Fosse's *Cabaret*, Dancyger asserts that although a 'freer' style was used compared to previous movie musicals, the 'editing decisions never challenged the rhythm of the music'. Thus, although the score was more varied than previous offerings, when the music was 'intense', this would be reflected in the editing style, whereby it simply punctuated the emotional range of the music. Dancyger, *Technique*, 75.

²⁷⁴ Audio commentary with Alan Heim. Fosse, *All That Jazz*.

²⁷⁵ 'If you stay on the beat': Alan Heim, interview with the author, 22 July 2010 in Wasson, *Fosse*, 486.

²⁷⁶ The author states that *All That Jazz*'s script was already written with Fosse time built in, which somewhat restricted Heim as editor of the film. In Wasson, *Fosse*, 486 and 470.

dance and movement within the frame as the performers poetically traverse the cinematic landscape, their sensual bodies and limbs indelibly marking the screen like paint on canvas, a sublime recognition of new sensibilities to gender and sexuality, the editing now rendered inconspicuous against that of performance.²⁷⁷

As we are catapulted into the ‘Airotica’ segment of the film, it recalls Stam’s hypothesis that the phenomenon of reflexivity is ‘the process by which texts, both literary and filmic, foreground their own production’ to grant the viewer access to new ‘scenic space[s].’²⁷⁸ In a *mise-en-scène* that abandons the proscenium arch, even the film’s protagonists become part of the production process. They create the studio lighting that embeds the background and spotlights the performers, creating a highly sexualised monochrome ambient, rejecting what Feuer called ‘conservative reflexivity’ that has historically embedded the musical film framework.²⁷⁹ It brings to the fore the republication of renowned cinematographer John Alton’s 1949 book, *Painting with Light*, whereby the text reveals the painfully heteronormative and sexist foundations on which the cult of Hollywood has been forged through filming techniques alone, which Mulvey, Butler, Berger, and Feuer examine magnificently.²⁸⁰ Alton states that the style of lighting, which also embeds ‘Airotica’, would have historically been used to create an ambience of mystery and foreboding.²⁸¹ Furthermore, whereby the Hollywood film industry had developed a style of lighting known as ‘three-point lighting’ functioning to exploit female stars for the male gaze, Fosse’s use of light subverts these traditional aesthetic codings, creating a fascinating maze for the dancers to navigate, renouncing the status quo as they explore forbidden new scenic

²⁷⁷ Wasson, *Fosse*, 486.

²⁷⁸ Stam, *Reflexivity*, Preface xiii; I refer here to the already cited ‘scenic space’ hypothesis by Bazin in Gargaro, ‘Works’, 192.

²⁷⁹ Feuer, *Hollywood*, in Stam, *Reflexivity*, 90.

²⁸⁰ John Alton, *Painting with Light*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. 1949/1995). This much-revered text is representative of its time with outdated stereotypes of women and conventional representations of beauty within the traditional Hollywood movie industry.

²⁸¹ Alton, *Light*, 44-56.

spaces and their sexuality.²⁸² Like *Sweet Charity* before, Fosse also allows the scene to be contaminated by lens flare, adding to the poetic docurealism that embeds the frame.

Fosse's industrial landscape of cables, lights, and metal in 'Take Off with Us/Airotica' is further amplified by the enormous background mirror creating a *mise-en-abîme* of infinite interpretations and various entry points.²⁸³ It recalls Fellini's *8½*, where the filmmaking process becomes part of the film itself and provides a unique cinematic space to observe the modern world and sensibilities.²⁸⁴ Fosse manipulates this and allegorises cinema and theatre, mimicking *8½*'s 'double mirror construction'.²⁸⁵ As Gideon holds the torchlight and shines this onto the performers, we are reminded of the character of Guido in the final reel of Fellini's film, where we see him directing his own work. In Fosse's reinterpretation, the torches create a hypnotically sexually charged atmosphere as the ensemble dons black peak caps and provocatively navigates the space and its haunting shadows, hinting at deviance and transgression. Indeed, the sadomasochistic imagery of the number recalls queer photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's artworks and society's infatuation with the body and carnal desires, as posited by Fordin and Chase's *New York Times* article previously (**Fig. 29**).²⁸⁶ Unlike sensationalist films like *Cruising* (William Friedkin, 1980) of the time, *All That Jazz* does not exploit homosexuality per se and accepts it as an inherent part of show business. Moreover, like *Cabaret*, it acknowledges 'otherness' nonchalantly without making its characters tragic or comic.²⁸⁷ Notably, towards the end of 'Airotica', the character of Ted

²⁸² Benschhoff and Griffin, *America*, 245; Feuer, *Hollywood*, in Stam, *Reflexivity*, 90-91; For a more nuanced reading of lens flare and its influences please read Turnock, 'ILM', 158-168.

²⁸³ Stam states that *mise-en-abîme* 'refers to the infinite regress of mirror reflections to denote the literary, painterly, or filmic process by which a passage, a section, or sequence plays out in miniature the processes of the text as a whole. In *Reflexivity*, Preface xiv.

²⁸⁴ In *8½* Fellini constructed a work which borrows from the *mise-en-abîme* strategy adopted by Gide in *Paludes*, which features a novelist writing *Paludes*.

²⁸⁵ Stam, *Reflexivity*, 102.

²⁸⁶ Fordin and Chase, 'Hollywood', 8; Robert Mapplethorpe (1946-1989) was an important artist whose sexually frank and often explicit black and white photographs challenged societal conventions. He died from AIDS related complications.

²⁸⁷ Benschhoff and Griffin, *America*, 333.

Christopher stares at one of the male dancers as he provocatively poses and flexes his oiled body while his associate Paul Dann says, ‘Jesus Christ! Sex, sex, sex - can’t he ever think of anything else but sex?’ to which Ted responds, ‘it’s his sickness’. This dialogue indicates the changing attitudes towards same-gender relationships in a society that was becoming forever more promiscuous and open. Although ‘Airotica’ attempts to address new sexual identities through dance and film techniques, it is unfortunate that in 1981 *The New York Times* published an article regarding a newly identified disease, AIDS, that primarily was ‘afflicting gay men in urban areas’ that went on to become a worldwide crisis, thus challenging and indeed reversing more accessible attitudes towards sexuality during the era.²⁸⁸

In Fosse’s *Coda for a Dancer*, he mapped out the decline of a chorus girl, a narrative that underscores most of his works. However, ironically, in *All That Jazz*, Fosse inverts the roles and points the camera at himself, or his gendered self, in creating a film that flips the ‘rise of a star’ narrative to look at the fall of its protagonist.²⁸⁹ Moreover, as Heim also tellingly posits, Gideon is a very lonely character who fights this through the bravura of performance.²⁹⁰ So, of course, it is tempting to conclude that Fosse’s life also mirrored this trajectory in such an intensely personal meta-narrative. At the time of the film’s release in 1979, Fosse agreed to an interview with Chris Chase for *Life*, who also had a cameo role in *All That Jazz* as a film reviewer (which led to Gideon’s second cardiac arrest in the movie). At the end of the article, she summed up the film as follows:

The script isn’t sentimental, the eye observing the rake’s progress is cold, the hand which dispatches him is ruthless. Yet the story also deals with immortal longings,

²⁸⁸ It is outside the scope of this dissertation to fully explore this theme. Please see Benschhoff and Griffin, *America*, 336-339 for a more detailed analysis.

²⁸⁹ Basinger, *Movie*, Ebook 486/571; Kessler states that many musicals of the 1960s and 1970s began to address issues relating to male identity, shifting focus ‘from romance to career, internal conflict, or larger philosophical concerns’. In *Destabilizing*, 38.

²⁹⁰ Heim states in the Blu-ray audio commentary that Gideon ‘is a lonely guy.... but he’s still going on. I mean he gets up every morning and he fights this’. Fosse, *All That Jazz*.

the longing for love of a man who can't be faithful to anyone but wishes he could, the longing for meaning of a man to whom work is the only answer, but who has a sneaking suspicion, that even the work may be meaningless.²⁹¹

'Airotica' not only 'comments on the position of gender and sexuality and its role in the society of the time with a performance of self-expression, but it also observes its complications through the meta-image of Joe Gideon, fused with the self-reflexive filmmaking process.²⁹² Furthermore, Fosse demonstrated that filming techniques and editing could be interwoven into the stylization of dance and vice versa in creating a post-modern *pièce de résistance*. Finally, Wasson profoundly summarises that the number demonstrates 'his creative and destructive process to be one and the same, a Möbius strip of relief and despair, death and imagination'.²⁹³ This argument is further punctuated by Seltzer, who states '... as an artist he turned his personal tragedy into an aesthetic triumph—a masterpiece of energy, movement, rhythm, expression: focused, concentrated, and compressed, it renders while transcending the sprawling mess of indiscriminate relationships and uncontrollable impulses that have made Joe's life what it is'.²⁹⁴

Bob Fosse collapsed and died in the arms of his ex-wife and long-term collaborator Gwen Verdon of a heart attack on 23 September 1987 in Washington D.C. while the revival of his 1966 musical play *Sweet Charity* was opening at the National Theatre. He was 60 years old.²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ 'Fosse's Ego Trip', *Life Magazine*, 1979/1980 in Gottfried, *All*, 401.

²⁹² Milovanović, 'Fosse Woman', 159.

²⁹³ Wasson, *Fosse*, 475.

²⁹⁴ Seltzer, 'Jazz', 102. In the only footnote in Seltzer's essay, he acknowledges that although Fosse had always claimed that the film was based on his life, it was nevertheless more a cluster of events outside of his own world and experience. In this regard, he also cites and contrasts Boyd Grubb, *Razzle*, whereby the author reveals that almost every incident surrounding Gideon in *All That Jazz* to be based on factual events in Fosse's own life. This would therefore suggest that the film is far more autobiographical and indeed prophetic than he wanted to admit.

²⁹⁵ Charles W. Hall and Douglas Stevenson, 'Bob Fosse Dies After Collapsing On D.C. Street', *Washington Post*, 24 September 1987, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/09/24/bob-fosse-dies-after-collapsing-on-dc-street/85aaf6d6-e440-402e-b74e-7bd290ce10d3/>.

Conclusion

The relationship between theatre and film has been the subject of numerous prolific writers and essays. In his ‘Notes on Theater-and-Film’, Stanley Kauffmann states: ‘The difference between the two arts here is certainly not in intent but in means. Temperament sometimes enables a director to use both sets of means—Bergman and Visconti, for just two instances—sometime not. Antonioni once told me that he had directed a few plays, and I asked whether he wanted to do more theater work. ‘No’, he said. ‘Always the same shot’.²⁹⁶ Bazin reiterates this argument and dismisses playwright, novelist, and filmmaker Marcel Pagnol’s hypothesis that film will replace theatre by simply ‘canning it’.²⁹⁷ Consequently, there has always been a dialectic tension between theatre and film, especially regarding celluloid-to-screen translations, which often appeared too staged and theatrical when amplified by the mechanical camera. The sixties and seventies saw tumultuous changes to the socio-political landscape forcing the musical movie format to respond with darker narratives and new approaches to the filmmaking process.²⁹⁸ With the inevitable developments came new ‘technical stylization’ inspired by ‘American and European avant-garde movements’ and even Felliniesque Italian neo-realism.²⁹⁹ Fosse responded accordingly and challenged the arcadian movie musical’s shortcomings in *Sweet Charity*, *Cabaret*, and *All That Jazz* ‘to the point where whatever function the genre once played now becomes obliterated’.³⁰⁰ Furthermore, he also brought a choreographer’s sensibility into the arena, creating works that

²⁹⁶ Stanley Kauffmann, *Theater and Film: A Comparative Anthology*, ed. Robert Knope, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005), 153; Swedish born Ingmar Bergman (1918-2007) is often regarded as one of the most influential filmmakers of all time. Luchino Visconti (1906-1976) was a major player in the creation of cinematic neorealism and a revered figure of Italian art and culture during the 20th century. Michelangelo Antonioni (1912-2007) was an Italian director who made the critically acclaimed English language *Blow-Up* (1966).

²⁹⁷ Bazin, *Cinema I*, 117.

²⁹⁸ Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 60.

²⁹⁹ Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 60.

³⁰⁰ Altman, *American*, 121.

poetically morphed theatrical and visual reflexivity. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, even the sophisticated reflexive devices used by Fosse altered dramatically over ten years as he experimented with their dynamics as interchangeable entities in line with the zeitgeist. The universal themes of sexuality and gender are intrinsically linked to Fosse's camera and filming techniques: a journey encompassing the 1960s sexual revolution until the late 1970s—a world it seems perpetually trying to find its identity after two cataclysmic world wars and then confronted by the AIDS crisis.

The genesis of *Sweet Charity* owes a significant debt to Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria*. Indeed, the sympathetic observation of the frailties of human existence and the exploration of ordinary yet desperate individuals and their alienation from society formed a serendipitous alliance with Fosse's transgressive vision for a new type of musical.³⁰¹ Fosse's earlier *Coda for a Dancer* underscored his projects and interests with themes of sex, drugs, and death, which aligned with the 1960s subculture narrative. However, in *Sweet Charity*, torn between aesthetic realism, inspired by avant-garde European cinema, and musical film fantasy, Fosse made many artistic yet fascinating *faux pas*, as in 'Personal Property', whereby he attempted to juxtapose natural settings against the artifice of characters who burst out into song with meaningless optical effects. These techniques were paradoxical with the harsh realities of the real world, the antiwar, civil and gay, and lesbian rights movements, drug culture, and the sexual revolution, desperate for something different.³⁰² Thus, *Sweet Charity* functions as a *memento mori* of the book musical format as the more sophisticated concept musical superseded it. However, occasionally Fosse's cinematic effects, including lens flare, superimposition, and close-ups in case studies such as 'Where Am I Going?',

³⁰¹ For a more nuanced analysis of Italian neorealism please see: Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present*, Third Edition (New York & London: Continuum, 2002), 31-73.

³⁰² Kennedy, *Roadshow!* 7.

demonstrate how effective his experimental camera could be while acknowledging new sensibilities and dynamics in the film musical. Furthermore, the choreography and staging of the 'Rich Man's Frug' with its highly labyrinthine psychedelic mise-en-scène, rapid editing, and colour tints, not only demonstrates the fracture between the arcadian and the modern musical but also shifting attitudes towards sexuality.³⁰³

Perhaps Fosse's most significant find in *Sweet Charity* was that dance and editing could form the ideal symbiosis, as demonstrated in 'Big Spender', creating a beguiling segment that also struck an intellectual discourse regarding Mulvey's male gaze and Butler's gender identity hypothesis.

Cabaret functions as a reaction to the resurging racism within American culture in the 1960s, a chilling reminder of how history repeats itself, combined with a public devastated by the various political assassinations and the Vietnam War, which permeated the era. This phenomenon collided with the new socio-political agenda inspired by feminism and the acknowledgement of 'otherness'. By chance, the source material, Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*, was already encoded with a radical narrative that perfectly aligned with Fosse's ideology. The Kit Kat Klub, a gender-fluid environment 'independent of time and space', connected with the grim world outside and created new possibilities for the musical film genre.³⁰⁴ By abandoning the book musical format, the opening 'Willkommen' demonstrates how song and dance can function as part of logical storytelling while introducing the sexually transgressive characters that propel the plot. Sophisticated cross-cutting editing techniques amplify these dynamics. Furthermore, in the 'Tiller Girls' routine, he pushes the boundaries of conventional film editing further and controversially conflates

³⁰³ Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 60.

³⁰⁴ Basinger, *Movie*, 518.

sexuality and spectacle with Nazi-inspired politics, creating a segment that assaults and provokes the senses echoing real-world issues. The mise-en-scène of the movie evocatively recalls the decadent Weimar Republic through the use of aesthetics inspired by George Grosz, the Expressionist movement, and chiaroscuro lighting, which permeates the decaying landscape. The ‘Two Ladies’ routine momentarily ruptures the rules of spectatorship as the Kit Kat Klub audience becomes a reflexive entity for our vicarious delight. *Cabaret* is in the backstage musical tradition; however, Fosse manages to deconstruct it, creating a powerful work, while maintaining the need for a ‘strong singing star’, Liza Minnelli, whose androgynous appearance along with her co-star Joel Grey creates a fascinating alternative to the arcadian movie musical stereotypes.³⁰⁵ Furthermore, as a testament to the film’s endurance, controversial themes such as abortion addressed in *Cabaret* have become a topical issue once more, with the US supreme court overturning abortion rights for women in 2022.³⁰⁶

Fosse’s swan song, *All That Jazz*, turned the camera on himself as the ‘editing and cinematographic techniques, realistic, stylized, and theatrical styles of mise-en-scène’ reflected worlds that ‘confront the intricacies of human experience’, creating a type of fractured antihero in the meta-image of Joe Gideon, a Broadway director, and choreographer.³⁰⁷ It also demonstrated that the genre could encompass more existential issues relating to the complexities of gender identity against a milieu of death and greed in the contemporary showbiz world.³⁰⁸ Fosse consequently shifted the film musical into new territory while exploiting a cinema verité style ‘rooted in the desire to make real

³⁰⁵ Basinger, *Movie*, 520.

³⁰⁶ ‘On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* eliminating the constitutional right to abortion after almost 50 years. This will lead to all but total bans on the procedure in about half of the states’. Extract taken from ‘The Supreme Court and *Roe v. Wade*’, *The New York Times*, accessed 30.8.22, <https://www.nytimes.com/news-event/roe-v-wade-supreme-court-abortion>.

³⁰⁷ Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 60.

³⁰⁸ Kessler, *Destabilizing*, 60.

stories about real people’ in a narrative which gradually ‘erases the line between onstage and off-, bullshit and truth’ while using the tropes of dance as storytelling.³⁰⁹ Academic Douglas Rosenberg asserts that screen dance ‘flows from the embrace of technology as part of the creative process’ whereby the gestures of movement create an inscription on the screen that functions almost like writing, thus creating a unique visual language acknowledging new worlds and indeed sexualities.³¹⁰ These dynamics are further exacerbated by the exploration of new scenic spaces and bold, even vulgar, filming styles, as in the ‘Airotica’ routine, where the camera lens voyeuristically interrogates the sexuality of both genders, disrupting Mulvey’s male gaze argument.³¹¹ Radically, the film also shows us the beauty of the naked body in a society obsessed with sex. Furthermore, it is a work that magnifies the ‘genre’s self-reflexive qualities rather than introducing them’.³¹² Jeanine Basinger, in her pitch-perfect book *The Movie Musical!* superbly deconstructs the complexities of Fosse’s contribution to the genre:

Where the Freed unit talents of Minnelli/Kelly/Donen brought the moving camera into the choreography, Fosse in his musicals brings in the editing table, cutting with a rhythm and making the beats of the dance the cuts of the film. The dances are designed to be cut in specific ways that are linked to the choreography. The attitude toward the human body dancing has shifted radically. Fosse contributed to a sense of abstraction in musical presentation: the talent of the individual dancer didn’t matter as much as what the dancer evoked.... Bob Fosse modernized the musical, whether anyone wanted it modernized or not. He upgraded it to contain sex, sin, and disaster. None of those elements were ever really absent in earlier

³⁰⁹ Wasson, *Fosse*, 474.

³¹⁰ Douglas Rosenberg, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.

³¹¹ Wasson, *Fosse*, 474.

³¹² Desirée J. Garcia, *The Movie Musical* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), Kindle, 1. The Musical as Archive, Pastiche and Hybridity.

musicals, but they were offstage, or briefly apparent, or buried in musical numbers. Fosse brought them on front and center. He also changed the idea that the dancer, in particular, had to be respected by the camera. On the contrary, his movies said, the camera can sit still and let the cutter do the dancing or at least be the partner of the dance. The result changed the dynamic of the musical for a viewer. No longer was the audience lifted up into a vicarious participation, a release into freedom of movement. Now the audience was a watcher of a rhythmic assault, in which the dancer paired with his or her own destruction.³¹³

To add to this hypothesis, in Fosse's three films, we also have to consider his tropes of mirrors as intriguing linking devices which, coupled with his camera, offer a fascinating portal into his world, whether it be the weary dancers of the Fandango Ballroom in *Sweet Charity*, the ambiguous Emcee in *Cabaret* or the highly complex post-modern Felliniesque landscape in *All That Jazz*, demonstrating a work in progress. Fosse's camera shifted from severe close-ups to oblique angles in response to changing attitudes towards sexuality and gender, from outside sexual objectification to more existential interpretation and analysis of characters, as in the case studies 'Cabaret' and 'Where Am I Going?' In *All That Jazz*, Fosse was brazened enough to eliminate the diegetic audience of the Kit Kat Klub and the Fandango Ballroom to connect his camera directly with the spectator as we approached the 1980s and the MTV video generation. Moreover, Fosse wanted to explore uncharted territory and altered states of consciousness in his musical films, whereby even the mind becomes an extraordinary setting, as in Sally Bowles' dream sequence and Joe Gideon's fantasy moments. In assessing his commitment to the musical film, we only need to consider the phallogentric texts of John Alton, whereby women had to be glamorous and pretty while

³¹³ Basinger, *Movie*, 521-522. Vincente Minnelli, Gene Kelly, and Stanley Donen are often regarded as the quintessential arcadian Hollywood musical directors of the 1950s and 1960s.

men were macho stereotypes. A phenomenon also extended to Busby Berkeley as a director and choreographer whose apparent innocent images of women on screen in the 1930s only sexualised them and enabled the male gaze.

In *Sweet Charity*, *Cabaret*, and *All That Jazz*, Bob Fosse subverts and eschews previous representations of sexuality and gender in the backstage musical film, and in doing so, his camera and filming techniques bear witness. His work artfully demonstrated that the genre could be more than merely song and dance or inferior entertainment with no intellectual credibility. Fosse's camera wallowed in the seedier underbelly of showbusiness because music, sex and doom were a powerful partnership in modern storytelling about fractured lives. Moreover, self-reflexive devices such as direct audience address and breaking the fourth wall prove the genre's multiplicity creating extraordinarily complex texts. Ultimately, the movie musical is a survivor in ever-changing worlds and shifting social attitudes. Indeed, it ingeniously 'reaches back' to learn from its mistakes, as in *Sweet Charity*, before accelerating forward and reinventing itself triumphantly, as in *All That Jazz*, yet always functions as a homage.³¹⁴ *Cabaret* is unique; it is an astonishing work and unquestionably one of the finest films ever made. When the movie musical is in the hands of a director and choreographer like Bob Fosse, it has endless capabilities, as this thesis has elucidated, and deserves revaluing from new and exciting perspectives.

³¹⁴ Garcia, *Movie Musical* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), Kindle, Introduction and 1. The Musical as Archive: Solace.

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Appendices: Images



Figure 1. A screenshot from the opening ‘Personal Property’ segment in *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) with Charity Hope Valentine (Shirley MacLaine) and Charlie (Dante di Paolo) in Central Park. The Technicolor film musical version contrasts with Federico Fellini’s black & white *Le Notti di Cabiria* (1957) set in the desolate Roman suburbs and shows how Fosse wanted to update the ‘book’ musical format to include real-world settings.



Figure 2. A screenshot from the opening ‘Personal Property’ segment in *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) with Charity Hope Valentine (Shirley MacLaine) and Charlie (Dante di Paolo) in Central Park. The saturated hues of Technicolor punctuate the film, and Fosse experiments further with colour tints and technical effects, heightening the film’s visual reflexivity and depictions of the characters’ sexuality. Ray-Ban sunglasses add menace to the role of Charlie, who later pushes Charity off Gapstow Bridge into the lake below.



Figure 3. A screenshot from the final moments of the ‘Personal Property’ segment in *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969). The cinematographer Robert Surtees allows the phenomenon known as lens flare to imbue the scene after Charlie (Dante di Paolo) pushes Charity (Shirley MacLaine) into the lake creating a ‘documentary materialist aesthetic’ as two male teenagers rescue her. Fosse’s film allows this technique to permeate other segments, adding to the film’s visual reflexive nature.



Figure 4. A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) with Helene (Paula Kelly), Nickie (Chita Rivera) and Charity (Shirley MacLaine) looking in the changing room mirror of the tawdry Fandango Ballroom as they contemplate their lives creating a sophisticated *mise-en-abîme*. As the backstage musical operates within a framework of reality versus illusion, the trope of the mirror metaphorically acts as portals to these realms and allows for a more nuanced reading of female sexuality within the *mise-en-scène* since they amplify our perception.



Figure 5. A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) with Helen (Paula Kelly), Nickie (Chita Rivera) and the principal dancers of the Fandango Ballroom performing the musical number ‘Big Spender’. Fosse’s camera is not merely recording a dance segment as in previous Hollywood offerings, choreography is essential to the filmmaking process, whereby movement and filming techniques intersect. Mechanicalized and intricately choreographed steps with stumping stilettoed heels on the dance floor create a primitive ambient that pulsates and excites, unlike the arcadian musicals of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.



Figure 6. A screenshot from the ‘Big Spender’ routine in *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969). Fosse uniquely eschews standard cutting techniques for slow-motion superimposed shots creating a dreamlike red sea of movement as complex layers upon layers of images create a sublime aesthetic forcing a more psychological reading of female sexuality and identity further distorting the arcadian musical film’s codings.



Figure 7. A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) with performer Suzanne Charny (centre) surrounded by the ensemble of the Pompeii Club as Charity enters a realm of outrageously complex aesthetics whereby the decadent and transgressive nature of the ancient epoch is juxtaposed with the freedom of the 1960s visual subculture. Fosse's intricate choreography accentuates these dynamics with extravagantly posed bodies and pulsating limbs. In addition, the men's dance steps are flamboyantly feminine hinting at new sensibilities.

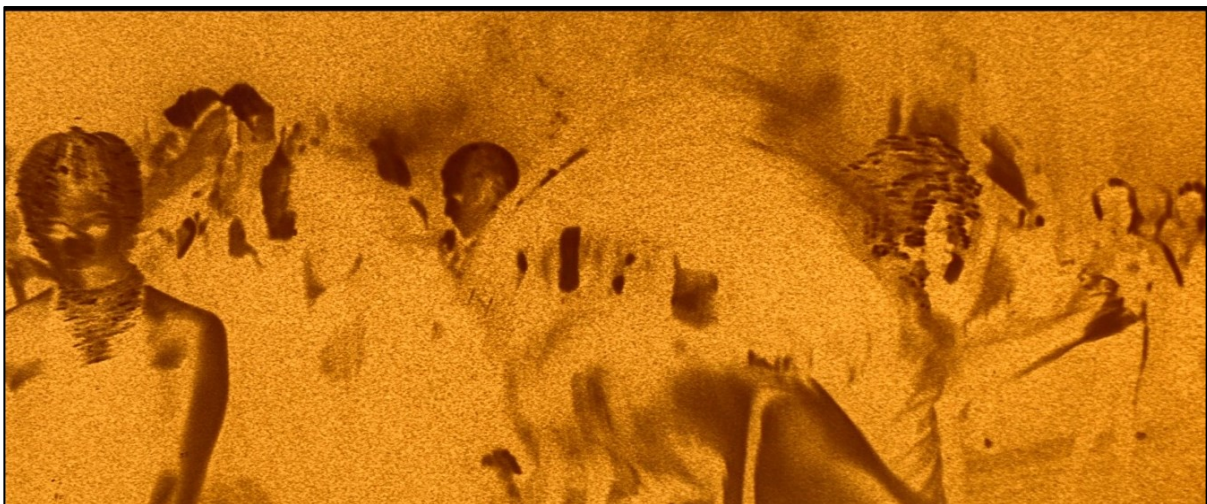


Figure 8. A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) highlighting the film's psychedelic effects drawing attention to the visual reflexivity that imbues the cinematic landscape. Fosse catapults us into the vortex of an alternative culture with a montage of projected film, movement, music, trippy colours, and visual effects synonymous with the era, dynamics underscored by the 1960s sexual revolution and drug culture. Furthermore, lens flare is contrasted with frantic shaking heads and primitive drumbeats creating a highly complex mise-en-scène that recalls art house experimental films.



Figure 9. A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) of Oscar (John McMartin) and Charity (Shirley MacLaine) running through the billboarded streets of New York City as dissolves dominate the cinematic landscape, creating a Dadaesque aesthetic. It demonstrates how a profusion of superimposed images creates highly complex yet astonishingly rhythmic and poetic effects in storytelling narratives. The ethereal characters are captured like ghosts caught in a moment in time creating a transcendent visual that shifts our observations of the characters from corporeal readings to psychological and vice versa.



Figure 10. A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) of Charity (Shirley MacLaine). The camera films her tears and heartache after being jilted at the Registry Office in the final reel, accentuating the impact of the face, camera and close-up - amplified by dissolve transitioning effects. Close-ups were first used in Carl Theodor Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne D'Arc* (France, 1928, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*) with the face of Maria Falconetti, conveying suppressed and inner turmoil during her trial and execution in 15th century England.



Figure 11. A screenshot from *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969) of the ‘Where Am I Going?’ segment further illustrating how the use of dissolves powerfully contribute to the film’s visual storytelling as we follow Charity (Shirley MacLaine) through the empty subways of New York City. The overall aesthetics force alternative readings of her character and demonstrates the film’s bittersweet narrative, where heartache is always behind euphoric happiness. Rather than burst into song, we only hear MacLaine’s voice on the soundtrack. The scene works far better than ‘Personal Property’ in Fosse’s attempt to fuse fantasy with real life settings.



Figure 12. A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of the distorted mirror hanging behind the stage of the Kit Kat Klub in the film’s opening sequence as the titles morph from black and white to Technicolor. The scene resembles the magnification of an abstract or impressionist artwork with deep red and dark colour tones, heightened by snatches of flickering light piercing through the cinematic landscape. The mirror device serves as various metaphors in the film as we are drawn into the milieu of the decadent epoch of ‘Berlin 1931’ and the transgressive characters of the movie’s diegesis.



Figure 13. A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972). In the opening ‘Willkommen’ number, the master of ceremonies (Joel Grey) suddenly appears in the mirror to a resonating smash of cymbals. His ghostly pale face, false eyelashes, rouged cheeks, patent leather hair and cupid’s bow create a fascinating but unsettling vision. Grey’s smirking image stares directly into the lens for a few seconds, breaking the fourth wall convention and subverting representations of male sexuality in film musicals.



Figure 14. A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) showing the *tableau vivant* of painter Otto Dix’s *Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia Von Harden* (1926) used in the opening ‘Willkommen’ routine. The creative team’s replication of the transgressive artwork skillfully reflects the dark and subversive ambient that underscores the entire movie, alluding to a world that is not only decadent and sexualised but also on the brink of something terrible.



Figure 15. A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of Brian Roberts (Michael York) arriving in Berlin during the opening ‘Willkommen’ number. The movie is also a coming-of-age story about Brian exploring his homosexual tendencies as the city entices and then corrupts him. The constant cross-cutting between Brian and the Emcee hints at a similarity in their sexuality. The train carriage glass window further blurs our perceptions of gender identity and adroitly connects to the distorted mirrored world of the Kit Kat Klub.



Figure 16. ‘Leave your troubles outside! So life is disappointing? Forget it! In here, life is beautiful’. A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972). We are introduced to the colourful and transgressive characters of the Kit Kat Klub. A candid acknowledgement of ‘otherness’ which permeates the mise-en-scène eschewing previous depictions of gender and sexuality in the film musical. These dynamics are heightened by the movie’s dynamic use of editing techniques, androgynous costumes and authentic set designs.



Figure 17. A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of Ricky Renée transforming into Elke in the smudged and dirty Kit Kat Klub dressing room mirror during the opening ‘Willkommen’ routine. The shot demonstrates shifting attitudes towards sexuality during the 1970s while authentically capturing its Weimar Berlin setting. As with *Sweet Charity*, mirror devices create complex aesthetics that subvert our immersive experience whilst offering alternative readings of representations of gender and sexuality in the musical film.



Figure 18. A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) showing the Kit Kat Klub dancers in the opening number ‘Willkommen’ and the mechanical mirror looming above the stage. Fosse’s camera is placed directly at the audience level, a technique used in many of the other musical routines in the film, highlighting the film’s scopophilic qualities and the male gaze. The deliberately sleazy and angular choreography recalls the Expressionist art movement itself.



Figure 19. A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972). The Emcee (Joel Grey) morphs from campy performer to sexual predator, addressing the camera lens directly and breaking the fourth wall convention. As he beckons the cinematic audience to this phantasmagorical and debauched world, he ingeniously demonstrates where sexuality, theatrical reflexivity and visual reflexivity intersect as all elements are present in the frame.



Figure 20. A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of the Emcee (Joel Grey) flanked by two of the Kit Kat Klub dancers during the bawdy ‘Two Ladies’ routine. Fosse’s camera shows the performers’ point of view from the back of the stage in a mise-en-scène blinded by multiple colour spotlights and lens-flare. These dynamics then blur with the image of the diegetic audience as they shift for a few fleeting moments from being the observer to the observed, heightening the film’s complexities of spectatorship and self-reflexivity.



Figure 21. A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of the Emcee (Joel Grey) in drag and the Kit Kat Klub dancers during the ‘Tiller Girls’ routine contrasted with violent scenes of the outside world. Academic Linda Mizejewski observes that the film bears the imprint of ‘politics acting as spectacle’ whereby the audience is seduced into an erotically charged and visually exciting world conflating sexuality with fascism.



Figure 22. A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) demonstrating the tawdry backstage area of the Kit Kat Klub as the Emcee (Joel Grey) provocatively fondles the bosom of Sally Bowles (Liza Minnelli) who is waiting in the wings. It forms part of her dream sequence and demonstrates the film’s use of metaphysical scenic areas. The appearance of Sally and the Emcee subvert previous representations of female and male stereotypes in the musical movie genre. Also, menacing chiaroscuro shadows begin creeping into the mise-en-scène as the drama evolves heightening the film’s complex visual codings.



Figure 23. A screenshot from *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972) of the mirror device in the ‘Finale’ number. ‘Auf wiedersehen. Au bientôt’ are the parting words of the Emcee (Joel Grey) before bowing and disappearing behind a curtain. The Nazi threat is now blatantly obvious as swastikas dominate the mise-en-scène. A final drum roll and chilling cymbal clash as the titles roll in complete silence to a new world order.



Figure 24. A screenshot from *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) of Broadway director Joe Gideon (Roy Scheider) as he announces, ‘It’s Showtime Folks!’, whilst striking an Al Jolson pose. We are introduced to the character by his morning routine in a montage of close-up shots whilst popping amphetamines and smoking. As a character study, the film observes Gideon’s ‘gendered self’ as he prepares for a new theatrical production interspersed with dream sequences and flashbacks of his life and memories told in non-linear ‘Fosse time’.



Figure 25. A screenshot from *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) showing lead performer Sandahl Bergman (centre) surrounded by the ensemble in the ‘Take Off With Us’ routine. The producers are delighted with Gideon’s work, but it soon shifts gear from ‘book’ musical to ‘concept musical’ considering more contemporary attitudes to sexuality and gender, underscored by direct and vulgar filming techniques where the camera is no longer hidden behind audiences and theatrical excess.



Figure 26. A screenshot from *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) of two male dancers in ballet mode during the ‘Airotica’ segment. Fosse exploits multiracial male and female homosexual couplings, threesomes and various ‘mini-orgies’ through poetic editing and movement - a perfect combination of visual and theatrical reflexivity. The number traverses uncharted territory where dance is used as a form of narrative storytelling as the cast explores their sexuality in new cinematic spaces.



Figure 27. ‘If you stay on the beat, it becomes too rhythmic’. A screenshot from *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) of the ‘Airotica’ routine. With dance steps reacting to the mood of the music, from ballet to mechanicalized twitching, the choreography becomes more frenzied as the number evolves. The number was deliberately edited to the motions of the human body and not to the soundtrack, creating new ways to observe dance and sexuality on film. Note the use of torches and the industrial style mise-en-scène eschewing previous film musical aesthetics.



Figure 28. A screenshot from *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) with Sandahl Bergman in the final moments of the ‘Airotica’ routine as she appears topless on the scaffold tower surrounded by her disciples who appear to be in a sexualised trance. In the shift from *Sweet Charity*’s more arcadian format, the scene demonstrates how portrayals of gender have progressed since the 1960s, without Fosse reverting to excessive use of optical effects as the new decade beckons.



Figure 29. A screenshot from *All That Jazz* (Bob Fosse, 1979) as Joe Gideon (Roy Scheider) and his cohort shine torches on the ensemble during the ‘Airotica’ number, thus becoming part of the production process, creating an atmospheric, Felliniesque landscape. The scene suddenly becomes more sexualised and hints at sadomasochism, *de rigueur* at the time in visual culture. In the background the large mirror also extends the reflexive mise-èn-scene and amplifies the performance heightened by the bravura music of the three-piece band.