

## Lecture 12 - Astaire, Kelly, Fosse

### I. Astaire vs. Kelly

### II. *Singin' in the Rain*

- Self-consciousness: an encyclopedia of musical history
- Key themes
- The place of song and dance

### III. *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse, 1972)

- Beyond genre: the end of Hollywood
- Fosse's career: the inheritor
- Weimar Germany and America in the late 1960s
- Style: mise en scène and montage
- Texture: multiplicity
- Musical numbers: true integration
- Key themes: innocence, history, the limits of satire

**Disclaimer:** The following notes were taken by a student during the Fall 2006 term; they are not Prof. Thorburn's own notes.

Film viewing tonight:

Donen, Stanley, and Gene Kelly. *Singin' in the Rain*. 1952.

- The integrated musical – this is what they called it at the time
  - Even to the people making these films, it became clear that there was a certain discontinuity between the energy of the production numbers and the lack of interesting character or plot
    - There was a lack of psychological depth and complexity
    - Remember the dance scene we saw from *Top Hat*
      - Metaphor for mutual sex and shared desire
      - The audience might not have explicitly noticed this symbolism, but they did process it on another level
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  - Arthur Freed
    - Began his career as a lyricist
    - Became executive producer of over 33 MGM films, and they included all the great musicals of this period
    - He assembled an enormous unit of performer, choreographers, directors, that was unrivaled
      - Busby Berkeley was in this unit
      - It included all the most distinguished people
    - He made character and story as interesting as the musical numbers

- He integrated the musical numbers into the rest of the story, so that the plot didn't just stop and then start again whenever there was a song
- Themes
  - Show business
    - Implicitly, this always contains within it themes of community building and democracy
    - There's almost always one snotty star who humiliates or mistreats the underlings
    - Thus class antagonism comes out
    - When this elitist is purged in some way, the community comes together in a kind of democratic excitement
    - Thus the group has achieved something, and become a place of democracy instead of one of snobbery
    - The humble and talented understudy gets the chance to finally shine
    - Thus it celebrates especially American values
  - High culture, popular culture
  - Convention, restraint vs. spontaneity, energy, and "the natural"
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- Fred Astaire vs. Kelly
  - You can see them as embodying different sorts of principles in their dance
  - Astaire almost always danced very well dressed – tuxedo, etc.
    - He always danced in places that were recognized as places to dance – the stage, etc
    - Within his own films, he's usually recognized as a great or professional dancer
    - He embodies a kind of grace in his dancers
    - He almost never violates the Proscenium arch
  - Kelly's dance is much more energetic and spontaneous
    - He's graceful in a way that violates boundaries instead of respecting them
    - His dances take over spaces that don't normally belong to dance – he dances in trees, on roofs, on tables...
    - It's like he's disobeying the ordinary restraints
- *Singin' In the Rain*
  - It embodies a lot of these themes we've been talking about – high vs. low art
  - Note Don Lockwood's speech, where he speaks of himself like a cultured, upper-class person, when the reality is more varied
  - Note Debbie Reynolds's claim to prefer higher art (Shakespeare, Ibsen), when she is in fact a popular dancer herself
  - Satire and Parody

- A satire makes fun of something, holding it up to mockery – it can direct itself at a broad range of things
- A parody is a more specific form of satire, where a specific object is made fun of via imitation
- Self-consciousness
- The key themes
  - One central theme is about performance
  - It sort of acts as an encyclopedic revisiting of the history of film.
  - The movie has a structural exuberance – there are so many different genres of performance going on at once
  - The gap between the outer (formal façade) and the inner (much more energetic intrinsic human energy)
- The place of dance and song
  - Faced with the boring elocution expert, the characters improvise a dance
  - Couches and staircases become elements of the dance – the space is transformed, and the ordinary objects become props
  - This is somehow connected to the somehow naïve exuberance of American culture – our ordinary talk can be edged into song, or normal walking can become dance
    - This has to do with the appeal of Musicals for their audiences – forms of freedom are particularly enacted.

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