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Two yet one : defining romance and the courtship ritual through the Astaire and Rogers duet dances of the 1930s

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**TWO YET ONE:
DEFINING ROMANCE AND THE COURTSHIP RITUAL THROUGH THE
ASTAIRE AND ROGERS DUET DANCES OF THE 1930s**

**A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Theatre Arts
San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts**

**by:
Kathleen M. Gutto
May 1995**

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ABSTRACT

TWO YET ONE: DEFINING ROMANCE AND THE COURTSHIP RITUAL THROUGH THE ASTAIRE AND ROGERS DUET DANCES OF THE 1930s

By Kathleen M. Gutto

This thesis examines specific duet dances performed by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in the 1930s in order to determine the symbols or signs contained within the dances that cause the spectator to perceive the romantic value of these performances. As a basis for discussion, this thesis refers to published critical analysis that has defined these performances as “romantic.” Detailed deconstruction of the dances is implemented as a method for analysis in order to identify elements of the dance that connote romance and the courtship ritual.

Deconstruction of the duet dances of Astaire and Rogers indicates a progressive pattern of danced phases of courtship that are labeled invitation, engagement and commitment. Each phase contains specific movement patterns that, taken as a whole, define the dance as romantic. By comparison, deconstruction of duet dances that have been historically defines as “non-romantic” reveals that this pattern of romantic signification is either abbreviated or eliminated.

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To my family, who supported me in my endeavors and were forced to make significant sacrifices as I pursued my studies, I love you.

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INTRODUCTION

Criteria for Analysis

Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers are widely acclaimed as the most romantic couple in film musical history, epitomizing the ideal heterosexual love relationship through their early duet dances:

It was through their dancing that the public grew to identify their moods, the depth of their involvement, and the exquisite sexual harmony that made them the ideal romantic team. [Their] love scenes were their dances. (Croce 5)

The unique contribution of Fred and Ginger¹ lies in the consistency with which they used the *dance*, rather than dialogue or acting, to define, and refine, their love relationship. "[T]heirs is a dance relationship-expressed through the dance, fulfilled through dance . . . " (Delamater 56). How do Astaire and Rogers so completely signify the love relationship through dance?

To analyze the significance of Fred and Ginger in defining "romantic," it is essential to identify the physical symbols of romance inherent in their duet dances and establish a relationship with other film musical dances occurring before and after the Fred and Ginger epoch.

The courtship/mating dance exemplified by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers is an elaborate machination of attitudes and posturings performed by the dancers, leading ultimately to communion and consummation:

The birth of Fred&Ginger [sic], two as one and one as two, came midway through *The Gay Divorcee*. Fred sings "Night and Day," then

invites [Ginger] to dance with him. She resists his invitation repeatedly, moves away, tries to leave the room, but he cuts her paths of escape, forces her to join him in stylized motion, and leaves her (and us), two choruses later, mute, motionless, transfixed. (Mast 146)

Intrinsic to the Astaire and Rogers duet dances of the 1930s is the progression of the relationship between the dancers from strangers to lovers through a recognizable sequence of steps:

Again and again the movements play out a small drama of difficult courtship: Astaire beckons and enchants, Rogers drifts into concerted movement with him, a close rapport is established and grows in romantic abandon to a point where everything stops, a pause, a decisive moment after which Rogers breaks away, or tries to, and has to be summoned back. (Russell & Taylor 43)

This progressive nature of the male/female courtship ritual has been noted by scholars studying human relationships. Judith Lynne Hanna, in her study of sexual identity and gender in dance, quotes anthropological and sociological research into courtship readiness behavior and applies to dance "these five distinct steps in male-female attraction: approach, look, turn, touch, and synchronized movement" (157).

Each of Fred and Ginger's courtship dances exhibits a progression of signification related to the particular stage of courtship being danced at the moment. What exactly are the attitudes, postures and physical contextualizing that carry these dancers through the different levels of their courtship? What are the signs of courtship that are transparent within the dance and yet indicate the progression of the mating ritual?

Because these signs are transparent and yet decipherable to an audience who is not at all confused about the significance of the dance sixty years after its original performance, the choreographer's choice of movements, referring to specific steps in the narrative structure of the dance, illuminates a wider range of attitudes, nonspecific to the historical period in which the dance was created.

My purpose in this paper is not to establish a cultural or sociological context wherein these signs of heterosexual romance were created. The sexual revolution and the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 70s challenged socially and culturally accepted values regarding love, marriage and human sexuality. Even so, the ideal of romantic love performed by Astaire and Rogers is recognizable to the spectator today and recently chronicled by film scholars. My purpose is to formulate a method of analysis that can be used to isolate symbols, or signs, that occur within the performance phenomenon itself, and translate transtemporally consistent messages (romantic love) to the observer. Identification of the signs of male/female love and romance through deconstruction of the dance duet can then be used by scholars to illuminate bias within the spectator that enables him/her to decode and interpret the signs, and chart how that bias may or may not have changed over time.

The exposition of romantic love within the American film musical is achieved through histrionic performance codes and genre clichés, developed on Broadway by musical and dance directors and brought by them to Hollywood in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The codes of

courtship apparent in the earliest film musicals function throughout the history of the genre and are decipherable to audiences today. However, the presentation of romantic love and the identification of specific male and female roles within the courtship ritual have changed over the history of the film musical, reflecting shifting cultural and societal bias regarding heterosexual mating. As Virginia Wexman argues, film is an important indicator of culturally based perceptions of love, romance and mating because "it constitutes a significant cultural practice, the conventions of which are related to the way we live" (4).

The Hollywood musical is obsessed with the theme of romantic love, ideally culminating in marriage. Rick Altman argues that romantic love, resulting from a confrontational male/female dichotomy resolved through the narrative, is generic to, and a necessary element of, the musical genre: "The 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" (32). As a result, the film musical genre, in particular, is worthy of analysis because of its dependence on the courtship ritual to establish its own identity. Generally, this ritual is exposed through the narrative, the "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy wins girl" scenario. Although the focus of the narrative is on the male/female love relationship, the signs of courtship become diluted by action superfluous to the courtship and difficult to read. Filmed duet dances within the musical context condense the signs of love and courtship into relatively short and manageable units for analysis, eliminate non-romantic action, and, therefore, provide an excellent

template for studying the codes of romantic love that operate throughout the entire film. It is for this reason that, in my attempt to illuminate transparent signs of romantic love and courtship exhibited in the American film musical, I have chosen to concentrate my analysis on male/female dance sequences.

The choreography of the heterosexual duet dance incorporates movements of the bodies and establishes space relationships between the bodies that conform to cultural expectations regarding male and female roles within the courtship ritual. According to Judith Lynne Hanna in Dance, Sex and Gender:

Many meanings in movement are so well established in culture that they are part of a choreographer's inheritance. The choreographer seeks signs and symbols people can relate to. . . . Meaning of gender movement appears in spheres of conveying meaning in dance: the body, especially its adornment and effort qualities; the unfolding of movement reveals who does what, when, where, why, how, and with or to whom; the movements themselves in terms of their historical origin, dancer's gaze, and spatial distance; or the sphere in which movement intertwines with narrative text. (159-161)²

In the deconstruction of Fred and Ginger dances, three fundamental phases in the progression of the courtship can be identified: invitation, engagement and commitment. The first two levels are subcategories of seduction and the last is the capitulation to the seduction. Contained within the invitation phase, and intermittently within the engagement phase, are episodes of rejection and hesitation, where one partner attempts to halt the developing romance.³ The

following table illustrates the phases of the duet dance and their relationship to each other:

Specific movement patterns, body attitudes, gestures and spatial relationships between the bodies that signal each phase of the courtship ritual are discovered through deconstruction of the duet dances and will be discussed more completely later in this paper. For now, Hanna's five-step synopsis of male-female attraction stated above can be utilized to summarize the basic elements of each phase of courtship: approach and look become elements of the invitation phase; turn and touch are instrumental to engagement; and synchronized movement signals commitment and consummation.

Contemporary views of romance and courtship, and specific male and female roles within the mating ritual, do influence the conscious, or

unconscious, choices made by choreographers in their depiction of the heterosexual love relationship through dance. Deconstructing early film dance illuminates these signs of love, and, in turn, popularly sanctioned codes of heterosexual courtship. However, because these codes are decipherable to a spectator not contemporary to the historical period in which the dance was originally choreographed, their significance is not temporally exclusive. By concentrating my analysis on the phenomena of performance, I have avoided the limitations imposed by a cause-effect interpretation of the film musical duet dance and, instead, have opened up the parameters wherein these codes, albeit influenced by the sociological and cultural sanctions of the period in which they were created, can be deciphered transtemporally. The chronological presentation of specific film performances is intended merely to acknowledge that the phenomena studied date to a specific historical period and is not meant to imply that the signs and signifying practices of heterosexual interplay and courtship apparent within the performance are translatable only within the context of the sociological and cultural environment of that period. Indeed, the chronological format serves to foreground the apparent dichotomy between performance that is historically specific and influenced by the cultural environment of the period and the signs and signifying practices of the male/female sexual and romantic relationship revealed within the performance that transcend the historical context. Analysis of Astaire and Rogers duet dances, defined by scholars as "romantic" forty to sixty years after their creation, enables us to determine prejudice regarding male/female

relationships and expected gender roles that endure over time, in spite of shifting views of sexuality and love relationships.

The dances are also analyzed out of context to the movie narrative environment in which they occur. The contextual relationship of the dance to the movie, or to the historical or political environment in which it was first performed, is irrelevant within the confines of this paper. Although film musical dances became, over time, totally integrated into the narrative framework of the movie, spectator perception of the dance, not the function of the dance in relationship to the overall narrative context, defines it as romantic.

CHAPTER 1

Earliest Film Musicals: The Spectacle

With the advent of sound in the late 1920's, Hollywood focused on the musical as the logical vehicle in which to exhibit the new technology and turned to New York and live theatre for talent and material. Before Fred and Ginger, the film industry was not interested in defining the heterosexual love relationship through dance. It focused, rather, on the tradition of spectacle, inherited from theatre, that chose to emphasize, instead, the overt sensuality and sexuality of the displayed human body:

The film musical undoubtedly arose out of the two allied forms of theatrical entertainment which were most popular at the time of the sound film's advent: the romantic operetta and the musical comedy. These were precisely the areas in which, up to then, the stage had a clear advantage over the screen: whatever substitutes might be found for stage dialogue, none could really be found for stage music, for what good was it to see dancing without hearing the right music rightly synchronized; what was the use of a singer opening and closing his mouth if the voice did not come out of it? (Taylor and Jackson 12-13)

In 1927, when Warner Brothers was seeking a showcase in which to premiere sound, it chose a production that had already proven its success on the stage: *The Jazz Singer*. The significant advancement of sound technology was foregrounded by inserting within the silent medium synchronized song.

The success of *The Jazz Singer* led to a monumental importation of established stage musicals and artists from New York to Hollywood.⁴

"The majority of...early movie musicals were more or less direct transcription of Broadway properties and/or Broadway stage techniques" (Rubin 31). Simultaneously, when Broadway dance directors moved to Hollywood they transferred, intact, the signs and signifying practices of male/female courtship that had been developed for the stage. These signs of courtship were eclipsed by a histrionic code of spectacular performance that was "in a sense, reflexive, referring always to the theatrical event rather than to the outside world" (Pearson 21). The event, or phenomena of musical theater performance, grew from an exhibitionist tradition that had no interest in defining the couple or the courtship ritual through the dance. Rather, the central theme of heterosexual love became the loose thread, woven through the narrative, that filled time between non-integrated, elaborately staged production numbers:⁵

The musical genre constitutes something of a special case within the institution of classical narrative cinema, because musicals are based on a central contradiction between the discourse of the narrative and the discourse of at least a significant portion of the musical numbers. The narrative and the musical numbers appear to be based on different laws or ground rules. This contradiction is never...resolved in the musical, so that the narrative's status as the dominant discourse remains excessively problematic. (Rubin 36-37)

Although the narrative is centered around the monogamous, romantic relationship between a male and a female, consistent with the predominant structure of the American musical, the display and

recognition of sexual desire, stimulated by the viewing of the human (female) form, is isolated from the narrative portion of the film and concentrated within the elaborate production numbers. Emphasis is placed on the sensuality of masses of bodies, primarily female, dancing in unison. While the identities of the narrative couple are sharply defined, the individual identities of the dancers are sublimated through the creation of overwhelming structures of architecture and geometric design, using the bodies of the performers as the building blocks. "One method of objectifying the female body was to treat it as a form of inanimate decor or building material" (Rubin caption to photo #12).

By objectifying and depersonalizing the female, the earliest film musicals simultaneously idealize and fetishize the female body, figuratively and literally placing it upon a pedestal. These earliest musical extravaganzas concentrate on exposing and fetishizing the female body for the purpose of eliciting a sexual response from the spectator. Although there are obviously female spectators within the audience, the camera, by isolating only male viewers on the screen, suggests that sexual response to the human body is specific to men. By assigning the display of sexuality and sexual desire to the extradiagetic production numbers, the musical also implies that overt sexual desire is somehow illicit and not to be identified with the "pure" male-female relationship of the narrative.

The trailers for *The Broadway Melody* (1929) label it as the first "all-talking, all-singing, all-dancing" film musical. It is also the first original movie musical, with original script and score, "a seminal film for

it not only displayed the primary musical elements of its day but also it introduced ideas which other film makers and other films would use more fully" (Delamater 24). Even so, the film borrowed heavily from the popular Broadway revue format and is an excellent early example of the fetishization of the human (female) body.

At several points throughout the film, the camera pans from scantily-clothed women to a group of men spectators. Early on, there is a scene that focuses on a row of chorines rehearsing a tap sequence. Intermittently, the camera shifts to Mr. Zanfield (the manipulative and exploitive producer) and his henchmen, watching the female dancers. The function of the female, as Zanfield sees it, is to perform for the male, exposing her body to him for his gratification, "crystallizing her position as a static icon of male desire, differentiating feminine exhibitionism and passivity from masculine voyeurism and agency" (Cohan 46). The males signal their approval or disapproval by either continuing or averting their gaze.

The most blatant example of female iconization occurs a short time later in the "Love Boat" number. As the curtain rises, the male singer (Marc Antony) is surrounded by females in reclining poses at his feet, with three women positioned on a towering boat in ascending levels above the stage. Anita Page, "Queenie," is standing on the highest level. The identically-costumed females wear very short, sarong-like skirts with a train of fabric down the side and halter tops, exposing all of the leg and midriff. Each woman also wears a long, blond wig, furthering the depersonalization of the individual woman and the fetishization of the

female icon. As the song begins, Marc Antony sings to Cleopatra, who sits a distance away from him on a throne and appears in the frame only briefly and within a long shot. The establishment and definition of the love relationship between the male and female is unimportant and merely incidental in the production number. Instead, the camera closes in on Queenie, high on her pedestal. As she stands in tableau, her arm extended overhead, the camera lingers and exposes her entire body to the spectator. After a few moments, the camera picks out three males in the audience, gazing up at Queenie. Jacques Warner shifts in his seat, signaling gratification and sexual arousal, eyes never leaving the woman's body. Next is a close-up of Queenie followed immediately by another close-up of Warner as he continues to stare at the object of his desire and smiles. The number ends, and Cleopatra finally rises and moves toward Marc Antony as the camera pulls back for a long shot of the entire stage, once again drawing the focus away from intimacy and the couple, away from the specific romantic relationship.

Significantly, the film itself comments on its own preoccupation with the idealization of the female body in the dialogue between Hank, Queenie's less voluptuous and therefore less desirable older sister, and Eddie, the male torn between his commitment to Hank and his sexual desire for Queenie:

Eddie: ...What's the matter, Hank? Aren't you happy?
Wasn't Queenie great? Aren't you proud of her?

Hank: Of course, Eddie. I'm glad to see her make good. Oh,
but gee. We ain't never had to get by on our legs before.

Eddie: But that don't mean nothing, Hank. Those guys aren't going to pay \$10.00 to look at your face. This is Broadway.

Hank: Yeah. *Broads*-way.

This dialogue consciously foregrounds New York's fetishization of the female form on stage for the gratification of the male spectator and the appropriation of that tradition by Hollywood for its early film musicals. But, more importantly, the comment places into perspective the elaborate display of sexuality within the production numbers. As Hank indicates, the exhibition of the human form to elicit sexual response is contrived to entice paying customers into the theater. The early film musicals are not suggesting that this overt sexuality is desirable as the foundation of the male-female relationship. Indeed, by isolating the production numbers from the narrative couple, by placing the environment for sexual exhibition within the somewhat seedy theater atmosphere, and by stereotyping the male spectator as manipulative and exploitive, these early film musicals indicate, by contrast, that the narrative monogamous love relationship, devoid of overt eroticism, is the ideal and preferred presentation of heterosexual courtship.

Busby Berkeley

The dance director most identified with exploiting and enhancing the Broadway spectacle genre for the film is Busby Berkeley:

When [people] think of the production number--that is, the number that depends on sheer spectacle, on the deployment of hordes of chorus dancers in a grandiose setting--one name

probably springs to minds before all others:
Busby Berkeley. (Rubin 1)

Busby Berkeley's contribution to the film musical, however, is far more complex than the mere elaboration and sophistication of early cinematic techniques and histrionic performance codes. His dissolution of the proscenium allowed Berkeley to involve the spectator, both male and female, more intimately with the spectacle by thrusting the intersexual audience into the performance through inventive use of camera angles and staging techniques. By "allowing" both male and female spectator to enjoy the sexual intensity of the production numbers, Berkeley also questions the veracity of the narrative couple relationship, where sexual desire is minimized.

When Busby Berkeley came to Hollywood in 1930, he had twenty-one Broadway musicals to his credit. Most of his experience had been within the Ziegfeld revue tradition of stage musical, although Berkeley had never worked for Ziegfeld himself. The elaborate costumes, staging and multitudes of beautiful girls that became the trademarks of the Ziegfeld Follies had a tremendous influence upon all of the dance directors who eventually migrated to California and in particular Busby Berkeley (Delamater 29). This fascination with extravaganza and spectacle is evident in most of the early musicals, but is further refined and enlarged by Berkeley for the wide screen. With the emphasis upon massive production numbers in which the individual is subjugated to the aggregate, there is no room, or desire, to define the couple or their romantic relationship through dance.

Busby Berkeley was disinterested in not only choreographing the male-female courtship ritual and romantic relationship but also in identifying a specific male or female's erotic potential. Berkeley obliterates individual eroticism through non-specific representation of cumulative sexuality:

In the end, it is difficult to determine if Berkeley's abstract-geometric visual conceptions are more intriguing because of the way they decorate women as male fantasies or the way they so overdecorate the human form that the human disappears altogether into patterns of pure form. (Mast 134)

Berkeley's greatest success and artistic achievements occurred while he was under contract to Warner Brothers from 1933 to 1937 (Mast 116, Rubin 97). A brief analysis of two of his landmark projects from that period, *Forty-Second Street* (1933) and *Gold Diggers of 1935* (1935), will illuminate not only his dismissal of the couple and the courtship ritual as insignificant to the portrayal of heterosexual erotic desire through dance but also his increasing dependence upon massive production numbers, orgiastic staging and the display of multitudinal male and female bodies to define intersexual tension.

Although the narrative of *Forty-Second Street* identifies the love relationship between Dick Powell's and Ruby Keeler's characters, that courtship is never performed through dance. In the first full-fledged musical number, "Shuffle Off To Buffalo," Keeler is partnered with an anonymous male chorine. The number includes very little dance, limited to brief periods of side-by-side synchronous movement, with little eye

contact and no torsal contact. Even though Keeler and her partner are portraying newlyweds on their honeymoon, the identification of their love relationship is achieved through the narrative of the song, not through danced movement. In this number Berkeley very much stayed within the restrictions of stage choreography, not yet utilizing the innovative and intricate camera angles of his later work that would allow the spectator visual perspectives of performance unattainable in theatrical space. As his cinematic experimentation achieved ever higher levels of sophistication, Berkeley was able to place the spectator within the performance, in the midst of the sea of disembodied dancing legs, furthering audience identification and recognition of the explosive sexuality of numerous performing bodies.

"I'm Young and Healthy" from *Forty Second Street* displays some of Berkeley's early use of overhead camera angles and non-static visual perspective, as well as elaborate staging, to elevate the individual female and fetishize the universal female. "He moves beyond a simple appreciation of female beauty and into the realm of voyeurism and sexual symbolism" (Delamater 37). The transformation of the sole female at the beginning of the number into a multitude, and of human bodies in the mirrored floor and moving platform sequences into geometric shapes, diverts spectator focus from the specific to the generic, from the mundane to the infinite. But then, as Berkeley pans through the line of women's legs to the couple at the end, he reestablishes the identity of the individual couple through their relationship to the whole. This pattern of enlarging from the individual to the cumulative and then refocusing on

the individual again is common in Berkeley's work, defining the parts in terms of the whole, the couple in relationship to the many.

The couple that asserts itself over the aggregate is often portrayed in a destructive scenario. In the number "Forty-Second Street," Berkeley shifts focus for an instant from the frenetic action of the multitude to a morbid vignette between a man and a woman. As the camera peers through the window, we see the couple struggling as the man tries to rape the woman. She makes her escape by jumping through the window to the sidewalk, into the arms of another man. They dance briefly together until the jealous lover approaches and stabs the woman. From his window above the street, Dick Powell's character detachedly observes the murder as his butler mixes him another drink. Almost immediately, the camera shifts to a massive chorus tap number, focusing on innumerable, identically dressed bodies, dancing in unison. The depersonalization and objectification of the male/female bodies is completed as the dancers hold up cardboard cutouts to form the Manhattan skyline. Ruby Keeler and Dick Powell then appear at the top of a skyscraper formed by the chorus and signify their love relationship through a kiss. The autonomous couple isolated from the whole self-destructs. The male/female couple can consummate their courtship only to the extent that the courtship ritual is defined by the whole.

Berkeley's depiction of the male/female courtship ritual through massive, orgiastic dance numbers reaches its apex in "Lullaby of Broadway" from *Gold Diggers of 1935* (1935). " 'Lullaby of Broadway,' the climax not only of *Gold Diggers of 1935* but of Berkeley's entire Warner

Brothers period, has been widely and justly celebrated as one of the greatest achievements of the American musical film" (Rubin 128). The number attains historical significance in its relationship to the shifting trends apparent in the film musicals of the late 1930s, away from the overtly spectacular of the early 1930s to the personality-driven, plot-oriented musicals that followed, best exemplified for the purposes of this paper by the Astaire/Rogers films of RKO. The vehemence with which Berkeley reacts to these shifts, from the focus on the masses to focus on the couple, is apparent in the powerfully elaborate, surrealistic staging of "Lullaby of Broadway."

"Lullaby of Broadway"

As the number opens, the spectator sees the disembodied face of Wini Shaw's character from afar, floating, it seems, upon a sea of black. As she sings the opening words of the song, the camera pans slowly in until, by the end of the second verse, Shaw's face fills the screen. Now the face turns and transmutes into the city skyline. This is followed by a montage of scenes indicating a city waking up. The solitary figure walking upon a deserted street is soon replaced by crowds, getting ready for the day, traveling to work and punching in. Against this backdrop, the couple is introduced as Wini Shaw arrives home, escorted by Dick Powell, after a long night of partying. The spectator senses the sinister and decadent nature of their relationship because of their idiosyncratic lifestyle, placed in juxtaposition to that of the masses, foreshadowing the tragedy that is to occur later.

The dance sequence of "Lullaby of Broadway" actually begins when Powell and Shaw arrive at a nightclub the following evening. In close-up, the distorted and elongated shadow image of a dancing couple, Ramon and Rosita, appears briefly on the wall and is soon replaced by the actual performers, dwarfed by their own shadows, as the camera is pulled way back for a long shot. The illusion of the couple dominates the reality of the couple, signified by the choice of camera angles. Far above Ramon and Rosita sits Powell and Shaw (identified as the romantic couple by the narrative), solitary spectators, removed physically and psychologically from the courtship dance that is being performed below them. By the time *Gold Diggers of 1935* was released, Astaire and Rogers had been teamed at RKO for two pictures, *Flying Down to Rio* (1933) and *The Gay Divorcee* (1934). The courtship dance of Ramon and Rita used many of the same signifiers of romantic love that is apparent in the Astaire/Rogers duets. The use of side-by-side synchronous movement, upper and lower torsal contact, backbends, and consistent eye contact and lifts are comparable to the choreography of Fred and Ginger and recognizable to the spectator as signifying a romantic relationship. Even the costuming is similar: Rosita in a long, flowing ball gown and Ramon in formal attire.⁶ Yet Berkeley chooses to de-emphasize the significance of their dance by overwhelming the couple with empty space, minimalizing their presence. The duet dance is abruptly ended as Ramon and Rosita separate in order to lead the innumerable male and female chorus dancers onto the dance floor. The projection of dancing shadows behind the male dancers enhances the illusion of infinite bodies

engaged in an increasingly frenetic, orgiastic dance, ending the desolate isolation of the couple (Ramon and Rosita) as they become lost in the crowd. The lyric duet dance that establishes the romantic relationship between a single male and a single female is replaced by a thunderous duel between the sexes, represented by dozens of tapping feet. At the climax, Dick Powell sits forward in his chair, signifying his emotional involvement in the number, and is at last drawn into the dance, compelled to relate to the masses, through song. The chorus answers in unison and invites Wini Shaw to join them. After a brief hesitation, in which she sings "Come on and get me," Shaw leaves Powell and engages in a brief duet dance with an anonymous male as her lover watches. Powell at last joins Shaw, after having to fight his way through the crowd. He pulls her away from her dance partner and kisses her as he supports her in a deep backbend, signifying commitment and consummation in the courtship ritual. Wini breaks away from Dick and, laughing, runs up the stairs away from the crowd and escapes through the terrace doors. The mass of chorus dancers press up against the door, physically overwhelming Powell as he and Wini kiss through the glass. The crowd explodes through the doors, engulfing and destroying the couple by knocking Shaw over the balcony to her death on the street below.

In reverse order of the opening of the number, the street scenes become the skyline, the skyline the disembodied face surrounded by black nothingness. The cycle is complete; from the individual to the many to the individual, defining the male/female relationship through

the spectacularization of the human body. The sensuality of the human form exists independently of the romantic couple, and the intersexual relationship is defined through that sensuality, not through some elaborate, narrative courtship ritual.

Adopting the Ziegfeld tradition from New York, the majority of film musicals of the early 1930's presented the female body as an object of desire for the male spectator:

The woman is the dance and the image which constitutes it, while man is the prying eye of the titillated audience--a configuration which Berkeley shares with the rest of the show musical and with the culture in general.
(Altman 230)

What Altman fails to acknowledge is that Berkeley's inventiveness allows for a complex presentation of the heterosexual relationship wherein the male/female dichotomy is defined through spectacularization of the (female) body and is accessible and desirable to both male and female viewer. Sensuality and sexuality are fundamental to the establishment of intersexual relationships, not ritual and courtship, and the human body is the vehicle through which sexual desire is best expressed. And, according to Berkeley, the greater number of bodies displayed, the greater the sensual impact upon the spectator. His break with the Broadway stage tradition lies in his dissolution of restrictive stage dimensions, escalating the spectacularization and iconization of the human body through inventive cinematic techniques while simultaneously placing the spectator within the spectacle. In *Broadway Melody of 1929*, the audience is isolated from the performance

through the use of proscenium staging. Although the referent spectator is male, signified by constant shifting of the camera from the female performer to the male observer, both male and female spectators are drawn into the frenetic, orgiastic spectacle of intersexual interaction. As Jack Cole stated in an interview with Jerome Delamater, "It was all about looking at gorgeous women erotically with the camera as a penis substitute" (Delamater 196). The object of the gaze is predominantly the female form, but both male and female spectators become immersed in the performance through Berkeley's use of camera angles and special effects. The act of spectating becomes an act of intercourse (a sexual act) with male and female playing identical roles. Gender roles are confused, masked as both male and female voyeurs participate in the spectacle.

"The Lullaby of Broadway" indicates that, not only was Berkeley disinterested in portraying the courtship ritual through dance, but, through his intricate use of staging and camera angles, he also effectively subjugated the couple to the greater reality of the aggregate, validating individual courtship only through its dependence upon sexual desire elicited through display of the human form. The stable, ideal monogamous, heterosexual courtship defined within the narrative is nullified through extradiagetic dance numbers. Sensuality and sexual desire are not confined by the relationship between a single male and single female. As Berkeley sees it, the narrative romantic couple is an illusion, a fantasy. This is in direct contrast to the Astaire/Rogers codes of performance that reinforced, through the duet dance, that fantasy.

Chapter 2

Astaire and Rogers

The focus of Fred and Ginger's duet dances remains consistently upon the couple. Astaire and Rogers may occasionally share the stage with dozens of chorus members, but they never capitulate to the sensuality of masses of dancers, as the couple is forced to do in the Berkeley numbers. The heterosexual love relationship, introduced within the narrative of the musical, is reinforced, and progressed, through extradiagetic male/female dance duets. Berkeley fills the screen with masses of anonymous male and female dancing bodies dueling in a ritualistic, orgiastic performance of intersexual tension and communication. The spectator, male and female, is plunged into the midst of the orgy through the instrument of the camera as a vicarious participant. Astaire and Rogers, by contrast, take center stage, identifiable as specific, named male and female participants in a courtship ritual that is introduced within the narrative but defined and intensified through their dance. The camera establishes a distance between audience and performer, the looker and the looked upon. Fred and Ginger demarcate clear gender-specific roles within the courtship ritual as the camera pulls back from the spectacle, allowing the audience, both male and female, to observe rather than participate in the ritual. The camera does not thrust them penis-like into the performance. Rather, it effectively holds the spectators at a distance that permits a detachment in viewing the ritual not possible in Berkeley's numbers. This objectivity enables the observer to identify gender-specific roles

within the danced courtship ritual, and the progression of that courtship signified by body movements and attitudes in relationship to each other and space, is easily decipherable to the spectator as romantic, heterosexual love.

Patterns of signification

Many studies of the musical have explained quite well how dance functions as a metaphor for sexual differentiation, seduction, and consummation, nowhere more brilliantly, subtly, or consistently so than in Astaire's films.
(Cohan 51)

What those many studies have so far failed to illuminate is how Astaire, and his most consistent partner Rogers, was so successful in portraying the romantic, heterosexual relationship, and what pattern of movement, established through the duet dance, is ultimately decipherable as signifying seduction or consummation.

The foregrounding of the heterosexual couple in the dance, as opposed to the masses of the Berkeley musicals, provided a foundation upon which the monogamous courtship ritual could be built. As Steven Cohan claims, the conventional demarcation of sexual difference, the "binary opposition of female performer and male spectator" is disrupted by the inclusion of the male (Astaire) in the spectacle (46-47). This inclusion allows the spectator to view both the male and female performer as erotic. However, merely isolating a specific male and female from the crowd for the viewing gratification of the audience does not implicitly connote the establishment of a romantic, heterosexual relationship. It is the *interaction* of the intersexual couple through the

dance that allows the viewer to interpret the courtship ritual. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers were the first film musical couple to consistently display this male/female interaction through the duet dance. Film scholars Arlene Croce, Gerald Mast and Rick Altman, among others, have consistently defined the partnership of Astaire and Rogers as the apex of heterosexual romantic dance. Through them "dancing was transformed into a vehicle of serious emotion between a man and a woman" (Croce 8). It is because I agree with these scholars that I became interested in taking their research a step further by delineating through deconstruction of Astaire/Rogers performances patterns of signification in movement, body attitudes and spatial relationships that connote heterosexual love, romance and the courtship ritual.

Intrinsic to the Astaire and Rogers duet dances of the 1930s is the progression of the relationship between the dancers from strangers to lovers through a recognizable sequence of steps:

Again and again the movements play out a small drama of difficult courtship: Astaire beckons and enchants..., Rogers...drifts into concerted movement with him, a close rapport is established and grows in romantic abandon to a point where everything stops, a pause, a decisive moment after which Rogers breaks away, or tries to, and has to be summoned back. (Russell & Taylor 43)

In the development of a system of analysis, it is imperative to establish a concise and unambiguous vocabulary. As I stated in the introduction, and for reasons that will become clear through analysis of

the specific dances, I have chosen to define the progressive steps in the courtship dance as invitation, engagement and commitment. Episodes of rejection and hesitation are apparent in the invitation and engagement stages. The dance ends with the commitment of each partner to the romantic relationship, signaled by the physical overwhelming of one partner by the other in a gesture of domination and a corresponding capitulation.

"Night and Day"

The Astaire and Rogers duet dance that most completely incorporates the progression of signification outlined above is the courtship/seduction dance "Night and Day" from *The Gay Divorcee* (1934) because, as Mast observes, "the miming of Fred's invitation, Ginger's rejection and the total seduction is more explicit in 'Night and Day' than it would be in later duets" (146).⁷ Bob Thomas, in his biography of Astaire, goes so far as to describe the number as "the first great romantic duet" (98).

Invitation-Hesitation-Rejection

The invitation phase of "Night and Day" begins before the performers start the actual dance. Their movements, however, are dancelike and foreshadow the movements of the duet. Ginger turns to leave Astaire (rejection). He stops her with a song (invitation). A close up of Rogers' face shows a brief moment of eye contact, and she begins to breathe more heavily. Because of Rogers' proximity to her male partner, who is declaring his attraction to her, the spectator recognizes her heavy breathing as the beginnings of sexual attraction and the eye contact as a

means of conveying, nonverbally, that sexual arousal to the male initiator. Her hesitancy to commit to the relationship becomes apparent when she breaks eye contact, turns her back to Astaire and moves away, up some stairs to the patio (rejection). By distancing herself from her suitor, Rogers effectively breaks intersexual communication with Astaire, leaving him temporarily impotent, unable to advance his sexual agenda. Simultaneously, Fred is placed in an inferior position by the spatial relationship between the two bodies, his seductive power over Ginger nullified as she attains a superior position on the stairs. To counteract her rejection, Astaire pursues Rogers in order to reiterate his invitation by keeping his body in close physical proximity and by reestablishing eye contact. Significantly, his hand is in his pocket when he reaches her, but as his desire becomes overwhelming, Astaire uncovers his hand and, palm turned upward, reaches out to the object of his desire in a gesture easily recognizable to the spectator as supplicating because of its similarity to the pleading gesture used by persons on the streets in need of support from others. At the same time Astaire is begging for Rogers' attention, he leans toward her with his upper torso only. Because Ginger has not yet indicated her acceptance of his romantic overtures, Fred does not move toward her with his entire body. Although Astaire is now constantly looking directly into Rogers' face, attempting to establish nonverbal, intersexual communication, she only fleetingly returns the gaze. Again, however, the closeup indicates Ginger's sexual arousal by the rapid rise and fall of her breast. Her reluctance to submit to her desires makes her hesitate.

Invitation to Engagement

The actual dance begins as Rogers rises to leave, once again rejecting her suitor. Astaire, encouraged by his partner's hesitation and fleeting episodes of apparent sexual interest, pursues Ginger and blocks her avenues of exit with his body, his eyes never leaving her face. She rarely looks at him. When she does, the softening of her features indicates her rejection sliding into hesitation. Astaire finally grabs her arm and, with a slight smile that signals confidence to Ginger and the spectator, repeats his invitation to love, with a dance step this time. This first physical touch initiates the active engagement phase of the seduction/courtship ritual. Ginger echoes her first rejection and turns her back on him. Forcibly, Astaire grabs Rogers' arm and twirls her into him. This is the first time their torsos make contact, heightening the active engagement phase.

The engagement phase signifies the moments in the courtship ritual when the couple responds to the sexual desires that have been awakened through the invitation stage and intensified through the rejection-hesitation episodes. The signs of this response can be summarized as sustained eye contact, close physical proximity, upper and lower torsal contact, side-by-side synchronous movement, and opening up the body to the partner, thereby exhibiting vulnerability and sexual availability.

Engagement to Commitment

As Fred and Ginger continue their dance, we see the first exhibit of opening the body to the partner as Astaire twirls Ginger away from him

and the movement culminates in her graceful backbend away from him. Although Astaire has been the initiator of the phase of courtship up to this point, by opening up her breasts and simultaneously thrusting forward her lower torso, Rogers announces her sexual readiness and she becomes, for a moment at least, the seductress. In addition, she is off-balance and must depend on Fred to support her. This sign of trust in the dance relationship connotes an important step toward commitment. Fred responds to her invitation by pulling her out of the backbend, and they begin side-by-side synchronous movement. Ginger indicates a further hesitancy to commit as she crosses her arms in front of her waist, physically barricading herself from her partner. At the same time she keeps her head and eyes lowered, effectively avoiding eye contact. Rogers remains closed to Astaire through the next few dance combinations. The impasse is broken when Fred echoes the invitation step he made at the beginning of the dance. Ginger responds with a step of her own, seeming to accept the invitation, but then abruptly turns to go, again rejecting Astaire. When Fred grabs her hand this time, Rogers pushes him away and sends him twirling across the room. Again she turns to go, but stops and waits for Astaire to retrieve her.

During the engagement phase, Ginger indicates her interest in the courtship, but on her own terms. After displaying her sexual availability and burgeoning trust in the backbend, she immediately closes in, arms across her waist, not yet ready to commit. This is the point at which Ginger begins to control the timing and progression of the courtship. When Fred reiterates his danced invitation, she answers in kind, and

establishes her significant contribution to the courtship with her own dance sequence, and then asserts her independence by turning to leave. Although Fred tries to physically overpower her by grabbing her hand, Ginger easily pushes him away and again turns to leave.

The commitment phase of the courtship is now initiated by Rogers. Astaire at this time is powerless to stop her from leaving. Ginger consciously decides to continue the courtship ritual by waiting for Fred to come to her. Her voluntary submission is celebrated by the first lift of the dance, signifying in yet another dance movement Rogers' trust of Astaire as well as his willingness to support her. The choreography reflects joy through the leaps and lifts by bringing an aerial quality to the dance. When their bodies join in sustained torsal contact, Astaire completely encircles her waist with his arm and, "for the first time they dance close, cheek to cheek, her arm encircling his upper back and neck" (Mueller 60). As the dance reaches its climax, total commitment and consummation, Fred supports Ginger in another backbend, this time with his body pressed into hers and lays her gently down upon a convenient bench. "He backs away, brushes off his hands--in satisfaction, one presumes, with a job well done--and calmly offers a cigarette to his dazzled partner" (Mueller 61).

The signs of each phase of the courtship dance, because of their transparency, are very difficult to read. Indeed, some signs are too ambiguous to read. However, when the spectator focuses on certain categories of body movement and spatial perspective, the signs become more apparent. The signs of courtship in the Fred and Ginger dances,

viewed by many scholars as definitively romantic, are visible within the following kinetic categories: posture (primarily upper body), look (eye contact), spatial proximity and relationship of bodies (including touch), hand and limb gestures, balance (relative position to the ground) and synchronized movement. Each phase of the courtship ritual dance, invitation, engagement and commitment, can be defined by deconstructing the dance, focusing on these kinetic categories to isolate movement sequences and determine their relative "romantic value" within the context of the dance.

Physical Connoters of the Phases of Courtship

In the invitation phase of the courtship dance, Astaire leans into Rogers with his upper torso, yet remains distant enough to be non-threatening. Later he extends a hand in her direction. Eye contact remains stable until she understands the sexual content of his invitation. Her own sexual desires and discomfort (signified by the rapid rising and falling of her chest) cause her to hesitate and her gaze begins to shift erratically. Finally, she breaks eye contact and initiates the rejection. She turns her back on Astaire and walks away, increasing the distance between their bodies. Later Astaire echoes his original invitation by reaching out to Rogers, with a dance step this time, hoping that she will join him. Again, she moves away. This pattern repeats itself throughout the dance; invitation (leaning in of body, reaching out with hand or movement), hesitation (erratic eye-contact and evident physical discomfort), and rejection (breaking eye-contact and distancing from partner).

The engagement phase begins as the sexual tension created within the invitation phase increases and the performers allow their mutual attraction to manifest itself through movement. The signs of this response include consistent eye contact; physical connection and torsal contact; opening up the body to the partner, thereby exhibiting vulnerability and sexual availability (back sway); and synchronized movement (two performing as one).

As in the engagement phase, commitment is signaled by almost constant torsal contact. The contact is occasionally broken, however, by leaps and lifts that signify joy and trust. The performers are no longer earth-bound. Their love frees them from mundane constraints. The lift is a sign of total commitment because it is a sign of total trust. At the end of the dance, the commitment is symbolically consummated as Ginger once again opens herself to Fred in the backbend and he in turn bends over her, sustaining torsal contact in a mime of the sex act.

As can be seen from the deconstruction of this dance, the phases of courtship overlap and are cyclical. They do not conform to a strictly sequential format. The pattern that can be established in this dance begins with an invitation, progresses through engagement and ends with a commitment to the relationship, having overcome intermittent stages of hesitation and rejection.

Challenge and Affirmation Duet Dances

In addition to the pattern of signification within the dance, there is a pattern exhibited *between* Fred and Ginger duet dances, establishing the love relationship within a dance that occurs early in the film and

then reaffirming that relationship in succeeding dances. Because the Astaire and Rogers' duet dance is integrated into the thematic and narrative structure of the entire movie (as opposed to the extradiagetic Berkeley dances previously discussed), the duration and emphasis of any particular phase of the ritual will reflect the progression of the romance to that point in the movie. As Rick Altman defines it, "[the] progression of the Astaire/Rogers films . . . depends on the simultaneous growth of their quarreling and of their love, with that ambiguous growth expressed through the dance" (164). Altman elaborates further on this progression of the romantic relationship by categorizing the dances, both solo and duet, according to their function within the Fred and Ginger film. His table in *The American Film Musical* (1987) outlines these dances and the sequence in which they appear in the films (165). I am most interested in the duet dances that he labels "challenge dance," "romantic dance" and "new dance." I have also added a separate category of dance, the "affirmation dance" which is an extension, or continuation, of the "romantic dance," and includes all of Altman's "new" dances as well as many he has placed within the "romantic dance" category. Using "Night and Day" as a template, I will deconstruct examples of each of these types of dances to discover the patterns of signification that establish the difference between these dances in function and spectator interpretation.

The Gay Divorcee does not follow the pattern of danced romance typical in most of Fred and Ginger's films. "Night and Day" is the first of only two duet dances and occurs early in the film, when the male and female are still estranged. The love relationship has not been introduced

through a challenge dance. Therefore, by necessity, "Night and Day" exhibits much more movement associated with the invitation, engagement and commitment stages than typical Astaire/Rogers romantic dances. That is why it is so complete and worthy of analysis. The entire seduction sequence must be performed in order to overcome the obstacles to courtship and achieve commitment. Once the love relationship has been defined narratively, the couple dance reflects the established romance and epitomizes engagement and commitment, with little or no display of invitation, hesitation or rejection.

"The Continental"

Having performed the complete courtship ritual through the dance "Night and Day," the next Astaire/Rogers dance in *The Gay Divorcee*, "The Continental," a "new dance," serves as an affirmation of that love relationship. By eliminating the invitation-hesitation-rejection cycle, the dance is freed to concentrate on the engagement and commitment phases.

As "The Continental" begins, Rogers sings the lyrics, filled with romantic language, to Astaire. Soon the lovers join the other couples on the dance floor. Engagement begins immediately with close body contact. Shortly, the other dancers leave the dance floor, and Fred and Ginger become isolated and focal. The dance pattern escalates into side-by-side and mirrored (face-to-face) synchronous movement. The dancers move into each other, their lips almost touching, while their arms are thrust out at diagonals, opening their upper torsos to each other in a stance of sexual availability. Twice in the dance, Astaire kisses Rogers'

hand. Fred supports Ginger in several leaps and, again, she signals her commitment with the back bend. At the end of the dance, Astaire forcibly twirls Rogers into his body and holds her close, bodies in full torsal contact, gaze firmly fixed upon each other. Sustained eye contact, physical proximity and touching, synchronous movement as well as supported lifts and backbends signify the established love relationship.

"The Continental" serves as "a celebration of the couple's union and an invitation to the audience to join them in that union" (Altman 164). The function of a particular duet dance in an Astaire/Rogers cycle of heterosexual courtship dances is defined by the temporal placement of the dance within the narrative framework of the entire movie. The spectator is able to decipher that function through the inclusion and/or exclusion of specific phases of the seduction ritual (invitation, engagement, commitment).

The challenge dance becomes interesting for analysis because it appears in the film before the romantic dance that confirms the love relationship. Just as the function of the affirmation dance to sustain the love relationship established in the romantic dance becomes apparent by analyzing the selective inclusion/exclusion of specific phases of the danced courtship ritual, a similar deconstruction of a challenge dance, in reference to these phases of courtship defines the challenge dance in relationship to the entire courtship cycle, as well as its readability to the spectator.

"Isn't It A Lovely Day To Be Caught In the Rain"

The progression of courtship dances ("challenge" - "romantic" - "affirmation") is clear and easily read in the Astaire/Rogers film *Top Hat* (1935). "Isn't it a Lovely Day to Be Caught in the Rain" introduces the love relationship born out of challenge and conflict, "Cheek to Cheek" consummates that love and "The Piccolino," the dance of affirmation, completes the cycle.

As in "Night and Day," the invitation and rejection phases of "Isn't It a Lovely Day" begin before the actual dance. Fred enters and finds Ginger alone on a bandstand, seeking shelter from a storm. The verbal, sarcastic bantering that follows between Astaire and Rogers serves as a precursor to the physical give and take in the dance. A clap of thunder suddenly drives a frightened Ginger into Fred's arms, but only momentarily. She backs away, then turns and walks away from Astaire (rejection). Hands in his pockets, Fred follows in pursuit; he moves into her, she moves away, maintaining the distance. Ultimately, they are both sitting on a bench, Ginger's back to Astaire, when he starts to sing to her. Fred leans slightly into Rogers, looking at her almost constantly. During the entire song, Rogers avoids eye contact, but her hesitation becomes obvious as she occasionally glances back at Astaire, a slight smile betraying her interest.

Fred begins the actual dance as he rises and twirls away from Ginger. Whistling, left hand in pocket, he moves back into her and as he crosses in front of Rogers, Astaire bends his body slightly into her, sweeps his right hand out, invites her to join him in the dance, then

looks back at her for a reaction. Ginger answers by whistling in response. She has accepted the invitation, although she hasn't moved. Astaire, encouraged by her response, moves back into her and this time executes a slight shuffle step directly in front of her, repeating his invitation. As Fred turns to go, Rogers rises and follows Astaire, duplicating his steps exactly, the sarcastic mimicry displayed most prevalently when she almost simultaneously puts her right hand in her pocket, replicating his body posture and attitude exactly. As they turn synchronously, Fred sees Ginger following and his surprise registers in a slight break in the pattern of movement as his right arm remains suspended for a split second. With a slight smile, Astaire recovers, puts his right hand in his pocket. He loses his smile as he looks down and notices Ginger doing exactly the same thing. Fred's awareness that he is being mimicked rather than followed changes the nature of the courtship dance for him. The challenge begins as he tries to frustrate her attempts to duplicate his actions. After a brief side by side stroll, Fred breaks away from Ginger with a twirling step that ends with his right foot extended and his arms crossed in front, satisfied that he has stumped his partner. Ginger responds by imitating his steps, double-time, then turns away. After a moment, Fred rejoins her in a stroll. Elaborating on her previous triumph, Rogers breaks in with a rapid tap sequence on her own. Astaire reacts by looking at her feet, signaling his astonishment by bringing his hand up to his mouth.

Up to this point the dance has not followed the pattern of courtship as performed in the romantic dance "Night and Day."

Although the prelude to the dance includes moments of invitation and rejection similar to those exhibited in the sung prelude to "Night and Day," Rogers does not react as expected to Astaire's invitation once the actual dance begins. When she accepts the invitation to dance, she takes control by imitating, rather than following her partner. Fred's blatant surprise at her reaction mirrors that of the spectator. The audience is prepared to witness a pattern of signification, including the phases of courtship exhibited in "Night and Day," that connote a romantic relationship. Rogers, however, exhibits no signs of hesitation or rejection at this time within the dance and actually becomes the initiator of action rather than the passive recipient as she outdoes, and challenges, Astaire in the movement sequences. The relationship is at a standstill until Astaire can accept the role that Rogers has defined. His acceptance of the terms of the danced relationship (signaled by the slight smile that appears on his face) is reflected in the fact that the dance continues, the romantic relationship between the male and female is progressed, and the sexual attraction becomes obvious. Within the next dance sequences, recognizable signs of the engagement phase become apparent and ultimately define the courtship function of this dance.

The dance resumes with a side-by-side synchronous tap series as Ginger's eyes remain almost constantly on Fred's face. Earlier in the dance Rogers, in an attempt to imitate Astaire's movement, focused on his feet, but now her interest is in the man, not his choreography. A side-by-side turn brings them face to face. The momentum of the dance brings them very close to touching, but each partner stops and hesitates,

Ginger's left hand held up in a restraining gesture between them. Maintaining almost constant eye contact, they commence a face-to-face mirrored movement sequence. Although there is as yet no physical contact, the constant eye contact and pick-up in the tempo indicates heightened sexual attraction. This portion of the dance ends as they face each other, still hesitating to touch. Fred folds his arms and Ginger imitates.

Up to this point in the dance, the challenge has been apparent in the dueling nature of the choreography. One partner initiates movement, the other imitates and broadens the movement. The romantic nature of the dance becomes apparent as the partners establish and maintain constant eye contact. But the courtship ritual cannot progress without physical touch. This stalemate is broken as the music swells, pulling Fred and Ginger into a series of hopping steps, swinging their arms as they face each other in mirrored movement. Working together now, instead of challenging each other, the dance builds until Fred initiates the first physical contact by grabbing Ginger's hand and twirling her away from him. She reciprocates as she grabs his hand and sends him whirling away from her. Another episode of face-to-face mirrored movement is interrupted by a clap of thunder. They freeze face to face, hesitant once again, until the music breaks in, effectively fracturing the impasse.

The rising intensity of the music underscores the building sexual tension as the dancers respond with longer, sustained dragging steps that carry them around the entire bandstand in face-to-face mirrored

movement. Their enjoyment of the interplay is signaled first by their smiles as they gaze upon each other and then by a side-by-side turning leap, followed by a short synchronous tap sequence. Hesitation long forgotten, they finally dance into each other's arms and around the gazebo. However, the sustained upper and lower torsal contact apparent in the commitment phase of "Night and Day" is abbreviated in this dance as they turn out of the embrace, around each other, shoulders and backs barely touching. After yet another brief episode of mirrored dancing, Fred and Ginger come back together and support each other in identical across-the-body throws. The dance ends shortly, after a few more side-by-side synchronous movements, as Astaire and Rogers sit side by side on the edge of the gazebo, legs folded, and shake hands.

"Isn't It A Lovely Day" contains recognizable signs of the phases of courtship identified in the romantic dance "Night and Day," but the pattern of signification that would define this dance as "romantic" is broken by intrusive episodes of hesitation that prohibit the relationship from progressing beyond the engagement stage. Side-by-side synchronous movement and sustained eye contact (signifiers of the engagement phase) occur often enough to establish the courtship function of the dance and the beginnings of a romantic relationship between Fred and Ginger. But the hesitation of the partners to complete the courtship cycle, signaled by the raising of physical barriers (hands), breaking away from sustained torsal contact and increased space between the partners, as well as the exclusion of supported backbends and lifts, prevents the culmination of the danced relationship in the

commitment phase. Although "Isn't It a Lovely Day" has established a love relationship through danced performance of the invitation and engagement stages, the commitment phase must be performed within a later dance in order for the courtship ritual to be complete.

"Cheek to Cheek"

"Cheek to Cheek" completes the progression of romantic signification begun in the preceding challenge dance. "Cheek to Cheek" establishes the culmination of the intersexual relationship through movements consistent with the engagement and, most importantly, commitment phases of courtship. It is a less complete romantic dance than "Night and Day" because the invitation phase of the courtship ritual, including episodes of hesitation and rejection, is abbreviated, having already been performed in "Isn't It a Lovely Day."

As the dance begins, Astaire holds Rogers close, although their torsos are still upright. Even though eye contact is almost constant, neither partner has opened up sexually at this point. Once the sung portion of the dance is completed and Fred and Ginger move off the crowded dance floor and onto the stage, however, the engagement phase escalates and almost immediately segues into commitment. The movement becomes more ecstatic, signified by a sequence of twirls that ultimately brings them together as Fred supports Ginger in the first of her backbends. "Several times Rogers falls backward in Astaire's arms, and each time the backbend gets deeper, longer, more luxurious, more sensuous, the last suggesting utter surrender" (Mueller 84). Their synchronous, side-by-side movement phrases always culminate in close

body contact. At one point, Fred and Ginger engage in a side by side tap sequence, choreographically recalling a similar sequence performed in "Isn't It a Lovely Day." The relationship and interdependence of the two dances in completing the entire courtship ritual is unmistakable. "Cheek to Cheek" is punctuated by leaps and lifts. The close body contact, opening up of the body to each other, the lifts dependent on trust and the almost constant eye contact all sign a dance of courtship where the engagement and commitment stages are focal.

"The Piccolino"

The last dance of the romantic trilogy in *Top Hat*, is "The Piccolino," another "new dance" that serves as an affirmation of the love relationship established in the previous two duet dances. Its pattern of romantic signification is similar to that used in "The Continental."

The number opens as a chorus of dancing couples fills the dance floor. Fred and Ginger watch from above. The choreography includes many of the signs of engagement and commitment visible within the Astaire/Rogers duets, establishing the romantic value of those signs even when danced by the masses. The couples signal engagement and commitment with side-by-side and mirrored synchronous movement, repeated over the body throws and lifts, as well as supported backbends.

At the table, Rogers sings to the enraptured Astaire the story of the creation of "The Piccolino."⁸ The camera once again pans back to the dance floor where the couples form a circle as the males support their female partners in deep backbends towards the center of the circle. After

a few twirling movements using sashes, the floor clears as Fred and Ginger tap down from their table.

What follows is the affirmation of the intersexual courtship through a clear pattern of engagement and commitment. Once again, the episodes of side-by-side and mirrored synchronous movement, almost constant eye contact, full torsal contact and backbends signal an already flourishing love relationship. The dance is interrupted for a few moments by the intrusion of the narrative as the last obstacle to the consummation of the love affair are eliminated. Although the interruption is necessary for the obvious summation of the story-line, the cycle of courtship dances has already confirmed the romantic union, and the narrative resolution becomes superfluous.

The last sequence of "The Piccolino" focuses on Fred and Ginger, in full torsal contact, until they twirl together out of camera range. The courtship cycle, performed over three dances, is complete.

The emergence of the couple (Fred and Ginger), inhibited and sublimated in the Busby Berkeley vehicles, allows for the performance of the heterosexual courtship ritual. Within the courtship ritual trilogy, the "new dances," or dances of affirmation, resemble most closely the Berkeleysque style because of their use of numerous chorus members. A brief comparative analysis of two well known numbers already discussed here, "The Lullaby of Broadway" and "The Piccolino," highlights the vastly different treatments of the heterosexual romantic couple in each dance as well as the impact of Fred and Ginger upon foregrounding and spectacularizing the couple through the danced courtship ritual.

"The Lullaby of Broadway" and "The Piccolino" Compared

Superficially, "The Lullaby of Broadway" and "The Piccolino" resemble each other, especially in their initial juxtaposition of the couple in relationship to the chorus. Each number begins with the isolated couple sitting above the dance floor, observing the male and female chorines dancing below. But, while "Lullaby of Broadway" functions to negate the romantic couple by luring away the female partner and eventually destroying her, "The Piccolino" celebrates the consummation of the heterosexual love affair, at first in the massive chorus number, where the signs of engagement and commitment are readable, and later as Fred and Ginger take stage. In "Lullaby of Broadway" the sensual display of numerous bodies overwhelms the couple. When Astaire and Rogers perform the first few steps of "The Piccolino," the chorus dissolves away.

The danced revelation of the romantic relationship between Astaire and Rogers is possible because of pivotal changes that occurred within the American film musical in the early 1930s. Just as Berkeley was reaching his peak at Warner Brothers with "Lullaby of Broadway," other studios began incorporating the dance numbers into the narrative of the musical. Whereas all of Berkeley's musical numbers were extradiagetic, referring not at all to the narrative romance, the incorporation of the dance into the narrative allowed the romantic couple's storyline to progress through the dance. Most significant, however, is the inclusion of the male partner within the frame of reference. Fred shares the stage with Ginger. Berkeley isolates the female within the eye of the camera,

virtually excluding the male from view, with the exception of select massive chorus numbers. It is only by bringing the male and female together, taking the male out of the background, "spectacularizing him" as Cohan contends, that the heterosexual couple is able to perform their courtship ritual.

According to the critics cited, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers were the most romantic dance couple in film history, and that romance was best defined through their duet dances. The signs of romance and pattern of signification of the romantic code incorporated by Fred and Ginger is apparent through the deconstruction of their duet dances. The courtship ritual may progress through a series of dance duets (challenge, romantic and affirmation), or be contained within one romantic dance. "Night and Day" is the most complete romantic dance (Mast 146) because all the phases of the courtship ritual are performed within the one number. The heterosexual relationship progresses from invitation (with episodes of hesitation and rejection) through engagement, culminating in commitment. The incorporation of the challenge dance in later films allowed for the abbreviation or exclusion of the invitation-hesitation-rejection cycle within the primary romantic duet and the "new" dances of affirmation function only to confirm the established romantic relationship through signs of engagement and commitment. "Night and Day" stands alone among the Astaire and Rogers duet dances in its completeness, and, deconstructed to reveal its signs of courtship through movement patterns, provides a logical template against which other heterosexual duet dances can be evaluated for their "romantic" quotient.

CHAPTER 3

Post-Astaire and Rogers Duet Dances and Their Comparable "Romantic" Value

If Fred and Ginger are indeed the most romantic dance couple in the history of American film musical, what differentiates their danced performance, especially in "Night and Day" from that of other romantic musical couples? The distinction between the Astaire/Rogers' vehicles and the spectacular Busby Berkeley productions that previously dominated the genre, specifically in referencing the heterosexual couple, is clear and has already been discussed. But what is peculiar to Astaire and Rogers that is not evident, per critical interpretation, in later duet dances? How much of the spectator's perception of romance within the dance is a direct result of the signs of the courtship ritual and the pattern of signification and how extensively is the perception of "romantic" affected by elements external to the dance; costume, lighting, camera angle or idiosyncratic performer code?

Non-Conventional Applications of the Signs of Romance

"Sunday Jumps": A Parody of Romance

One method of determining the impact of the signs of romance on viewer perception is to eliminate extraneous sensory influences, as much as possible, and insert the signs of romantic love into an otherwise "non-romantic" context. Fortunately, Fred Astaire has provided an excellent performance event in which to analyze the relative influence of the signs and patterns of signification of the courtship ritual upon spectator

perception of a heterosexual romantic union. In the specialty number "Sunday Jumps" from *Royal Wedding* (1951), a "parody . . . of his own romantic duets" (Mueller, 324), Astaire appropriates the signs of courtship, thereby transforming a lifeless prop (the coat rack) into a dance partner and an otherwise athletic-oriented solo dance into a romantic duet.

The setting for "Sunday Jumps" is a gymnasium, a makeshift rehearsal hall for Astaire and his partner Jane Powell. At the beginning of the number, Astaire's character is alone, awaiting the arrival of his sister (Powell). The setting, the costuming (casual rehearsal clothing), and the fact that Astaire is alone, are not consistent with anticipated performance values of a romantic duet dance.

After an introductory sequence, dancing in time to a metronome, Fred, impatient for his real partner to appear, decides to employ a convenient coat rack. As an invitation, Astaire pulls the coat rack into the middle of the floor and sets it twirling, testing its potential to dance. After watching for a moment, Fred dances around his partner and initiates the engagement phase by grabbing the coat rack with both hands, and supporting it in its first "backbend." Immediately following, the spectator sees a clever mime of side-by-side synchronous movement as Astaire cradles the prop in the crook of his arm, followed by yet another backbend. Twirling around the floor, the "couple" engage in face to face mirrored movement. As Astaire goes down on one knee, he rolls the coat rack around him, over his neck and shoulders, a suggestion of upper torsal contact. Side-by-side synchronous movement resumes as

Fred manipulates the prop, angling it in such a way that each "performer" maintains identical positions in relationship to the floor. After another episode of face-to-face mirrored movement, Astaire supports the coat rack in a lift with his foot and twirls it around him, then allows the coat rack to support him as he leaps over it. An episode of hesitation and rejection intrude here as the coat rack becomes stationary, and Astaire dances around it. To mime rejection, Fred pushes the rack away from him, controlling it with his foot, then invites it back with a beckoning wave of his hand. In another gesture of invitation, Astaire dances around the rack again. Two more gestures of hesitation and rejection occur as Fred repeats pushing away the rack, first one way, then the other. With a slight look of frustration, Astaire is able to resume the courtship cycle by pulling the compliant coat rack back into the dance, supporting a cursory backbend in the process. Side-by-side synchronous movement is followed by the partners' holding "hands" as Fred grabs the top of the coat rack and spins it around him. Face to face, the couple sway side to side, temporarily hypnotizing Astaire. Fred prepares for an overhead lift by going down on one knee in a pledge of fidelity, then grabs the coat rack by both hands and attempts to lift it over his head. He cannot do it.⁹ A brief interlude follows in which Astaire leaves his partner to attempt to strengthen himself on the gym apparatus. Confident, Fred returns to the coat rack, lifts it from the bottom with one foot and turns the prop around him. Finally, he lifts it onto his shoulders (commitment) and swirls in a prolonged dance of exultation. He ends the dance with his partner resting in the crook of his

arm, "feet" off the floor. To carry the illusion further, Astaire and the coat rack take their bows.

The movement patterns apparent in "Sunday Jumps," side-by-side and mirrored movement, backbends, lifts, all signal phases of the heterosexual courtship ritual. In order to define the coat rack as a romantic partner, Astaire needed to incorporate recognizable signs of heterosexual romantic love so that the spectator would transfer the identity of romantic partner to the inanimate object. That the dance is perceived as a romantic duet is attributable to the signs of romance appropriated by Astaire, not by setting, costuming, or even musical values, which differ vastly from the expected romantic norm. What becomes evident, also, is the generic nature of the signs. Although the signs of romance become apparent through deconstruction of intersexual duet dances, the signification of romance is not reliant upon the partnering of a unique male and a unique female, as would be suggested by the narrative theme of the American film musical. The notion that the signs of the courtship ritual can only be recognized and validated within the context of a heterosexual duet dance conflicts with the obvious manifestation of the courtship ritual between a man and a coat rack. In parodying the pattern of signification evident within his own romantic duet dances, Astaire simultaneously validates the readability of those signs while negating the effect of living, male and female partners upon the overall perception of romantic interaction.

"Tale As Old As Time": Animated Romance

Another example of the strength of the signs of courtship over the context of performance occurs within the Walt Disney animated film, *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and the dance duet "Tale As Old As Time" in which the characters discover their love through the dance: "The Beast takes Beauty's arm and guides her into his castle's ballroom. The doors open, the audience gasps, and the two stroll in, dance, and fall in love" (Armstrong 42). The perception of romantic love is not affected by human idiosyncratic performance values or even the interaction of an intersexual, human couple. Rather, the animators self-consciously constructed movement patterns that connote romance and the courtship ritual as defined by the model "Night and Day" and imposed those patterns upon animated cartoon characters, one recognizable as a female, but the other an inhuman beast, albeit with male identity.

As with Astaire and Rogers, the invitation phase of the courtship between Belle and the Beast begins before the actual dance. As Mrs. Potts sings "Tale As Old As Time" in the background, Belle descends the staircase attired in beautiful formal wear and looks up to see the Beast silhouetted in the doorway to the hall. Their eyes meet momentarily. He drops his gaze, hesitates, adjusting his cravat, and is finally prodded into action by Cogsworth. As they approach each other, Belle curtsies and the Beast bows. He then extends his hand to her and places her arm in his to guide her down the stairs to dinner.

After supper, Belle, inspired by the music, rises and crosses down the long table to the Beast. She takes both of his hands in hers to invite

him to dance. The Beast again hesitates, a look of confusion and fear on his face. Belle forcibly pulls him from the chair and they enter the ballroom side by side. Again Belle takes the initiative when she places her hand in his. The Beast signals his hesitation with a pronounced gulp as Belle positions his arm around her waist and again establishes eye contact with her partner. The Beast, however, is still reluctant to engage, and looks away, at his feet.

This invitational phase is much abbreviated in the Beauty and the Beast number. Unlike Astaire and Rogers, there is no rejection apparent, signified by distancing of bodies. There is only hesitation, on the part of the Beast, to accept the invitation offered by Belle.

As the dance progresses, and the couple waltzes around the floor, the engagement phase begins. The first sign of active engagement appears as the Beast twirls Belle away from him, maintaining physical contact by holding her hand. She extends her free arm out, and he mirrors her action. Almost simultaneously, they have opened up their bodies to each other. The Beast brings her back in for a moment, then spins her out again for another mirrored, open arm posture. When she dances back into him this time, their bodies touch, and a closeup reveals consistent eye contact between the partners. At that moment, commitment between the two is established. Belle lays her head on the Beast's chest. The two dance close, and for a split second, both of their eyes are closed. When the Beast opens his eyes, he smiles broadly and looks to his friends Lumiere and Cogsworth. They display signs of congratulations, thumbs-up and hands clasped overhead in a gesture of

victory. They recognize, as does the human audience, that the dance has established the love relationship between the Beast and Belle. This is highly reminiscent of the cigarette smoking episode following "Night and Day."

The dance ends in yet another open body turning out for both partners. The Beast brings Belle back into him, they dance for just a second side by side, then exit the ballroom arm in arm.

The reprise of the song after the Beast has regained his human form is also a continuation of the courtship dance. The Beast/Prince lifts Belle in an ecstatic gesture of love, trust and commitment, then brings her down for a prolonged kiss. As the couple continue their dance around the floor, they sustain constant eye contact, but no torsal contact until the very end, when the dance, and the movie, ends with their embrace.

The dance of Beauty and her Beast is much less complex than that of Fred and Ginger. This simplification of the courtship dance can be explained, to some extent by the constraints innate to the process of animation. Animators often work from photos and film of actors performing the action called for in the animation. Lorna Cook, one of Belle's animators, explains some of the difficulties in bringing a character to life:

Any human character is going to give you fidgets if you don't take heed of how the live action works, and that takes a lot of time. What you try to do is not be overly literal. But there are subtleties here that I just wouldn't be able to see

if I didn't have the (photo) stats. (B. Thomas, 1991, 183)

The subtleties that Lorna speaks of are the gestures, body attitudes, facial expressions that convey to the audience certain emotions or feelings that the character is experiencing at the moment. Because of the need "not to be overly literal" in representing the human through animation, the animator chooses only those signs that are essential to convey meaning.

The dance of the Beauty and her Beast contain all of the essential signifiers of romantic love that were exhibited in the Fred and Ginger dance. The invitation phase is clear with Belle reaching out to the Beast. Although he does not reject her, as Ginger does Fred (this can be explained in part by the progression of the romance through the narrative in each film), the Beast does show hesitation by avoiding eye contact and physical proximity. The engagement phase is signaled in both dances by close physical proximity, sustained eye contact and opening the bodies to each other. When the Prince lifts Belle in the dance reprise at the end of the movie, it establishes the commitment phase as clearly as when Fred lifts Ginger.

There are notable differences between the two dances, however. During the Fred and Ginger dance, there is much more evidence of sexual attraction and arousal, signified by heavy breathing, upper and lower torsal contact and Ginger's backbends, than in the animated piece. In spite of the movie musical's convention of portraying the ideal male/female sexual relationship within the context of marriage, heterosexual desire is recognized, and performed, for the purposes of

heightening the interest and tension between the characters, as well as for the gratification of the spectator.

Although Belle and the Beast do open their bodies in a spread arm gesture, signs of sexual desire are minimized. Sustained torsal contact is not present. The kiss at the beginning of the reprise is the first hint of sexual desire between the two characters. And yet they immediately separate for their dance around the floor, maintaining some distance between their bodies until the final embrace. This deemphasis of sexuality can be explained by examining the audience for Disney's animated fairy tales, primarily families with children.

Fred and Ginger idealized the courting couple whose love was realized through both emotional and sexual commitment. Belle and the Beast represented the loving couple whose primary attraction was emotional, with minimal reference to the sexual. Both dances, however, establish the romantic love relationship between the male and female characters.

A more significant difference between the two dances is in the roles played by the sexes within the dance. In Astaire and Rogers' duet dances, Fred is the initiator of action and Ginger the recipient. He invites her to dance. He pursues her. He relishes in his conquest. This gender-specific role-playing is consistent with the American film musical's presentation of the male-female relationship within the narrative.

Conversely, the initiator of action in "Tale As Old As Time" is Belle. *She* pulls the hesitant Beast into the dance and initiates physical

contact. *She* is the first to open her body in the extended arm posture. *She* is the controlling partner, start to finish. Belle is a reflection of the changing views regarding the female role in the courtship ritual:

Unlike past Disney heroines (up to the feisty Little Mermaid, at least), Belle is an intelligent, independent woman. . . . With such characterizations, Disney may indeed have pulled off its greatest achievement: political correctness without the shrillness that, in 1990's America, usually accompanies it. (The Economist 93)

Although the signs of courtship within the American film musical are overwhelmingly presented within the context of traditional human male-female interaction, and the movement patterns performed are most often gender-exclusive (Hanna 160-161), the courtship ritual is not bound by sexual differences, or identification of gender-specific roles within the courtship. The progression of romantic signification exhibited within the dance transcends sociological and temporal constraints. "Tale As Old As Time" indicates that the danced signs of courtship are still readable, even when the constraints of stereotypical gender-specific behavior patterns are reduced or eliminated.

"Sunday Jumps" and "Tale As Old As Time" illustrate how strongly the signs and movement patterns of the courtship ritual prompt spectator perception by imposing those signs into a non-romantic or a non-conventional environment. But how does the inclusion, abbreviation, or elimination of certain signs within a recognizably romantic environment with heterosexual, living partners alter viewer perception? There are many male-female dance duets that followed

Astaire and Rogers. How is their performance perceived by film analysts? The strength of Astaire and Rogers to define the romantic heterosexual couple within the dance through identifiable signs of courtship and the courtship ritual is validated by comparative analysis with other heterosexual dance duets that portray a romantic relationship, yet are not perceived as romantic by the spectator.

Gene Kelly

The dancing styles and images created by Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly have been constantly analyzed, compared and contrasted with the differences between the images of the two performers especially highlighted. Gerald Mast spends a great deal of time studying these perceived differences. In speaking about Kelly's courtship dances, Mast states:

Those duets that are not playful challenges tend toward balletic pas de deux, more arty and precious, less sensuous and flowing than Astaire's combination of aesthetic, ballroom and tap. While Kelly projected the idea of love as dancers do on a stage, Astaire projected it as lovers did (or hoped to do) on dance floors. (250)

Rick Altman appears to agree with Mast: "The Gene Kelly who stands out, performing numbers which only he could bring off, is not a Gene Kelly *making love*, but a Gene Kelly *showing off*" (55).

Other critics refer to specific signifying practices that differentiate the filmed images of Kelly and Astaire; camera angles and movement, use of space, editing and trick photography, with Kelly being much more innovative and daring than Astaire. (Jerome Delamater 133-167)

Is this perceived difference between the two performers grounded within the signs of courtship made apparent in their duet dances? Can it be understood by analysis of the signifying practices incorporated by each in filming their dances? Or is the dissimilarity a function of qualities unique and intrinsic to the individual performer, a sign of the performer code? An analysis of the progressive signs of courtship in selected Kelly duet dances, in comparison to those made apparent in the Astaire/Rogers pieces, will serve to answer at least one of these questions.

"Our Love Is Here To Stay"

In speaking of the Gene Kelly-Leslie Caron duet dance, "Our Love is Here to Stay" from An American In Paris (1951), Gerald Mast makes this observation:

As opposed to Fred&Ginger [sic], who reveal their love to each other by dancing, this duet is more a revelation for the audience than the dancers, a projection of their love for us. (258)

As in "Night and Day," the invitation phase of "Our Love is Here to Stay" begins as Kelly sings the first lines of the song to Leslie Caron. She moves away, in apparent rejection, but once she has established a distance, Caron turns back, opening herself to Kelly. Her rejection is not complete. In contrast to Astaire, Kelly does not immediately pursue. He sits back, indifferent almost, and continues to sing to Caron. He does not feel threatened by her distancing herself because the distance is nullified when Caron signifies her continued interest in the courtship by turning back to Kelly. Eventually, he casually strolls over to her, hands

in pocket, to pull her into the dance. Here again, there is no episode of hesitation or rejection, as Caron readily falls into Kelly's arms and engagement occurs as the couple sways together, maintaining full torsal contact. A brief moment of hesitation is signified as Caron turns out of the embrace, away from Kelly. He immediately grabs her hand and pulls her back. Instead of resuming the engagement phase of the ritual, however, Kelly sets Caron aside and proceeds to move around her, illustrating his sexual prowess and physical attraction through the dance. Satisfied that he has proved himself, Kelly then takes Caron's hand and they stroll away, side by side, her head on his shoulder.¹⁰ A brief side-by-side synchronous series follows and ends as the couple comes face to face, rise on *pointe* and clasp hands, arms extended between them to maintain some distance. Breaking physical contact, Caron and Kelly begin to dance around each other in simultaneous, non-synchronous movement, reaching out but never connecting. Finally, Caron moves toward Kelly, dances around the back of him, encircling his shoulder with her hand. They meet briefly face to face as Kelly reaches out as if to take her in his arms. Caron turns away in a gesture that would normally connote rejection except that the turning away leads into a distanced, but synchronous movement sequence (engagement). Next the couple emphasizes its reluctance to touch by keeping their hands behind their backs in a sequence of mirrored simultaneous movement, followed by a series of leaps and turns performed around each other. The phrase ends as Caron and Kelly stop at a distance from each other, back to back.

The dance draws towards conclusion as the couple once again establish full torsal contact (engagement/commitment) through face-to-face mirrored synchronous movement. But as the music builds to a climax, the couple parts once again, repeats the hands-behind-the-back sequence as they dance around each other and finally lean in, not touching, to kiss. Kelly puts his arm around Caron. She places her arm around his waist and her head on his shoulder as they stroll off.

"Heather on the Hill"

In Brigadoon (1954), Gene Kelly and Cyd Charisse perform a similar courtship dance, "Heather on the Hill."

The invitation phase once again begins with the song sung by Kelly to Charisse. As he maintains constant eye contact, Kelly sings of his attraction. Charisse exhibits a brief moment of hesitation as she turns and walks away, but Kelly soon catches up with her (pursuit) and they walk together side by side (almost identical to the movement pattern of Kelly and Caron). The invitation phase is signaled as Kelly reaches out his hand to Charisse. She does not reject him, but takes his hand and they continue on side by side. Shortly thereafter, the first sign of sexual tension is evident as Charisse leans against a tree, her chest visibly rising and falling, exactly as Rogers' did in "Night and Day." A brief episode of rejection follows as Charisse runs away from Kelly. He pursues and blocks her exit. As she turns and walks past him, her right arm is extended back towards Kelly (invitation). He grabs her hand and pulls her toward himself. In slow and controlled movement, Kelly lifts Charisse and brings her down into a supported backbend, (engagement-

commitment) signaling her sexual availability. A little later, Charisse sits on one of Kelly's knees and windmills her legs around him in yet another gesture of sexual openness. Dancing around a tree, the two meet in an almost kiss, run off in separate directions, arms spread wide in a sign of joy, and return to each other. Kelly sweeps her into his arms and lifts her as her arm encircles his neck (commitment). Briefly, the two dance side by side in synchronous movement that ends with a another backbend and a kiss. After another cursory interlude of synchronous movement, Charisse climbs upon a rock and leans over Kelly. He supports her as she lowers herself to him in a mime of the sexual act.

The audience recognizes "Heather on the Hill" and "Our Love is Here to Stay" as dances of love and courtship. The signs of courtship that became apparent in analysis of the Fred and Ginger pieces are present in these dances. There are significant deviations from Fred and Ginger's pattern of courtship, however, that may account for the perceived difference between Astaire and Kelly as noted by the critics.

The invitation, hesitation and rejection phases within the Kelly duet dances are abbreviated, practically non-existent, even when the love relationship has not been firmly established previously by the narrative or within the context of an earlier duet dance. Love comes very easily to Kelly. Astaire, on the other hand, must pursue the object of his desire more aggressively, risking rejection and humiliation. The resulting sexual tension that builds during the course of performed pursuit climaxes during the engagement and commitment phases. Within Gene

Kelly's dance, this sexual tension is never allowed to build and the engagement and commitment phases lose some of their explosive affect.

The more significant difference between the Astaire/Rogers duets and those performed by Kelly and his partners however, is the limited time that Kelly and Caron/Charisse spend in side-by-side synchronous or face-to-face mirrored movement. Kelly's dances include episodes of simultaneous, non-synchronous movement, establishing a relationship between the partners while concurrently maintaining the independent identity of each. However, it is within the synchronous movement as well as through sustained bodily contact that the dancers sign their love and commitment:

The dance establishes, celebrates, and confirms their [Fred and Ginger's] spiritual union, not as a metaphor for sex but for something better than sex. Better because their dance enacts the idea behind sex--the absolute union of mind and feeling through bodily contact and activity, the coming together of male and female who are two but one (Mast 149).

The unity between the lovers as signaled by Astaire and Rogers through synchronous movement and sustained torsal contact is not satisfactorily established between Kelly and his female partners. More often they move around each other in simultaneous but independent movement, coming together occasionally for the signifying torsal contact, lift or backbend. The dancers use their partners as props, like a tree or stone, through which they can manifest their virtuosity. This lack of unity may be one of the reasons the analysts find the Kelly duet dances less romantic than those danced by Astaire.

Mast refers to Kelly's use of ballet and ballet-type movement, the *pas de deux*, to incorporate an artsy quality to his performances (250). Whereas Astaire and Rogers appear to perform arduous dance steps with ease and grace, Kelly prefers to exhibit the difficulty in the movement and physical exertion required to execute the dance. Ballet discipline and technique provide the ultimate vehicle through which Kelly can display his physical prowess. His costuming, in turn, emphasizes the musculature of his body, especially effective while he is in motion. The emphasis shifts from the couple to individual performance technique.

The ballet, however, served a greater function within the American film musical than to highlight the physical prowess of the performer. It became incorporated into the musical as the "ultimate representation of picturing the imagination" (Mast 260). The end ballet in *An American In Paris*, a dreamy, surrealistic dance in which Kelly pursues his lost love, established an industry standard. Dream sequences gradually became the vehicle through which the couple could interact and perform their courtship dance.

"Broadway Melody"

Gene Kelly uses the dream sequence with ballet and ballet-like movement in "Broadway Melody" from Singing in the Rain (1952). The heterosexual relationship portrayed (Kelly-Charisse) is extradiagetic to the narrative love story (Kelly-Reynolds). Rather than affirming the love relationship portrayed through the narrative, Kelly exploits the dream sequence to explore the parameters of the heterosexual love relationship by juxtaposing two different representations of the courtship ritual. In

the first part of the dance, Kelly not only reverses the gender-specific roles of initiator and recipient of action, but also introduces an overtly sexual element to the courtship dance. Although sexual tension and sexual desire are performed within the Astaire/Rogers duets (open body positions, backbends, deep breathing), ultimate commitment and consummation of the relationship can only occur through the performance of the progressive phases of the courtship. In the second part of "Broadway Melody," Kelly presents a more conventional treatment of the courtship ritual, reminiscent of his previous heterosexual duet dances.

The number opens in a closeup of Charisse's leg as she dangles Kelly's hat from her toe. Her character is inviting him to come toward her. The first view of Charisse's face shows her bringing a cigarette to her lips, a histrionic sign of immorality and easy sexuality.¹¹ If she is going to be the sexually dominant partner, it is tolerable only when the audience understands that she is a woman of loose morals. She begins the active phase of engagement as she moves away from Kelly, inviting him with a bent back (unsupported) to follow. With exaggerated upper and lower body undulations, Charisse opens herself up sexually to her partner (engagement-commitment). At this point, however, Kelly asserts his dominance by grabbing her and pulling her toward him. He supports Charisse in a sustained lift (commitment) which ends as she slides down his leg and lays on the floor in a deep back bend. The commitment phase culminates as they move in to each other. Just as they are about

to kiss, Charisse is lured away by a flashy necklace, an affirmation of her character's innate immorality.

In the second half of the number, Kelly dreams of another encounter with Charisse, one in which the gender-specific codes of behavior are consistent with expectations. The phases of the courtship dance follow basically the same pattern as in the duets previously discussed. Again, however, there is very little physical contact between the dancers. Kelly chooses to use Charisse's scarf as a surrogate for this contact. The commitment climaxes as he lowers her to the floor, entwined together in the scarf, and kisses her. They part and move away from each other, arms outstretched. The dream dissolves with Kelly foregrounded and Charisse in the ephemeral distance. Back in real life, Charisse rejects Kelly's invitation as he moves toward her and the courtship ends when he chooses not to pursue. Interestingly, neither depiction of the intersexual relationship achieves a satisfactory conclusion. Kelly loses the girl either way.

Although Kelly toys with the signification of romantic love at various levels, his interest lies not so much in the couple depicted, but rather in the dance itself. His reaction to the loss of Charisse as a mate reveals much about his emphasis on the courtship duet and his perception of its significance. As he stands dejectedly ruminating on the rejection he has suffered, a dancer comes into the shot singing, "Gotta dance!" With a slight shrug dismissing the lost love, Kelly joyfully echoes the refrain, "Gotta dance!" The pain of unfulfilled love can be relieved as long as the dancer can dance. The questions Kelly raised in his two-part

depiction of the courtship ritual--overt sexuality versus heightened sensuality--would be addressed by later artists. Bob Fosse's dynamic choreography, for example, foregrounded elements of human sexuality not explored by Astaire or Kelly.

Bob Fosse

Bob Fosse brought a new vision, a new perspective to the American film musical:

I had to break away from movie musicals that just copy the Broadway show. Or movie musicals that copy conventions of the stage. . . . [A]ll the Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire musicals--they're classics. But they represent another era. . . . The theater . . . conveys a removed reality. The movies bring that closer. (Grubb, 152)

In his quest to portray reality, Fosse incorporated elements of numerous dance styles (jazz, ballet, eccentric, or flash) that resulted in a uniquely Fosse choreographic technique. "A . . . general analysis of . . . [Bob] Fosse's dance style reveals certain major characteristics: eccentricity, isolation, repetition, and fragmentation. . . ." (Delamater 126). Unlike the smooth progression of movement patterns inherent in both Astaire's and Kelly's duet dances, Fosse's fragmented choreography emphasizes independent, and somewhat disconnected motion within as well as between the performers' bodies. Through the isolation of body parts, using only parts of the body rather than the whole, the pelvis, legs, breasts, Fosse can focus upon the erotic nature of the couple relationship. By fragmenting the narrative line of the dance, placing in juxtaposition disjointed movement sequences and isolating groups of

dancers working simultaneously, but independently from each other, he portrays a freneticism not visible in Astaire or Kelly pieces. This freedom from conventional restrictions of musical dance enables Fosse to explore human sexuality. He focuses upon the eroticism inherent in interpersonal relationships, both heterosexual and homosexual.

Cabaret

Cabaret (1972) is distinguished for its exploration of not only heterosexual love and romance, but also bi-sexual and homosexual liaisons. Although *Cabaret* is often critiqued for its political statements, juxtaposing, quite graphically, the raucous, decadent environment of the cabaret with the brutality of the Nazi regime, its departure from idealizing the monogamous, heterosexual love relationships danced by Astaire and Kelly ushers in an era of erotically-motivated dance in the film musical, a rebuttal to the progressive courtship ritual and signs of romance epitomized in the Fred and Ginger duets.

"Two Ladies"

In a dance that foreshadows the *ménage-a-trois* relationship among Sally, Max and Brian, Joel Grey, as the Master of Ceremonies, dances with two chorines. Dressed conservatively in Bavarian costume, the three proceed to perform a representation of love that includes three partners. As the number begins, the curtain parts and Joel and the two women appear. The women signal their mutual intimacy with the man by placing their hands on his chest and around his waist while simultaneously thrusting out a leg on either side of him. During this movement Grey is singing, "Two ladies and I'm the only man. I like it,

they like it." A brief interlude ensues wherein the ladies dance around him, each maintaining physical contact by holding one of his hands. The series continues with one of the women grasping Grey's hand between his legs, pulling him across the stage, much to the amusement of the audience. With Grey between the two ladies, the three, continually maintaining back-to-back upper torsal contact, walk stage left, then skip hand in hand upstage to their idealized abode, birds chirping in the background, and proceed to sing of their ordinary, daily routine. Juxtaposed to the innocent lyric are the suggestive poses, buttocks thrust in toward Grey, assumed by the women. He signals his appreciation of their anatomy by biting one woman and bumping the other. The three then wrap around each other, using arms and legs.

The suggestion of the sexual act occurs next as Grey and the women lift a sheet off the bed and disappear beneath, alternate heads popping out to sing the refrain. Strobe lights come on, indicating a frenetic build of sexual activity. Each member of the trio, in turn, exits the sheet to run ecstatically around the stage. Ultimately, Grey appears in his underwear. Consummation is signaled by the return to normal lighting, Grey's fanning himself, and a woman's legs crossed contentedly overhead. As the trio exit the sheet, Grey moves into the audience to invite a spectator to join them. When she refuses, he returns to the two women. The number ends as the ladies lift and rock Grey, then cartwheel in front of him into handstands, framing his face between their legs. As they come down, their legs form a bridge through which Grey crawls.

Shortly after the "Two Ladies" number, the narrative relationship of the three principals, Sally, Max and Brian, is illuminated. Through dance, Fosse graphically portrays the building sexual tension between the two men and one woman. The dance is the most obvious sign of their unconventional love affair.

Weekending at Max's home, the three relax while listening to music. In response to the music playing on the gramophone, Sally begins to dance seductively around the room, hips swaying, breasts thrust forward. Brian and Max look on appreciatively and beg her to continue when she stops to rest. Eventually, Sally playfully invites Max to dance with her. After a brief hesitation, he joins Sally and the two join together, first in a tango step, then later face to face in mirrored synchronous motion, establishing and maintaining full torsal contact (engagement-commitment). As sexual tension increases, the dance slows and Sally lays her head on Max's shoulder. Brian watches the couple, signaling his discomfort by pacing. As Brian passes the couple, Max gently pulls him into the dance. Two become three. The intensity of mutual sexual attraction becomes evident as the camera focuses in a closeup upon the three faces, dewy with perspiration, moving in a circle, lips almost, but never quite touching. The dance ends when the tension becomes too profound, and Sally moves away.

In both numbers, Fosse uses signs of engagement and commitment apparent in Fred and Ginger's duets, upper and lower torsal contact, physical proximity, even a lift (in "Two Ladies"). But he places these signs of romantic love within non-conventional contexts, where

they are still readable to the spectator and, consequently, questions the perception of monogamous, heterosexual love.

"If You Could See Her through My Eyes"

Another number in *Cabaret*, "If You Could See Her Through My Eyes" parodies the progression of the heterosexual courtship ritual. Although the function of the number within the narrative framework of the movie is to satirize the Nazi anti-Semitic platform, Fosse's appropriation of the signs of courtship serves to question the validity of assigning those signs exclusively to the sanitized, idealized romantic love as performed by Fred and Ginger.

Joel Grey's partner, dressed elegantly in a long cape, faces upstage as the number begins, back to the audience. She turns and reveals herself to be a gorilla. The audience laughs because, conditioned by the signs of romantic love, they are expecting to see a woman. In close physical proximity, the partners turn face to face and establish eye contact. Holding hands, opened bodies to each other, Grey and the gorilla move into a side-by-side synchronous motion. As he follows, the gorilla twirls away from Grey. He goes down on one knee to declare his love. Joining hands again, the two walk across stage. After a moment when they reestablish eye contact, the partners perform a brief side-by-side and mirrored soft shoe series, her arm around his waist, and move upstage. There he places a ring (symbol of monogamy and marriage) in her nose. As the number ends, Grey sings "Can one ever choose where the heart leads us?" and asks for understanding and tolerance.

Throughout the film *Cabaret*, Fosse questions the conventional American film musical treatment of sexual preference and gender identification. In one scene, Brian is obviously startled to see a beautiful female (impersonator) standing next to him at the urinal. In yet another scene, the Master of Ceremonies is discovered, to the spectator's surprise, dressed and performing as a female within the chorus line. Gender identity and sexual preference is an illusion. What is real is the eroticism inherent in love relationships. By isolating and focusing upon specific parts of the body, buttocks, pelvis, breasts, faces, lips, Fosse conveys the eroticism of the love relationship. He is not interested in, and deems unrealistic and "a little silly" (Grubb 152), the courtship ritual as portrayed by Astaire and Rogers. Reality is the physical reaction to sexual tension between partners, signed by the movement of areas of the body associated with the sex act.

Nowhere does Bob Fosse portray the eroticism fomented by physical interaction more powerfully than in "Aerotica" from the film musical *All That Jazz* (1979). In this number, Fosse manipulates the perception of the spectator through fragmentation and discontinuity of visual images, isolation of groups of dancers, performing independently of each other as well as repetition of erotic movement patterns.

"Aerotica"

A closeup of a single gloved hand, fingers snapping out a rhythm, opens the number. The camera cuts to one woman, Sandahl Bergman, leg extended forward. The snapping fingers and the beat of the drum are joined by the whistling of the woman. Isolated body parts, arms and

legs, jut out from either side of a central body whose back is to the camera. As the Sandahl character begins to sing on the platform, the dancers move around below her, contracting and releasing parts of their body, controlling and sustaining movement as they assume different poses. Legs, hips and upper torsos undulate to the beat. The movement escalates as Sandahl falls forward from the platform into the arms of the waiting chorus members. The dancers kick and turn in front of the spectators, the camera focusing on their legs. The chorus then rearranges itself into a squirming mass of interwoven bodies, punctuated by outthrust arms, legs and buttocks. Bergman executes a controlled split and, leg extended, introduces the chorus. An interlude follows in which the dancers line up in front of the spectators and perform in unison as Sandahl sways into the viewers. At one point, her back to the audience, she bends over and sings through her legs. The first half of the number ends in a tableau, the dancers frozen, pelvises thrust forward.

To say that the second half of the number intensifies the eroticism and sexuality evident in the first half is an understatement. Fosse pulls out all the stops as he celebrates the human body, exploring sexuality and the sex act through explicit movement patterns. As the lighting goes down, a flashlight illuminates a single male face. The next closeup focuses upon a female unzipping her outer garment. As the male speaks, "Welcome aboard Airotica," the camera pulls back to reveal the chorines in the process of stripping down to expose their bodies. Almost immediately, the dancers begin to pair up for their ride on "Airotica."

First a male and a female introduce themselves to each other. Next two females, and then two males exchange names. Focusing on these three couples, Fosse directs a ballet of sexually explicit movement, displaying, in turn, the intense eroticism of homosexual, lesbian and heterosexual intercourse. The bodies interact, female caressing female, the two males locked in an embrace, one partner supporting and lifting another. The heterosexual couple mimes nonconventional intercourse as he thrusts his pelvis into her extended buttocks. Eventually, the other chorus members join in, as we hear them introducing themselves to one another. Soon the spectator witnesses a mass of gyrating bodies engaged in frantic sexual activity. Up on the platform, Sandahl lies on her back, legs extended in the air, head hanging over the side, as her male partner kneels above her. Forcefully he pulls apart her legs. Is it rape or sadism? She pulls off her top, exposing her breasts. He pushes her legs back together, and leaves her alone. As Sandahl dances solo upon the platform, the sexual intensity below escalates. The spectator can isolate partnerings of two, three, and sometimes four bodies. Eventually the chorus is drawn into Sandahl and starts to beat on the platform. She stands above them and responds by frenetically circling her head. The circling motion soon extends to her hips, as arms extended, hands holding onto the framework of the platform, she flings back her head in ecstasy. Coming together in a unified dance of sexual climax and consummation, the chorus leaves the platform, leaps, then collapses to the floor, mimicking Sandahl's head motion. Above them, she is posed on her knees, arms out, pelvis thrust forward, head back. The number

draws to a close as the dancers line up, face to face, say good-bye to their partners and separate. Over their action, Roy Scheider speaks as commentator: "Our motto is, we take you everywhere and get you nowhere." The chorus comes together once more, their faces lit eerily from below, to stare at the spectators.

Fosse explores through dance human sexuality, alternate sexual lifestyles, and the erotic potential of the human body. His stated purpose in the execution of his craft is the exposition of reality. He does not necessarily comment upon the morality of sexuality, merely the fact of it. The statement made by the Roy Scheider character at the end of the "Airotica" number indicates that the erotic experience is real and contained within the moment of sexual interaction. The expression of human sexuality is not a means to an end, it will not "get you anywhere." It just is. In contrast, the courtship ritual moves a relationship through the progressive phases of signification with the purpose of achieving commitment and consummation. By choosing to focus upon the erotic nature of interpersonal love relationships, Fosse does not invalidate the romantic element of courtship. Fred and Ginger do indicate sexual desire through their dance, but cloak the erotic nature of their relationship within the signs of courtship. The spectator uncovers the sexual nature of the relationship through interpretation of the signs. Romantic signification hints at sexual intimacy. Fosse exposes sexual desire by choreographing that intimacy, stopping just short of displaying actual intercourse.

Busby Berkeley, Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly and Bob Fosse all use the human body to foreground elements of love and sexual interaction. Berkeley idolizes and fetishizes the body, objectifying human form by incorporating it into elaborate kaleidoscopic patterns. Eroticism and sexual desire is symbolized through the spectacular display of cumulative sexuality. Astaire exploits the body as merely the vehicle through which the partners in the dance can express their sexual interest in each other. Fred emphasizes the process through which sexual desire is communicated, not the tool that is used to signify that desire. Kelly, on the other hand, foregrounds the human body within the context of the (abbreviated) courtship ritual. The danced pattern of signification becomes secondary to the exposition of physical prowess. Bob Fosse engages the exposed body in a literal performance of the sex act.

Rick Altman decries the movement of the American film musical from the symbolic to the realistic representation of sexual encounter: "Sexual attraction has been reduced to a bodily function like hunger or perspiration" (268). What has disappeared in recent movie musicals is the mystery, the illusive nature of the love relationship. Inherent to the romantic depiction of courtship, defined by Astaire and Rogers, is uncertainty and vulnerability, the risk in extending an invitation that can be rejected. Desire is not immediately satisfied, but allowed to intensify through the progression of the courtship ritual. Consummation is signified at the end of the dance, but never realistically portrayed, allowing sexual intercourse to retain mythical dimensions.

Romance Vs. Sex

With few exceptions, recent movie musicals have discarded as naive the notion of romantic love. The pattern of romantic signification has become so familiar to the spectator as to be deemed "corny" and unrealistic. However, in an attempt to portray a realistic sexual relationship between two partners, contemporary choreographers have, unwittingly, genericized eroticism through the convention of the "sex dance." Emphasis has been misplaced upon the dance itself, be it Dirty Dancing or the Lambada, to signify sexual interaction. The partners performing the dance become secondary to the performance of the dance. Unlike Fosse, who exploits dance to expose the erotic and expand the boundaries of human sexual expression, the choreographers of these "fad" dances imprison the expression of desire within the confines of the dance. The American film musical has thrown out the ideal representation of romantic love but, as the decline in box office revenues seems to indicate, it has been unable to create a satisfactory substitute.

The dichotomy between the ideal romantic love performed by Astaire and Rogers, and the sexually explicit love of more recent musicals is examined in the 1981 movie, *Pennies From Heaven*, directed by Herbert Ross and starring Steve Martin and Bernadette Peters. As the main characters shift between the real world of Depression America and the fantasy world portrayed in the 1930s musicals, the nature of the relationship between the sexes is examined. In the real world, sexual tension and release, not romance, establishes and defines the relationship between male and female. Yet the characters continually

revert to the musical world to vocalize inner feelings that are suppressed in the non-romantic reality. Each imagines that the greater truth behind heterosexual love lies within the romantic ideal. However, when Martin and Peters assume the roles of Astaire and Rogers, they find that the idealized relationship is equally unsatisfactory, and the dance ends with the two of them behind "bars," imprisoned by their own illusions of romantic love.

Conclusion

The duet dances of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers are considered romantic because they incorporate a complex, and sometimes ambiguous, set of signs that establish a progression of courtship from invitation, with episodes of rejection and hesitation, through engagement to final commitment. These signs become apparent through deconstruction of their duet dances. Specific to each phase of courtship are movement patterns and body attitudes, as well as the spatial relationship between the bodies. During the invitation phase, the distance between the bodies is decreased, sometimes by merely extending forward a hand or inclining the torso toward the partner. Hesitation and rejection are signaled by the distancing of one body from the other or turning away. Engagement begins when the bodies establish and maintain contact. Eye contact becomes significant in communicating invitation, as well as engagement and commitment. Broken eye contact indicates hesitation or rejection. The signs of commitment include open body posturings that suggest sexual availability, backbends and lifts (connoting trust). "Night and Day," the courtship dance described as the most romantic of the Fred and Ginger duets, is the most complete in its pattern of signification, and can, therefore, be used as a template when determining the romantic quotient of other film musical dances. When a dance eliminates, or abbreviates, any of the phases of the courtship ritual, the romantic "value" of the dance is diminished.

The unique contribution of Fred and Ginger to the portrayal of the romantic ideal in film becomes apparent when their work is compared to other film musical dances. Although there are thousands of dances that appear on film, and hundreds of dancers and choreographers, it is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to analyze even a significant percentage of them. Instead, in order to test the validity of the signs of courtship, I have chosen examples of film musical dances that, by historical critical analysis, are in tension with the romantic ideal established by Fred and Ginger. This methodology can, at any time, be applied to any couple dance in order to determine its romantic value relative to "Night and Day."

Busby Berkeley concentrates upon the whole, rather than the couple. The pattern of romantic signification is non-existent in his dance numbers because the couple is not allowed to interact. Berkeley questions the ability of the monogamous love relationship to exploit its erotic potential. In this respect, Berkeley and Fosse seem to agree. However, Berkeley chooses to portray eroticism through the surrealistic presentation of the human form. Fosse presses to establish the erotic through the realistic depiction of sweating, gyrating bodies.

Gene Kelly has often been compared to Fred Astaire but is described as being less romantic. Although his couple dances do incorporate many of the signs of courtship, Kelly either abbreviates, or eliminates, the hesitation and rejection episodes of the invitation phase. Inclusion of these episodes indicates vulnerability and risk, and is in conflict with Kelly's emphasis upon physical strength and prowess.

Critical bias seems to demand that vulnerability in order to label the couple interaction as romantic.

The Bob Fosse dances are simply not interested in portraying romance. Although some of the signs of courtship are decipherable, eye contact, lifts, open body posturings, they are overwhelmed by the blatant emphasis on the sex act, signaled by the undulation of body parts identified with intercourse.

The dances choreographed by Berkeley, Kelly and Fosse are not described as "romantic" dances. The term most often used in conjunction with Berkeley is spectacular. Gene Kelly is described as a physical dancer. And Bob Fosse is associated with erotic sex. The methodology used in this paper to decipher the romantic element of the Astaire and Rogers dances could as easily be applied to the dances of these other artists to determine patterns of signification that indicate spectacle, physicality or eroticism.

The signs of romance are not confined to the conventional, male-female, couple relationship. Astaire's dance with the coat rack, Joel Grey's interaction with the gorilla, as well as the romantic duet dance of Belle and her Beast reveal the applicability and readability of these signs within non-conventional contexts. In addition, the courtship ritual is not restricted by the assigning of gender-specific roles. Although Fred is the dominant partner in "Night and Day," initiating the action while Ginger is the recipient of that action, Belle makes the romantic overtures to the Beast without compromising the romantic value of the dance.

Even though Fred and Ginger have established a precedent for romantic love in "Night and Day," and that precedent is recognized by film scholars, how realistically does the romantic ideal portray the complexities of sexual desire and interpersonal relationships? Is romance an illusion, as indicated by the finale of *Pennies from Heaven*? Although these are important questions, they really do not address a basic truth. The idea of romance is most definitely real and has survived in spite of shifting cultural views of human sexuality. It is present in the writings of each scholar who describes Astaire and Rogers as romantic and in the subconscious of each spectator who views "Night and Day" and sighs appreciatively.

(Photo from T. Thomas, 115)

Figure 1. "Lullaby of Broadway"

Berkeley places the romantic couple in juxtaposition to the chorus below.

(Photo from Rubin, 54)

Figure 2. "Lullaby of Broadway"

The couple is overwhelmed, and ultimately destroyed by the crowd of encroaching chorines.

"Night and Day" Phases of Courtship

Figure 3a.

Engagement into Commitment:
Full torsal contact, mirrored
synchronous movement, slight
backbend, sustained eye contact.

Figure 3b.

Commitment: Lift indicating trust
and joy.

Figure 3c.

Commitment: Open body
posturing and backbend signifying
sexual availability.

Figure 3d.

Engagement into Commitment:
Full torsal contact, face-to-face
mirrored movement, sustained eye
contact.

"Night and Day" Phases of Courtship (Continued)

Figure 3e.

**Invitation with
Hesitation/Rejection:** Turning
away, distancing from partner.
Reaching out to pull partner back
into the dance. Astaire's
vulnerability is apparent in his off-
balanced and inferior position in
relation to Rogers.

Figure 3f.

Commitment/Consummation:
Male leans over female in mime of
sex act.

(Photos 3a. through 3e. from Green, 74-75; Photo 3f from B. Thomas, 98)

(Photo from T. Thomas, 181)
 Figure 4. "Our Love is Here to Stay." The distance maintained between the partners' bodies inhibits performance of the engagement and commitment phases of the courtship ritual.

(Photo from L. B. Thomas, 33)
 Figure 5. "Heather on a Hill." The hesitation phase of courtship is signalled by pulling away from partner. Unlike Astaire (Figure 3e.), Kelly is upright in an equal position to his partner and balanced, stable.

(Photo from L. B. Thomas, 33)
 Figure 6. "Heather on a Hill." Commitment is signed through the lift. The physical exertion becomes evident through Kelly's conscious choice of costuming that reveals the muscle strain in the buttocks, back and arms.

Notes

¹ Arlene Croce, Gerald Mast and Jerome Delamater, among others, use the familiar “Fred and Ginger” as well as the more conventional “Astaire and Rogers” when referring to the team of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. The identification of this couple as unique in portraying the intimate love relationship through dance is supported by joining the first names of each. Croce goes so far as to eliminate the space between their names and refers to them as “Fred&Ginger,” a device copied by Mast, to illustrate the special relationship they achieved on film. I have chosen to use the familiar “Fred and Ginger” as well as “Astaire and Rogers” because both identifications immediately recall the image of this unique romantic couple.

² See Table 7.1 (160-161) for an interesting analysis of stereotypical gender behavioral expectations.

³ Many film scholars have included the same, or similar terms, in their analytical writings, but have failed to satisfactorily define the significance of these labels within performance. My objective is to pinpoint specific movement, or movement patterns within the performance, that can be defined using these terms as significant of certain phases within the courtship ritual.

⁴ A few of these early stage to screen transfers, as listed in assorted filmographies, include *The Desert Song* (1929), *New Moon* (1930), *Sally* (1929), *Rio Rita* (1929), *Showboat* (1929) *Sunny* (1930), and *The Golddiggers of Broadway* (1929). Of course, many of these musicals were remade in later versions.

⁵ Several film scholars, Gerald Mast, Jerome Delamater, Martin Rubin and John Russell Taylor among others, have outlined the evolution of the staged spectacle to the film musical, so an elaborate historical analysis of the genre within this paper would be redundant. What is important to this phenomenological analysis is the understanding that the earliest film musicals inherited from stage codes of performance that de-emphasized the individual, and in turn the couple, in favor of abundance and spectacle. Because this tradition was so firmly entrenched within the musical genre, the foregrounding of the couple and the courtship ritual within the dance performed by Astaire and Rogers, was revolutionary, and began the process that ultimately

resulted in the integration of the narrative into the dance sequences, the integrated musical form that dominates the genre from the 1950's to this day.

⁶ The similarities between Ramon and Rosita's dance and Astaire and Rogers' duets will become clear when I deconstruct "Night and Day," Fred and Ginger's most complete courtship dance, later in this paper.

⁷ Although other scholars have indicated that "Night and Day" is the apex of the Astaire and Rogers' romantic duet dances because of its complex texturing and totality in performing the courtship ritual (Mueller 63, Croce 33), none have clearly defined the elements of the dance that create this impression. Mueller comes the closest in his detailed look at the chronology of the danced performance and effectively isolates gestures and movement sequences utilized by the dancers to forward the narrative structure of the dance. His analysis stops short, however, of identifying specific movements with corresponding functions of seduction.

⁸ In both "The Continental" and "The Piccolino," Rogers introduces the song to Astaire, initiating the couple's involvement in the dance. In the challenge dance, "Isn't It A Lovely Day" as well as the romantic dances, "Night and Day" and "Cheek to Cheek," Astaire, likewise, draws Rogers into the dance through song. This reversal of roles between male and female indicates the progression of the relationship from that of pursuer (male) and pursued (female), to one of established partnership where the female becomes empowered to initiate a romantic episode. The gender-specific roles of male and female within the Astaire/Rogers courtship ritual are significant and will be discussed later at further length.

⁹ Here, more than anywhere else in the piece, the parody pokes fun at the signs of romantic love evident in the dance. In a "real" romantic duet, Astaire would lift his partner with ease. To defy the expected codes of performance is to startle, and delight the audience, who is suddenly included in the conspiracy to appropriate these signs of romantic love into an environment in tension with the concept of romance.

¹⁰ In spite of fleeting moments of hesitation that follow in the dance, the love relationship is already established. Strolling away together signifies commitment to the love relationship. An identical movement pattern occurs at the end of the danced courtship ritual.

¹¹ Roberta Pearson, in her book Eloquent Gestures, defines the histrionic and verisimilar codes and applies that to her own theory of performance analysis.

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