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A STRUCTURALIST ANALYSIS OF THE MUSICAL FILM GENRE AND ITS RELATION TO THE TRADING OF FILM CONCEPTS

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ABSTRACT

If film is to be taught in South African secondary schools as a Matriculation subject, we need a viable method of teaching it which must be media specific and appropriate to the discipline. Genre film categories present numerous teaching examples, because of their adherence to given formulae and structural patterns. A deconstruction of these films reveals that the narrative content of an individual genre film is specifically organised around a framework of binary oppositions. These oppositions form the basis for the structuralist model which can be used as a tool for the critical analysis and discussion of musical films.

The argument between various critics and film theorists about the 'highbrow' aestheticism of film as an artistic medium, and its function as 'popular culture' has always been volatile and is clouded by dogma, preconceptions and prejudice. In recent years, many, like Victor Perkins, Jim Kitzes, Stephen Neale, Stanley Solomon, Thomas Schatz and Colin McArthur have sought to debunk the notion of an 'orthodox film theory' and have upheld popular culture modes as valuable and revealing. Because although they adhere to the constraints of a commercial film industry and fulfil a definite entertainment function in society, many individual genre films are both complex and artistic.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

[illegible]

[illegible] day of [illegible], [illegible].

[illegible]

for my husband, Larry.

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PREFACE

The research for this work began when I saw my first musical film The Sound of Music. I was nine years old and enormously impressed. Since then I have sat through countless genre films, some mediocre, and others exceptional in their artistry. I hope this dissertation will alleviate some of the unjustifiable prejudice with which many regard this popular culture mode.

My sincere thanks must go to Dr John van Zyl of the University of the Witwatersrand whose encouragement, advise and constant help have been invaluable.

I acknowledge also the School of Dramatic Art at which I am registered as a Post-Graduate student.

And I would like to express my gratitude to the authorities of the University of Natal for allowing me to use their Library facilities.

I extend a note of appreciation to my unborn child for making my pregnancy a comfortable one, and having the good grace to arrive when this work was completed.

Finally, my love and my thanks go to my husband, whose understanding and pride have been my strength.

Now that the study of film has been accepted, recognised and instituted as a subject worthy of matriculation examination in some schools falling under the jurisdiction of the Transvaal Education Department, there is an urgent need for a viable method of teaching it. We cannot teach film using the traditional methods which apply to the study of English Literature and expect to be successful. The fundamental differences between the two narrative forms are too great. Film is a visually auditory medium while Literature exists in the written word and the structure of language. Applying the principles of analysis relevant for literature to film only results in misplaced, inappropriate criticism of that medium. In a classroom, this would cause confusion about the nature of film and how a visual narrative signifies.

We need a media specific approach to the teaching of film studies. One that derives from literary discipline, not one which uses film as a visual aid for teaching literature, but one which considers film as film and takes into account the intrinsic characteristics of this medium. In his Master of Arts dissertation entitled The Theory and Practice of Film Study at Secondary School Level T.H.M. Grové provides the following information regarding the amount of time that the average white South African school child spends absorbing the media:

> "South African pupils spend 3,7 hours (or 8%) of their leisure time on the reading of books; the balance of 40,3 hours (or 92%) is devoted to the media. Total viewing time per week is 11,5 hours (or 26%) the equivalent of 32 days teaching time in the classroom. (A further breakdown of the figures indicate that the better pupils spend 3% more time on the reading of books than their fellows who do less well at school. There was no significant difference between the two groups regarding the time spent viewing television and films on the commercial circuits - a strong argument in favour of teaching visual literacy at all levels of achievement at school.)" [1]

He concludes that the study of film is of vital importance, as it will equip the South African pupil with the means to interpret the visual content of communications media. One of the teachers involved in the Transvaal Education Department's pilot study in which a film course was introduced into six Transvaal schools added that:

> "Visual media are very much part of our everyday life, and if some or other form is not introduced into schools, education will become irrelevant and the pupils will be unprepared to face the onslaught of mass media when confronted with the outside and adult world ..." [2]

Exposure to a growing amount of visual media is on the increase in South Africa and it is shocking to consider the statistics which have been released in countries abroad. In the United Kingdom 35% of pupils in the 12 - 14 age group watch 24 hours or more per week and only 32% of this group watch less than 12 hours per week. Americans watch an average of 20,4 hours per week as opposed to 7,5 hours spent reading magazines and newspapers and 0,6 hours per week reading books. [3] We can assume from this that the South African pupil is assured of an even greater exposure to the visual media in the future following the trends which are apparent overseas.

Grové and others have made a convincing case for the study of film at secondary school level, but my primary concern is how it is taught. Since it is a new subject, there will obviously be continual monitoring of its progress, and the methods used, particularly as many of these are still in the experimental stage. In his dissertation Grové has outlined the method which he advocates as appropriate for teaching film and provides five examples of suitable short films which could be used in a classroom situation given the limitations of time and the requirements of the secondary school syllabus. His analysis of each film is appropriate to the medium, and each one is studied as an example of communication in a visual narrative mode. I am in agreement

with Grové's methodology and my study attempts t extend the progress which has already been made. I aim to provide further teaching examples which may be used in secondary schools or even further into Higher Education institutions. It will form part of a growing body of literature which aims to build a theoretical framework for the teaching and study of film concepts.

In my opening Chapter I will do a comparative study of film and literature in order to illuminate their differences and show that they communicate, and are encoded with information in entirely different ways. I hope that this will help dispel the notion that film study is an offshoot of literary study. One of the most commonly held misconceptions when teaching film, is that film concepts and literary concepts are essentially the same. However, it must be realised that they are different, both in the ways in which they are employed - encoded into the text, and how they are perceived and decoded by the reader/viewer. George Bluestone explains the difference between our perception of literature and film as two different "ways of seeing" highlighting the concept of seeing visually and 'seeing' imaginatively. [4] When watching a film our reception of the message is both visual - we are shown an image on a screen, and audible - we hear the information encoded into the soundtrack which either reinforces,complements or contradicts the visual image. The novel communicates via the imagination and the rea er creates his own image by decoding and reconstructing the written word in his own mind. Metaphor, which is a literary concept, used by the novelist to give greater complexity and significa nce to his work, operates differently in a visual context. Many assume that it is only applicable to literature,but it can be used successfully in a film context providing that it is employed in a way which is appropriate to the medium. The equivalent of metaphor in film is audio visual and is perceived directly through the sight and hearin, of the viewer. Likewise it must be noted that film symbolism and literary symbolism are mutually exclusive concepts. Although

symbolism is a specific artistic and stylistic device, its presentation in a visual mode is entirely different to its occurence in a literary form. Film symbolism communicates and is received visually. My opening chapter will also include a discussion of the critical theory of the science of signs - Semiotics, and will focus upon the application of this theory to the study of film. Finally, I will discuss the concept of film style, showing how it differs from literary style, and how it is manifested in particular films.

I have chosen to use the Musical Film Genre as a specific category for study and analysis, and therefore I shall spend some time outlining the various approaches to this popular culture mode. Despite it being a part of the commercial film industry and falling within the boundaries of popular culture the musical is a densely structured form, often complex and strictly limited by its adherence to generic formulae and conventions. It provides a valuable teaching example because of the abundance of complex thematic structures, the many and varied visual metaphors, striking symbolism and vivid artistry. The musical is one of the most neglected of film categories and the disinterest and indifference of many critics is to a large degree unjustified.

Until recently most serious literary and film critics have tended to ignore or disregard the prolific output of films made during Hollywood's 'Golden Era'. These films have on the whole been dismissed as escapist and therefore unworthy of serious attention. The enormous impact of Hollywood films upon the American cinema-going public has borne little relationship to a lack of critical appraisal. Because film-makers catered for a mass audience in a mass market, genre films and especially musicals, have been downgraded to popular culture. Critics are inclined to view what 'the masses' find entertaining with a measure of contempt, and consequently few attempts have been made to analyse these films seriously.

Yet there have been some critics, particularly in recent years, who have sensed that there is often more to a genre film than a hackneyed plot and a few stereotyped performers. There was a growing realisation that beneath the glossy exterior, presented in these films, lurked a deeper meaning, structure and complexity. What happened as a result of this was that the critics attempted to analyse the genre film within the various frameworks of accepted critical approaches and film theories. These methods are often inappropriate for what is essentially a popular culture medium, but it is interesting to follow the various thrusts into which critical endeavour was channelled and note the discourse which the critics used to examine genre film.

As stated above, the musical film has never enjoyed a reputation for being fine cinema and the most common criticism levelled at it is that it is escapism. Escapism in turn clothes a wide variety of adjectives used to describe the musical, among the most often used:- frivolous, unintelligent, glossy, shallow, irresponsible, vacuous, meaningless... The importance and value of musicals and indeed all popular culture is believed to be nothing more than what they offer the audience in terms of a few hours pleasure and the chance to escape from the mundane routines of their daily lives, in the darkness of the movie theatre. If there is any value in musicals then it is in their ability to provide the audience with something to sing and dance about. Roy Paul Madsen, echoing the views of many others like him, wrote:

> "Although escapism can be used to justify anything, the thin stories and the miniscule messages of the average musical make it clear that the only reason it thrives during days of ordeal is that it offers the national audience collective pleasure, relaxation and escapism. Film and television musicals really find their social value, if they need one, in giving the viewer something to sing about and in providing a respite from continual confrontation with "The Problems".

When one notes the amount of musicals that were produced during the years of the Great Depression and considers how

popular they were, and adds to that the musicals of the war years (1st and 2nd) the escapist argument appears logical. But it is incomplete and shows a lack of understanding about the nature of popular culture. Although it is escapist in many senses, that is not its only function, and it does not negate its validity as art.

In his book Film as Film (1972) Victor Perkins successfully debunked the traditional and orthodox theory of film.[6] He showed that it was structured upon dogma and prejudice:

> "formulated under the guise of an aesthetics of taste and personal response which rested on considerations of social status: the status and prestige of the Cinema as an Art and therefore, by implication, the status and prestige of the film journalist-critic."[7]

During the late 1950's film theory and criticism polarised around two dominant approaches regarding Genre film. Firstly the established orthodox theory which clung to the notion of cinema as a 'High Art' form, and the new theory which challenged the authority of the 'film culture establishment'. This new thought did away with the idea of an individual approach to an individual text and brought a new phenomenon into focus - genre theory. Critics began to talk about a class of texts and a discourse of 'popular culture'. Films were no longer regarded only as individual texts but as part of a total sociological structure called mass culture. And because these films were placed into the context of a group films and texts, critical analysis could focus upon their function as one of a category.

Following the recognition that there was a definite class of texts under the label of genre films, the French Structuralists' methodology provided an important framework against which the body of Hollywood film could be analysed. In the early 1960's Truaffaut, Chabrol and others writing for the influential European magazine Cahier du Cinema set out to uncover the deep sociological structures at the foundation of the genre film industry.[8] Their critical thrust was based upon the premise that all art is necessarily rooted in its social structure and therefore to understand art the critic must isolate and

probing in this direction the question of the director's (auteur) relationship with his text (film) was raised and once again the orthodox film establishment and the new theorists were at loggerheads. At first the establishment maintained that in the Hollywood commercial filmmaking industry there could be no place for an individual's artistic vision. Any artistic impression which the director might try would automatically be crushed by the ruling commercial ideology which allows no room for experimentation and deviation from proven box office formulae. Hollywood film-making emphasises the marketability of its products and not the vision of its creators. However, the evidence against this argument mounted up and the critics had to admit that directors of the calibre of John Ford, Reuben Mamoulian, Alfred Hitchcock and Vincente Minnelli made a very strong personal mark upon their films. It became obvious that each film bore the indelible stamp of its auteur, despite or often because of the structure of genre film, and the Hollywood filmmaking machine. The orthodox theorists accounted for this by admitting that even in a mass appeal cinema there was a place for the individual artist to flourish. The last section, drawing upon structuralist methodology derived from linguistics and anthropology, maintained that the deep rooted structures and systems in society which led to the manifestation of a popular culture, were directly responsible for the director's vision and his resulting artwork.

These two approaches to genre film and how the auteur principle operates in this category continued to coexist however uneasily. The orthodox believed that they had solved the problem of the auteur relationship and accepted that there was room for individual artistry within the mass-culture mode. They found no difficulty accepting also, that an artist could inhabit a 'non-artistic' or people's medium such as genre film and flourish even within the strict limitations of the Hollywood film industry. While this

restored the reputations of Hollywood's leading directors and performers it held no method for regarding their films as equally artistic. This argument is difficult to accept as the structure of the genre and the vision of the auteur are necessarily interrelated. Vincente Minnelli's musicals are a combination of the structuring principles of the musical genre and his own personal signature of artistry. His works are successful not despite the genre, but because of it, he builds each film around a complex set of structures which constitute the narrative core of the musical.

For their part, the structuralists sought to draw the critical emphasis away from the individual texts and authors and examine the broader structures of popular culture and its product: genre film. Hence the theory of genre film became absorbed into the mainstream of semio-structuralist activity and the vital issues raised and considered were how the genre operates as a structure, how it is organised and regulated, and how individual texts signify in terms of their own internal cohesion and as part of a broader generic system.

An important result of this critical activity was to focus upon the concept of a popular culture and show how it reflected the prevailing social attitudes of the period. Musical films, which are probably one of the most well-received but often strongly criticised of the popular culture genres, manifest an interesting and telling array of social attitudes and values. Class, ethnicity, dominant attitudes towards women and other matters of social and cultural importance were reflected as part of the genre's underlying structure and ideology. They were not overtly drawn attention to, or isolated for audience attention i.e. as a message, merely offered as part of the narrative discourse. A director rarely uses the musical as a vehicle to evoke audience response about a sensitive issue, or question deeply entrenched social structures, but simply

exposed and gave vent to attitudes already prevalent or accepted in society. The musical reinforces society's myths.

The works of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, two of the most prolific and successful writers (both in the artistic sense and at the box office) illuminate how a popular culture medium reflects society's underlying mythologies.

Carousel (1956) was based upon Ferenc Molnar's Liliom (1909) which dealt with man's ethical quest to be honest, and his corresponding struggle against poverty. Rodgers and Hammerstein, used this dilemma as a basis for Carousel which reflected America's widespread poverty and unemployment. The hero, Billy Bigelow, is a proud unemployed Carousel barker who desperately tries to support his family. When he fails, he is driven to crime and persuaded to join his unsavoury friend Jigger in a robbery. It fails and Billy falls on his knife trying to escape capture. Fifteen years later he returns to earth to give his posthumous daughter a guiding star. Carousel is a film about a man's pride in the face of difficulty. Billy is like many American's trying to come to grips with a hostile environment and failing. But even against these overwhelming odds Rodgers ends the film in the spirit of hope and optimism captured in the myth of the Great American Dream. "You'll never walk alone" inspires one to believe that success will come in the end:

> "When you walk through a storm hold your head up high
> and don't be afraid of the dark
> At the end of the storm is a golden land
> And the sweet gentle song of a lark...
> Walk on walk on with hope in your heart
> and you'll never walk alone
> you'll never walk alone."

In The King and I (1956) Rodgers and Hammerstein created an Oriental King with a huge family and an obnoxious disposition. The European governess, who he employs to educate his children according to Western practices, is obliged to grovel before him in humble subservience. Coming as it did only ten

years after Pearl Harbour was attacked, and in the wake of an influx of Oriental immigrants, The King and I unconciously reflected a certain amount of xenophobic panic. American society was understandably suspicious of this yellow, alien people whose language was unfathomable and whose culture an enigma. Perhaps the final revelation of the King of Siam as a benevolent man who inspires sympathy and respect, and the delightful musical sequence "March of the Siamese children" would have helped to alleviate some of the American fear of these "heathen Chinese".

Although South Pacific, (1958) is a more overtly serious musical, dealing quite specifically with racial intermarriage and entrenched prejudice and social attitudes, the film effectively blocked the complexities of these issues reaching the audience. The frivolous treatment of integration and racial harmony on this tropical South Pacific island paradise, and the fact that the ominous threat of war was only referred to in fleeting moments tended to smother the harsh content contained in the film. In the attempt to avoid a very serious issue this film was rendered hollow and insignificant.

One of the reasons for the success of The Sound of Music (1965), is that it has all the joy and exuberance of a typical musical genre film, but beyond its initial impact as entertainment there are other deeper layers of signification. As well as dealing with fantasy and emotions and revolving around the inevitable love story, it focuses upon the darker subject of extremism (framed as Nazism) and the effects of dogma upon youth and innocence. It reflects society's fear of extremism whichever way it is inspired and provides an outlet for this feeling.

Bob Fosse's Cabaret used the same subject matter but presented it in a far more extreme and terrifying way. Violence and aggression become recurring motifs in this horrifying picture of wartorn Berlin and its confused hedonistic heroine. Cabaret reveals as much about the social climate of the 1970's

as it does about wartime Germany. Easily palatable love stories are no longer part of the necessary generic formula.

The problem with critical analyses of this sort, is that once a reflection of the wider social structure is isolated and discussed, further examination of the film ceases. This implies that the only function of the musical genre has been to reflect the times in which they were made, and in some cases hide the grim truth from their audiences and pretend that events like the Depression simply did not exist. One of my aims in this dissertation is to propose a method for analysing the internal structure of the musical film. To go as Stanley Solomon says "Beyond Formula", and discover what constitutes the cohesive structure of the individual film, and how individual films make up a narrative generic system. The musical is a complex, structured narrative system in which the form is foregrounded. In natural discourse one's communication is usually verbal, reinforced, complemented or contradicted by a visual aspect, perhaps a facial expression, gesture or pose. Music is a stylised form of communication which consciously foregrounds itself and imparts its meaning through the mediating structure of music. So musical films automatically lend themselves to an analysis which considers the formal qualities and coding procedures that are so vitally important. In other words an analysis of the discourse. To understand how a musical film signifies, one must decode its subtext and isolate its complex structures and formulae. For although this is a popular culture medium, it is a difficult one to understand and deconstruct.

The audience of a musical film is prepared to accept that song and dance are used as part of the 'natural discourse' of the performers. That is one of the features of the genre which is tacitly acknowledged by the viewer but would be inappropriate for a 'Western' film or another genre. This stylisation of performance serves the dual function of

defamiliarising the action and simultaneously alienating the audience who are obliged to view the events on the screen, from a distance, through the mediating language of music. So the audience cannot identify with the action or become submerged in it. In principle this alienating effect is a Brechtian concept outlined in A Short Organum for the Theatre which is based upon the Marxist dialectic of thesis, antithesis:synthesis.[10] Brecht's own alienating techniques - songs, placards and stylised acting methods drew the audiences attentions away from the character onto the aspect of performance. His reason for this was to allow the audience to make a choice based upon his intellectual response rather than out of a sympath or empathy with the character on stage. In Beyond Formula, Stanley Solomon cites Bob Fosse's film Cabaret as an example showing Brechtian framing devices, and using songs to comment on the narrative.[11] The musical sequences at the Kit Kat Klub provide insights into Nazi extremism and wartime Berlin by presenting grotesque caricatures of real people, indulging in apparently humorous situations which become uncontrollable and finally collapse into violent fighting.

Musical Genre films are not simply escapist entertainment, although they can fulfil that function. What is needed, in an approach to the Musical film, is a method which takes the specific characteristics of the musical film into consideration. The function of any critical endeavour should be to provoke analysis and hence understanding of a work, and the function of any critical approach is to provide the most suitable framework within which discourse can naturally flow. An important factor to consider is the extent to which the approach is appropriate to the form i.e. whether it takes account of the specific characteristics and properties of that form.

The Genre approach to criticism and analysis of Hollywood film has enjoyed renewed support in recent years. From its

early beginnings when the French structuralists began to talk about classes of texts, and there were loose references to various genres, musicals, westerns, thrillers and so on, it has now emerged as a fully fledged intelligent critical methodology. One of its vital characteristics is that it accepts that Hollywood films fall into certain publicly recognised, accepted generic categories and that individual films must be analysed according to the essential formulae and conventions of the whole generic system. The theory of genre criticism will be discussed at length in Chapter 3 but it is necessary to make a few points about it here. Firstly, it accepts that genre films have to be commercially viable and their formulae will be repeatedly exploited as long as it is profitable for the studio moguls to do so. Furthermore it admits that the proven formulae are necessary to the intrinsic structure of any genre and maintains that it is not in spite of, but because of the limitations of genre that some of their finest films have been successful. And finally a generic category is defined by public consensus. Audiences recognise a recurrent narrative structure and name it according to general opinion which usually describes the content - a western, a musical, a gangster or a crime film.

So an artist who works within the limitations of the genre film, whether he is a filmmaker or a performer is most successful if he can use the conventions and formulae in an original and exciting way to give the audience new insights into an old subject. He must provide striking visual images which reinforce the underlying structure of the genre. Fred Astaire's elegance and spontaneity give his films a keen freshness and artistry. Each time he is poised to dance the frame is charged with anticipation, and with each new step he never disappoints his audience. Similarly Vincente Minnelli's brilliant sense of mise-en-scene never exhausts itself. It is always rich, constantly changing and by turns controlled, elegant, brash, opulent, impressionistic and always successful. John Ford's striking visual symbol of the

cactus flower is drawn from the thematic structure of the genre and illustrates his capacity to choose the most appropriate and unlikely image. In The Man who Shot Liberty Valance the cactus flower is indicitive of Hally's personality, a woman in the wilderness who creates the only protection she can against a harsh and hostile environment.

The Genre approach is the most logical method to use when discussing musical films because it recognises the need to isolate formulae and structuring principles making up generic systems. Within the framework of genre criticism I have devised a binary opposition model which can be used to analyse the thematic structure of the musical film. It is a structuralist model and incorporates some of the basic principles of structuralism, which are used as part of a methodology within the broad category of genre criticism. It is structuralist in that it accepts Claude Levi-Strauss's premise that the human mind classifies the world by forming a series of binary oppositions which describe the world and the relationships of objects to one another, like "hot/cold" or "raw/cooked". Levi-Strauss maintained that this classification process is inherent in the human mind sought to prove it by studying non-literate societies. Furthermore the structuralist's analysis of reality and Roland Barthes deconstruction of codes of realism, as well as his examination of society's perpetuation of mythological systems have proved of vital importance to this work.

The musical film does lend itself to an analysis of this sort particularly as binary oppositions like reality/fantasy and romantic conflict are at the core of the genre and form part of its narrative structure. Jim Kitzes has done a similar analysis of the thematic structure of the Western genre in Horizons West, and shows that it is a genre which manifests conflict between two opposing environments (ideologies) the East and the West. [13] In Chapter 4 I shall discuss this model in detail and offer the one which I have devised, showing how it can be applied to a study of the musical film.

The binary opposition model of the musical film is to be used as a method for critical analysis and I believe that it is valuable because it considers the vital aspects of the genre and isolates its central themes and conflicts. In this respect it is helpful for the teaching of film, as it provides an appropriate method for deconstructing one specific category of film - the genre musical. To return to one of the points made at the beginning of this introduction, a critical method should be drawn from the subject it wishes to analyse, taking into consideration that subject's fundamental characteristics and dominant narrative patterns. The aim of my dissertation is to examine the musical film genre:

1) as film,
2) as genre, and
3) as a musical

in order to present an example of how film should be taught and studied. To examine the musical as film one must understand the concept of film symbolism, film metaphor, style in film and film semiotics. These are all considered in Chapter 1. Understanding how the musical functions as a Genre is analysed in Chapter 2. Here I consider the nature of genre and explain how it operates as a definite narrative structure. I will deconstruct this narrative structure into its various components and use the musical as an example to show how generic formulae are manifested. In chapter 3 I will deal specifically with the musical film as a musical and analyse its structures and oppositions according to the structuralist binary opposition model. Finally in Chapter 4, 5, 6 and 7, I will deconstruct four important film musicals using the model as a guide. The purpose of these four analyses will be to show practically how films can be studied in order to gain the maximum understanding of their content.

I am aware that in secondary schools time limitations make it very difficult to study films in their entirety. However it is possible to teach one film in the course of the

term by breaking it down into ten or twelve manageable sequences. That way a film could be incorporated as a "set-work" within the school curriculum. I have provided a theoretical framework within which to study film. Whether at secondary school level or in a higher education institution it can be adapted to meet the needs of specific pupils.

For my examples I have drawn upon musical films from 1930 - 1970 and have isolated a f / specifically for critical attention. The most important ones are those made by the R.K.O. Radio Film Studio, starring the song and dance partnership of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, those produced by the Arthur Freed unit of Metro Goldwyn Mayer (M.G.M.) during Hollywood's 'Golden Era' of musicals (1940 - 1960); particularly the films directed by Vincente Minnelli.

NOTES

1. Grové, J.H.M. The Teaching and Practice of Film Study Secondary School level pg 4

2. ibid. pg 12 These figures are results of a survey conducted by the Transvaal Education Department during 1978, involving 4 000 pupils at six schools.

3. ibid. pg 3 Grové quotes information from the latest U.K. research figures, and figures published in 1976 by C.B.S. in the United States.

4. Bluestone, George Novels into Film pg 1

5. Madsen, R.P. The Impact of Film : How Ideas are Communicated Through Cinema and Television pg 308

6. Perkins, Victor Film As Film pg 11

7. Neale, Stephen Genre pg 1

8. Cahier du Cinema, founded and edited by Andre Bazin, became an influential film journal both in France and abroad. During the mid-1950's it popularised the concept of Auteur criticism, first put forward by Francois Truffaut.

9. Solomon, Stanley Beyond Formula : American Film Genres pg v

10. Brecht, Bertoldt A Short Organum for the Theatre para. 45 - 47

11. Solomon, Stanley Beyond Formula : American Film Genres pg 106

12. Levi-Strauss, Claude The Savage Mind pg 263

13. Kitzes, Jim Horizons West pg 11

CHAPTER 1

TEACHING LITERATURE AND FILM : A COMPARATIVE STUDY

1.1 Semiotics : Signs and Semantic Systems

The theory of semiotics, the "science of signs" is a product of this century, rooted both in America and in Europe. Its two founders worked simultaneously, but individually, on their respective continents. What emerged as a result of that independent thinking were two critical disciplines which were fundamentally the same. C.S. Peirce, the American, named his theory semiotics, while the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure the term semiology, which remains the European preferen. In essence though, their theoretical principles are the same and involve the study of signs and sign systems in society. Both semiology and semiotics aim to deconstruct these systems, with a view to understanding their meaning and function.

During the 1920's de Saussure proposed a science which studied the life of signs in society and focused upon two issues i) what they are made of and ii) what laws govern their behaviour. [1] At the same time, Peirce was formulating his theory which would: i) Observe the different forms of social behaviour with special reference to society's rituals, ceremonies and greetings. ii) Analyse the semantic systems which are prevalent in art and literature and iii) Decode the non-linguistic signals which abound in the world outside of human behaviour, for example in the field of zoo-semiotics, cybernetics and bionics. [2]

Whether one chooses to use the American or European terminology is unimportant, because Peirce and de Saussure were moving in the same direction, and both would agree, along with the later Structuralists, that there is no universal realism or singularity of meaning of perception. Any act of communication,

whether linguistic or non-linguistic, functions as a sign within the larger semantic system, and is acted upon by several mediators of meaning. For instance verbal signs which exist within the larger structure of human language, have no one definitive meaning but are affected by the way in which the transmitter encodes them, and the receiver interprets them. The fallacy of an innocent eye is revealed in Nelson Goodman's now classic statement:

> "There is no innocent eye, the eye always comes ancient to the world" [3]

what Goodman is emphasizing here is the artificiality of language, thus dispelling all notions of an objective reality. We bring out past to bear upon our interpretation of the present, which comes to us through visual and verbal signs.

The inevitable question which arises in any discussion of the theory of semiotics is: "what is a sign?" Quite simply, a sign is a stimulus, or a perceptible substance which evokes a particular response. A photograph, or a 'shot' in a film is the first stimulus or sign. This sign evokes a mental image resulting in the second stimulus. Thus the first stimulus evokes the second stimulus with the view to communication. A sign must have an inherent intention to communicate albeit conscious or unconscious. Blushing is an unconscious sign which signals the embarrassment of the blusher, but smoke is not a sign of fire as there is no conscious or unconscious intention involved. Various sign systems include medical semiology in which the diagnosis and treatment of illness is conducted as a result of interpreting the signs which have manifested themselves in the human body as symptoms of the illness, and Mythology and Folklore which are semantic systems in which the various signs are made to mean and mean again in the narrative structure.

Saussure's concept of language as a mediating structure, resulted in the formulation of an entirely new linguistic model. [4] Through this model, language could be treated as

a self-contained, autonomous system, in which meaning is produced as a consequence of the internal relationships between the linguistic signs within that system. Saussure makes a distinction between the actual use of language, parole, and the system which underlies it, langue. The relationship between these two is essentially the difference between language (langue) the greater system of rules and codes making up the structure of language and speech (parole) which is the actual use which people make of that system. Without langue we could not logically say anything meaningful as meaning is only transmitted in terms of the understanding which one has of the underlying system of language. Conversely, langue is only meaningful when it is related to the actual process of communication. Likewise, any human game which is governed by the rules and codes of its playing, for example tennis, is only meaningful while there are people participating in the game.

Langue is a sign system, and de Saussure elaborates upon the nature of signs by saying that every sign is made up of two parts. It is the result of the relationship between its signifier and its signified.[6] Basically, this is the difference between form and content. The signifier (form) is the sound image, not the material sound, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes upon one's senses. The signified (content) is the concept. So the sound image 'dog', and the concept 'dog' when added together form a linguistic sign which means a four-legged, furry animal. Language, is composed of an infinite number of linguistic signs.

The relationship between the signifier and its signified is governed by convention, to a greater or lesser degree. Language is a construct in which there is an arbitrary relationship between the sound image (signifier) and the concept (signified).[7] The word 'd o g' is not the thing itself, a small four-legged furry creature, it is only a representation of it, which we experience through the

mediating structure of language. So the word dog is an unmotivated sign which, by conventional practice, means the thing it refers to. The opposite to this, a motivated sign, has a definite relationship to the thing it represents. Hence the common roadsign:



indicates that a slippery road surface could mean dangerous conditions for the motorist. Its message is quite clear: 'Caution! The road could be wet and slippery', and is motivated by a need to communicate possible danger. The roadsign is a direct, pictorial representation of the situation, a car skidding on a wet road surface, and functions as a warning to other road users.

Motivated and unmotivated signs are also distinguished by the way in which they communicate meaning, and are either implicit or explicit signs. A conventional sign in Chemistry is to use H O as a reference to water, it is an unmotivated, implicit sign that is only understandable to those who use the language of Chemistry, all of whom must tacitly agree to its meaning. But most people recognise a picture of a tap dripping as a sign of water, thus the sign is motivated and explicit.

A distinction must be made between the different types of signs which communicate in sign systems. Peirce defines a sign as:

1) Something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity.
2) Anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object)
3) It stands for something to somebody (its interpretant)

4. It stands for something to somebody in some respect (this respect is called its ground)

and goes on to talk about a triad of signs which signify predominantly in one of three ways, according to the relationship between the sign, and the object to which it refers i.e. the relationship between its signifier and its signified. Signs either exist in the iconic, indexical or symbolic mode.

Iconic Signs

In an icon the relationship between the sign and the object which it represents is one of resemblance. It is a direct relationship in which the receiver of the sign impulse can recognise and identify that sign because of a definite likeness to its subject. The signified has an iconic relationship to its signifier. A photograph is an iconic sign as it directly resembles the object to which it refers (its signifier). Similarly, the relationship between a reflection in a mirror and the object which it reflects is in the iconic mode.

Indexical Signs

An index usually implies that the relationship between the object and the sign (signifier/signified) is one which is causal, and the relationship is actual and definite. Smoke is an indexical sign as it suggests the possibility of fire. The sound of a telephone ringing is also indexical as it signals someone's desire to communicate. A weathercock is an index of the wind's direction, and a knock on the door is an index that someone is outside wishing to enter. Most metonymic and synechdocal signs are indexical, as they use a part to suggest the whole. A crown is an indexical sign signalling royalty.

Symbolic Signs

Signs which are in the symbolic mode are characterised by an arbitrary relationship between the signifier and its signified

It requires active participation on the part of the interpreter to inject meaning or significance to that sign. Saussure's linguistic model implies that the relationship between icons and the objects to which they refer, is in the symbolic mode since the relationship between the two is arbitrary and the receiver of the linguistic sign interprets it in terms of the relative structure of language.

Signs do not always belong to one of these three groups but can involve all of the signifier/signified relationships to a greater or lesser degree. Usually though, one relationship is dominant, and determines how the sign functions. A traffic light (sign) is predominantly indexical, causing traffic to continue or stop, and according to which light is showing will signify danger or safety to the motorist. Red and green lights also function symbolically, because of their colour signification. Red implies danger in our society, while green, by popular consensus, implies safety.[10]

In the 'real' world, there is a connection between icons and indexes and the objects which they represent. Linguistic signs have no such connection as they function symbolically and the relationship between their signifiers and signifieds is arbitrary. A linguistic sign only has meaning because of the agreement of its users, not by a natural relationship to the object which it signifies. Language has an internal logic, structured to convey meaning. The rules of language are autonomous. Langue is a self-contained structure. The meaning of a sign depends upon its connection to other signs within the system, and only has meaning in terms of the difference with other signs constituting the same semantic system. Langue is a sign system in which the individual sign only signifies by virtue of its relationship to the other signs in the system. Parole, or the speech act, has other constraints which influence meaning, and other semiotic systems may be brought to bear upon the act of communication, whether by the transmitter or receiver of the message, like culture, individuality or religion.

Within a semiotic system, signs exist either in a syntagmatic or paradigmatic relationship to each other.[11] These relationships determine the internal rules of the system. The paradigmatic or vertical axis shows the alternatives from which one can choose. They involve all the possible or absent units in a relationship which could have been used to signify a message. The syntagmatic organising of signs, or the combinative horizontal axis show how the signs are arranged in order to create meaning. By rearranging these signs the meaning will change, either minimally or drastically. So if we take an ordinary sentence: 'The dog chased the cat', which is made up of various linguistic signs in a certain relationship, the paradigmatic of associative/selective/synchronic axis consists of all the possible nouns, verbs, adverbs, from which one chooses in order to complete a speech act. In place of dog one could have chosen 'Boxer', 'Alsatian', 'Doberman', 'canine' or 'hound'. 'Ran after', 'looked at' or 'followed' could have substituted 'chased', and 'feline', 'Siamese', 'pussy' or 'moggy' might have sufficed for 'cat'. Once a choice is made from the range of possibilities, meaning becomes more definite and the act of communication is likely to be successful. Thus the syntagmatic or combinative/diachronic axis determines how a sign is used. Its place in a sentence narrows the meaning which a combination of signs will have. If one attempted to change the order of the words, their combined meaning would be altered, 'The cat chased the dog', or even destroyed, 'Cat the dog the chased'.

So far, this discussion of semiotics has only considered language as a sign system, and the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and signified of a linguistic sign. Applying semiotics to other disciplines, it becomes apparent that each discipline is a sign system which is organised according to the relationship of its individual signs to each other and the system as a whole. The relationship of these signs within the system constitutes meaning. Semiotics can be

successfully used in the study and analysis of film or literature, and involves the deconstruction of a specific literary or film text in order to isolate its organizing principles and its individual signs, with a view to revealing the inherent meanings of that text. Semiotics considers film in terms of the relationships between signs, and how they signify in a text. It emphasizes the relationship between the user of the sign (i.e. the filmmaker) who encodes information into a sign so that it signifies in a certain way, and the reader of the sign, who interprets it against its context, and according to his own personal, culturally predetermined, background. Signs are afforded signification by the viewer and the filmmaker. They have no meaning in themselves, they only exist in terms of the greater system to which they belong.

Roland Barthes, one of the leading interpreters of de Saussure's theory of semiotics, uses the example of how a bunch of roses can be framed in order to signify passion. [12] In this context a bunch of roses is the signifier, while passion is the signified. The associative total of the signifier and signified, produces the sign which is a totally new entity - the bunch of roses as a sign. Once a bunch of roses functions as a sign, it ceases to function as a simple bunch of roses - the horticultural object. When it is a sign, it is filled with signification and manifests the intent of the person who wished to communicate that a bunch of roses is synonymous with passion. A filmmaker may use objects for a specific artistic end, by encoding them with information, making them signify in a certain way, or framing them in a new context. Cars are often used as signs of wealth and power, the car is the signifier and the characteristics wealth and power are its signified. It is an easily recognised, conventional sign in which meaning has been agreed to by public consensus.

A simple iconic relationship between the image on a screen and the object which it represents is given signification by the framing which it receives at the hand of the filmmaker. This is why the visual sign is often mistaken for the thing

itself, and why Christian Metz was prompted to isolate the trap of the visual media saying that "a film is so difficult to explain, because it is so easy to understand". [13] Its iconic relationship leads to a confusion between recognising a sign and understanding it. The secondary signification invested in a sign by the particular way in which it is framed, must be decoded and absorbed before that sign can be accepted as understood. Thus a detailed look at the semiotics of a particular text is both valuable and necessary for the complete revelation of its meaning. Film is particularly suited to this type of analysis as its visual semiotics are dense and individual texts are laden with signification. Visual signs are easy to recognise but not as easy to understand, and therefore, any teaching method incorporating the theory of semiotics as a tool for critical analysis of film, will naturally lead to the decoding of the visual signs in order to make them understandable.

The model which I have devised for analysing and teaching genre film, particularly the category of the film musical is, as I have stated, a structuralist model founded upon structuralist principles. These will be discussed at length in Chapter 3, but it is necessary at this stage to clarify the implication of using both semiotic and structuralist methods. Firstly, the two are not necessarily exclusive, fundamentally different critical approaches. In his various seminal critical works Roland Barthes has successfully combined the two. His deconstruction of Balzac's novel Sarrasine reveals how realism in literature is a constructed code. There is no innocent reader, no 'objective' text, and no definitive content forming the body of a text. [14] Any 'realistic' novel is constructed to give an impression of realism, and this is achieved in two ways. By a naturalization of the discourse, which results in the reader believing that the novel has not been contrived in any way. 'Realistic' works of this sort also display a reduced palpability of sign, in other words signs appear to be 'natural' objects, not signifiers of meaning. The work therefore purports to be

totally denotative. So structuralist principles, which state among other things that reality exists in the relationships between objects, which are ultimately more important than the objects themselves, may be formulated into a critical method which analyses man's art, which in turn reflects his experiences. Semio-structuralism, as a method of critical analysis, rests upon the presumption that all art is structured and the relationships between signs and sign systems create the meaning of an artwork. Semio-structuralist activity concentrates upon analysing two facets which make up the discourse of any narrative, its codes of signification and its conventions of meaning. Barthes explains that semio-structuralism is:

> "a mode of analysis of cultural artefacts which originates in the methods of contemporary linguistics". [15]

Although the binary opposition model of the musical genre is structuralist in concept, any analysis of the text of a musical film should also consider the semiotics of that work and actively deconstruct its visual content, focusing upon the relationships between its signifiers and its signifieds. Critical analysis of the musical film, should isolate the genre's conventions of meaning, discussing the various formulae which occur as narrative patterns, thus the individual film is explained within the context of the whole generic structure.

Various film concepts which are used in a film narrative, visual metaphor, visual symbolism and other visual signs (iconic or indexical) can all be explained in terms of their semiotic relationships. Teaching these concepts, involves learning to recognise their function as signs in a narrative form. In the example which I am using, the musical film, these signs constitute a structure which we call the musical, and this specific type of text belongs to an overall category of film, Genre. Although these films appear easy to understand, the layers of signification mount up when viewed in the context of their relationships within broader narrative structures. To teach film adequately,

we must go beyond the level of initial recognition, and foster an awareness of, and need to discuss, the underlying semantics of this visual narrative mode. It is only by doing this, that pupils will achieve an acceptable standard of visual literacy.

1.2 Comparing Literary and Film Concepts

To teach film successfully, we need a method which is media specific. Film is an autonomous art form with its own unique properties and needs to be recognised as such. A teaching method must be applicable to its discipline. Film texts are different to literary texts even if they share a common plot, each narrative mode is encoded and communicated in a mutually exclusive way. Most literature teachers in senior schools will admit that the common practice of showing a literature class the film of their setwork only reinforces the plot of a novel or dramatic work. And the plot may change subtly or significantly in the transition from one form to the other. Students have even remarked that if a film is screened, they need not read the novel, presuming that in a ninety minute period they could absorb the same amount of information as they would in a week's reading. That, too, presumes that the encoded information is the same in both media, obviously this is not so, and the differences in their production and reception will be discussed at length elsewhere. Teaching literature in this way, i.e. using film as a type of visual aid to, or replacement of, the literary text is not only confusing for the pupil, but potentially dangerous. It is confusing because it fails to discriminate between visual and literary modes. Literary devices occur differently in a visual context, metaphor on the screen cannot be equated with metaphor in novel. The former is received directly through our senses, sight and hearing, while the latter comes to us through the mediating structure of language. And it is potentially dangerous to use the narrative form to teach the other, because it reduces them both to the simplest level of meaning common to both, their plot. Even

this may alter in translation, films summarise the plot of a novel and exclude various events according to the priorities of the scriptwriter and the director. The potential danger is that the pupil will fall prey to the trap of all visual media, and confuse recognition of the visual sign with understanding it. A student may recognise the plot of a film and equate in on a one-to-one basis with his reading of the novel, but he will not grasp the literary complexities of the novel, or the visual signification of the film.

The aim of any literature teaching, must be to foster understanding of the written word whatever form it takes, novel, poetry or drama. It must also consider the unique qualities of literature as an art form, and isolate its particular stylistic and narrative devices. Likewise, the aim of teaching film, is to promote a recognition and understanding of the unique characteristics of the film medium. But it must be treated as an autonomous art form, and not an offshoot of literature. By comparing these two narrative modes and highlighting their fundamental similarities and irreconcilable differences, it will become obvious that as teaching subjects they should be kept as far apart as History and Geography.

The problem which faces anyone who attempts to part literature and film is clear. Many important literary works have provided the raw material for film scripts, and those films which have been adapted from literary sources, only a few have achieved the success of their predecessors. The reason for their failure, or only moderate success is threefold. Firstly, the audience attempts to evoke a comparison between the two and upholds the literary work as an artistic artefact. The director is not given the licence to change the novel in any way. He is expected to be true to its spirit, and any deviation is regarded as a sign of disrespect to the 'real' author. No director could hope to be successful in the face of such obvious prejudice and any attempt which he might have at matching up to the novel will inevitably fall short of

audience expectations. The audiences' visual expectations about a novel are predetermined and individually different. The second reason for the failure of so many adaptations of novels into films, is that the filmmaker tries to translate the narrative directly without considering the specific properties of the cinema. He uses literary devices where they are neither applicable nor appropriate in a film context. Many filmed novels are simply orientated around the plot. Thus a dense literary work is reduced to the most basic level of narrative discourse, and a filmmaker destroys the complexity which characterised the original. To be successful in making a film which uses a literary work as its root, the director must recreate the plot in a particularly cinematic way and encode the visual content with significance. He must afford it complexity and meaning which communicate visually or audibly. So the film, finally, is a new artwork with its own internal structure and cohesion, based upon, but not synonymous with the original novel. Finally, in many instances the director works within a popular culture medium and unlike the novelist, his work is subject to numerous constraints. The aspects of production, distribution, publicity and audience reception all act as mediators upon the individual filmmaker's work. In a popular culture mode like genre film, he is obliged to work within these limitations and adhere to generic formulae and conventions. Novels may be adapted to meet the requirements of genre and the demands of the audiences. The novel therefore enjoys the status of a 'highbrow' art form and criticism of its individual texts is based upon the aesthetics of taste and the status of the art. Films of novels are often classed as 'popular culture' and by implication unworthy of serious critical attention.

In the opening chapter of Novels into Film, George Bluestone describes the fundamental difference between literature and film as two 'ways of seeing' and quotes D.W. Griffith:

> "The task that I'm trying to achieve is above all to make you see"

and Joseph Conrad:

> "My task which I am trying to achieve is by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel - it is before all, to make you see." 16

Bluestone is emphasizing the desire by both the filmmaker and the novelist to communicate a message via their own medium to a receptive audience. Although the aim is the same, a desire to communicate, the means to achieving this end are different. Both Griffith and Conrad use the term 'see' to describe their audience reception, but it is used literally by Griffith and figuratively by Conrad. Griffith speaks of the visual image which he uses to convey his message, while Conrad uses 'seeing' to describe a mental process, one in which the reader recreates Conrad's words in his own mind and builds a mental response to those words. The reader is capable of 'hearing' Conrad's prose, as well as 'seeing' it.

The problem with Bluestone's analysis of how film communicates is that it is incomplete. He makes a formalist point by saying that film communicates visually, and the viewer physically sees the image which the filmmaker presents. This argument ignores the communicational, codified nature of film. It is not just a visual medium, information can be encoded either into the image or sound tracks.

The ways in which the reader/audience decodes the perceived message are also dependent upon the particular response demanded by the text. Literature calls for the deconstruction of its various devices: metaphors, symbolism, structure and mythology to render a complete understanding of the text. Similarly, the film audience must analyse a film text according to a specific methodology of film criticism, considering the visual semiotics and thematic structures which have been encoded into the twin channels of image and sound.

Once a novel has been translated into a film, the only similarity and basis for comparison is the story. This is

the only point of intersection and any critical discourse must accept that each text should be regarded as a separate entity. A film is therefore either successful as film i.e. it is a cohesive meaningful inherently cinematic work or it fails because it has none of these qualities. Comparing the film to the novel, and qualifying its success by stating that, "the film is true to the spirit of the book" or its failure, by remarking, "the director showed little respect for the original work" denies the existence of film as an autonomous art form. Furthermore one should accept that a film director is under no obligation to be faithful to the novel in its original form. The film theorist Bela Balazs notes that a novelist and a filmmaker can each successfully use the same raw material for their work, and even though:

> "the subject or story, of both works is identical, their content is nevertheless different. It is this different content that is adequately expressed in the changed form resulting from the adaptation." [17]

The artistic content of a work is reliant upon the use which the novelist or the filmmaker makes of his particular medium. They are not interdependent for their success. Bluestone explains the necessity for distinguishing between these two narrative modes:

> "Viewed in these terms, the complex relations between novel and film emerge in clearer outline. Like two intersecting lines, novel and film meet at a point then diverge. At the intersection, the book and the shooting script are almost indistinguishable. But where the lines diverge, they not only resist conversion, they also lose all resemblance to each other. At the furtherest remove, novel and film and all exemplary art have, within the conventions that make them comprehensible to a given audience, made maximum use of their materials. At this remove, what is particularly filmic and what is particularly novelistic cannot be converted without destroying an integral part of each. That is why Proust and Joyce would seem as absurd on film as Chaplin would in print. And that is why the great innovators of the twentieth century, in film and novel both, have had so little to do with each other, have gone their ways alone, always keeping a firm but respectful distance." [18]

and emphasizes that there are certain qualities particular to each which cannot be translated from one form to the other.

The fundamental difference between the two media is that film is iconic and literature is linguistic. Any critical analysis of either of these two modes should take this formal difference into account. Bluestone and Richardson both fall into the trap of defining film as a visual medium and literature as a conceptual one, saying that one sees a film literally and one 'sees' a novel imaginatively. But although film is iconic, its image must not only be seen, but also decoded and understood. Many complex films can be described as conceptual, (Godard's La Chinoise Renais Last Year at Marienbad for example) and require close examination and analysis of their content. It must be remembered that in film there is also a soundtrack, into which a vast account of information can be encoded. In the musical film especially, the soundtrack is vital to the structure and narrative of the film.

The novel exists in a structure of linguistic signs and literary concepts are therefore entrenched in the language which forms them. Metaphor, simile and other figures of speech are particularly novelistic and comprise figurative language. Figurative language has both latent and manifest meaning. These terms were first used by Freud to describe the difference between what is actually said (manifest meaning) and what is inferred on a secondary level of meaning (latent content). Two other crucial aspects of meaning arise in this context, denotation and connotation. The former implies literal, contextual meaning while the latter implies the figurative or latent meaning which is embedded in a novel's subtext. Figurative language is used as a device by the novelist to create a complex pattern of meaning, it is evocative and descriptive, and creates a visual image in the mind of the reader, which is subject to the mediating structure of language. Taking the following description of Gabriel Oak from the novel Far from the Madding Crowd:

> "his eyes were reduced to chinks, and diverging wrinkles appeared round them, extending upon his countenance like the rays in a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun." [iv]

it becomes apparent that each person who reads the description will create a mental image subject to his own imagination. For although Thomas Hardy's prose is characterised by its precision and attention to detail, it can never signify as exactly as a photograph can.

But this is not to say that metaphor simili and other literary devices have no place or no existence in a visual medium. Although film is iconic, it has the ability to signify both through image and soundtracks. Simple images are made to mean and mean again within the structure of the film. What must be accepted is that these concepts are necessarily different, and have undergone a subtle transformation when they occur in a visual or aural mode. In the discussion which follows, the difference in the nature and occurence of these literary and film concepts will be isolated and examined.

Metaphor

What critics and film theorists have tried to emphasize, when they state that film is a 'visual medium' or that film 'pictures' its subject, is the connection which a film has with 'reality' by virtue of its iconic resemblance to it. Rudolf Arnheim reinforces the belief that the cinema has the power to somehow capture 'reality' by holding the appearance of it, in his discussion of film metaphor. He explains:

> "Just as a grinning death's head does not in a film appear as a symbol but as an actual part of the human skeleton, so the connection between two objects shown on a film simultaneously never seems metaphorical but always at once real and ontological." [20]

André Bazin supports Arnheim in his belief that the cinema's essential characteristic is its ability to picture reality by describing the ontology of the photographic image:

> "The aesthetic qualities of photography are to be sought in its power to lay bare the realities. It is not for me to separate off, in the complex fabric of the objective world, here a reflection on a damp sidewalk, there the gesture of a child. Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled up preconceptions,

> that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love. By the power of photography, the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can know, nature at last does more than imitate art, she imitates the artist." [21]

Bazin's fundamental belief that film is most successful when it records the world, makes all discussion of film metaphor redundant. For if it is true that cinema is defined by the ontology of the visual image, then, says Bazin, the 'true vocation of the cinema' is its quest for realism. However, this theory is only coherent if one is prepared to accept Bazin's central premise that cinema must adhere to the purest notions of photographic realism. The novelist Virginia Woolf adds her opinion about what film can and should not do, by maintaining that the power of the written word to convey meaning and visual impressions has no equivalent in the cinema.

> "Even the simplest image "my love's like a red, red rose that's newly sprung in June", presents us with impressions of moisture and warmth and the flow of crimson and the softness of petals inextricably mixed and strung upon the lift of a rhythm which is itself the voice of the passion, and the hesitation of the love. All this, which is accessible to words and words alone, the cinema must avoid." [22]

Woolf is denying the validity of film as a communicational codified medium and restricting its function to the purely formal aspect. But film does not only signify in this limited way. Numerous influences, or mediators of meaning such as those of the director, scriptwriter, cameraman, actors and so on are brought to bear upon the text. The 'reality' which a film 'pictures' is always manipulated to some extent. Nevertheless, one should accept Arnheim's point that the film image is dependent upon the demands of space, and has an iconic resemblance to its subject which cannot be ignored. The photographic image of a car will always signify a car, since its signifier is so close to its signified. It can be recognised on a one-to-one basis as the actual object. However, a shot of a car can be made so signify 'wealth and power' if it is framed in a specific context, and when it ceases to function as an ordinary car the simple, iconic relationship is lost.

Since this discussion considers the concept of metaphor, an explanation of how it operates in a literary mode and the limitations of its usage, would be appropriate here. From this, it will be possible to ascertain whether metaphor can exist in a visual, aural medium, and if so, in what form, and subject to what transformations. In literature, metaphor involves substituting a figurative word for a literal one in order to make a comparison, express a likeness or reveal an analogy. Metaphor has two essential components, the analogue and the referent and works by a process of transference in which characteristics of the analogue are applied to the referent, so that the latter is described in terms of the former. The purpose of such a transference is twofold. Firstly it makes description more precise, and secondly, it imparts a complexity of meaning to the narrative. A deconstruction of the metaphoric statement 'She was a lily' reveals the following: The referent is 'she' the analogue 'a lily' and the analogy is that the woman is a lily. This is impossible in a literal sense, but in a figurative way a woman can be described in terms of a lily and the description appears appropriate in the context of literature. Metaphor is an accepted literary device. The woman 'she', has various 'lily like' characteristics. To the reader the metaphor may suggest a combination of some or all or more of these adjectives: delicate, beautiful, pure, virginal, quiet, perfect, fragile and so on. Whatever the reader perceives to be the characteristics of the lily, becomes synonymous with his conception of the woman whom the novelist creates. Yet, to each reader the description seems at once to be exact and simultaneously rich with possible meaning. Connotative meaning of the word, concept 'lily' is vast, and goes beyond pure denotation i.e. the horticultural entity described by the word 'lily'.

Metaphor is a literary construct, a semantic system in which the relationship between signifier, signified and sign, operates in a second-order semiology. An ordinary sign (iii)

the woman, which is the associative total of its signifier (the sound image i) and its signified (the concept woman ii) is framed in a new way. Its new signifier (ia) the original sign woman (iii) is framed as the signified (iia) a lily and results in a completely new sign (iiia) which is the woman as a lily. Metaphor is generally associative in principle and functions according to the paradigmatic, associative relations of language. In other words, various selections are made by the writer in order to create meaning. Instead of lily he could as easily have chosen chrysanthemum, rose, flower, or one of a host of other adjectives.

Another literary concept involving the relationship between analogue and referent is Simile, which is almost identical to metaphor save one fundamental difference. Where metaphor implies that the transference of the characteristics of the analogue to the referent have already occured, simili suggests that such a transference would be possible. A subtle change in the metaphor 'She was a lily' results in the following simile 'She was <u>like</u> a lily'. It invites the reader to make a comparison by hinting that analogue and referent are similar, not that they are synonymous.

Metonymy, like metaphor, is second-order semiological system, but is differs from the latter as it exploits the sytagmatic relations of language. Metonymy is based upon an association, or an existential link between a literal term, and its substitute, the figurative one. So a part of an object is used to refer to the whole object. Thus a name may represent an institution or object, for example "The Crown" replaces the Royal personage or the institution of Monarchy. Similarly by the metonymic expression "Pretoria" which is the seat of government. A similar concept to metonymy is synedoche, which uses the convention of replacing the whole object with just a part, without using a name. So a part of an object, refers to the whole object. Hence a group of workmen are described as 'hands' and a group of cattle as 'heads'. The syntagmatic relation which applies here, is the link between two adjacent

properties like 'The Queen' and 'the crown she wears' or 'the South African government' and 'where it presides, Pretoria' or 'heads' and 'cattle'. Thus the metonymic relationship is combinative rather than associative, which also applies in the case of synedoche.

What needs to be seen now, is whether these literary concepts exist in any way within the film medium and if so what transformations they have undergone. Is there a visual or aural equivalent to the metaphoric and metonymic systems which operate in literature?

Conventions have arisen in both the novel and film, and each individual text is decoded according to the specific narrative patterns of its medium. Because of its long history and traditional status as an artistic medium, the reader of a novel has certain preconceived ideas and expectations. Concepts like structure, symbolism and metaphor are accepted as part of the novelist's discourse and are understandable to most readers. Despite the emergence of film as a comparatively new art form, its conventions and specific patterns of meaning are fairly well-established and identifiable as part of a definite film narrative. Many filmic conventions have their roots in literature, but they have had to undergo severe mutations when transfering from one medium to another. Consequently, they do not exist in the same form and that is why an autonomous method of critical analysis is necessary for film.

Because films and novels communicate via different channels it is probably self-defeating to isolate equivalents between novelistic and filmic conventions. There are obvious parallels for instance between film editing and literary metaphor but these are only similar in concept. Sergei Eisenstein's experiments which juxtapose two images in order to create a final impression (thesis + antithesis = synthesis) is similar to D.H. Lawrence's use of flower imagery to describe his women characters. Kuleshov showed how when a shot of an

actor is juxtaposed with various shots, a bowl of soup, a bed or a fire that actor's expression signified hunger, tiredness or warmth as a result. So the shot of the soup, or bed describe the emotional condition of the actor visually. Lawrence's descriptions are given to us in language and incorporate poetic imagery. The difference between the communication processes of literature and film can be revealed with reference to Jakobsen's communication model. In the novel, the message is initiated by the novelist whose audience is the reader. Similarly a film message is conveyed by the director and a combination of other agents, the art director, cameraman, sound editor and so on, towards the viewer or group of viewers. For the message to be transmitted it requires a contact, which in the case of the novel is visual and in film, mechanical. Secondly, it should be composed according to a code. The novel uses writing, while the film is worked onto the image, and soundtracks. Finally, the message should have a context within which that message is comprehensible to both the addresser and the addressee. There must therefore be a structure which underpins the message, against which the text can be analysed and understood. In film it would be the structure of filmic convention, and in literature the narrative structure of the novel.

Both filmmaker and novelist are intent in their desire to convey non-verbal experience, and in each case they can only ever give an impression of it, never the experience itself. D.H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers reveals the novelist's quest to reveal the inner realities of his characters. His mastery of the written word and the strength of his linguistic evocations make this a novel of exceeding power and inherent beauty. It is rich with the poet's discourse, striking metaphors and vivid imagery. Through his writing he successfully conveys a subtle range of human emotions. By invoking an illusion of reality through the precision and density of his choice of words, he creates so fine an impression of how a character feels that we actually 'feel' with her:

> "the child, too, melted with her in the mixing pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon." [23]

Lawrence's description of Mrs Morel's disorientation, and her momentary loss of all sense of reality is intense in its emotional connotations. His communication of human experience although only the illusion of it, is powerful enough to assume a shocking realism. One of his characteristic traits, is the use of flower imagery to describe his various women characters. Mrs Morel is represented by white lilies:

> "She touched the big pallid flowers on their petals then shivered" [24]

cold and deathlike, Miriam by white roses:

> "She lifted her hand impulsiv[illegible]o the flowers, she went forward and touched th[illegible]n worship...ivory roses - a white virgin sce[illegible] [25]

intense, pure and self sacrificing, and Clara by chrysanthemums:

> "Clara glanced thrcugh the windows after him as he tied up the too heavy flower branches to their stakes...she wanted to shriek her helplessness." [26]

strong and sensual. This subtle use of imagery and metaphor is successful in a novel because it comes to us thrcugh a screen of language, evoking a mood and feeling for the character in the reader's imaginat.cn. The reader can actively recreate the novelist's words and choose his own, most appropriate image. whatever he believes are properties of a white rose can be extended to the character he understands as Miriam. In film it is more difficult to make these choices and comparisons and this must be accepted as a result of the ontology of the visual image. But metaphor can be made visual providing it is not foregrounded. Eisenstein's experiments in juxtaposing images are unacceptable today, as film is more sophisticated and audiences are less likely to accept a device which is so obviously literal. So although a shot of Miriam juxtaposed with a shot of white roses presumably signifies that Miriam is a white rose the sign is too strong to be successful in film. Returning to Barthes' exposition of how a code of realism works, it must be remembered that 'realistic' texts

display a reduced palpability of the sign. This concept is important here, because if a sign is to be successful it should appear natural within the structure of the discourse. Comparisons are only relevant in a visual sense if they appear within the boundaries of the frame. A film of Sons and Lovers could show Clara's sensuality and physical presence and thus reduce the need for verbal description. Film can show visually what Lawrence describes metaphorically, and in film the character Clara is dependent upon the demands of space, defined by the visual aspects of movement, gesture and dress. She also exists in the auditory channel of the soundtrack, into which a vast amount of information can be encoded. Clara's character may also be expressed in the visual signs which surround her. Chrysanthemums would function as icons, providing a subtle reflection of her character drawn from the mise-en-scene. Metapho. occuring in a film context must therefore be naturalised into the discourse.

To express non-verbal concepts like sexuality, inhibition and bitterness, the novelist creates a context in which they can be displayed. In Sons and Lovers these traits are revealed in the character's unconscious relationships with objects, and more specifically with flowers. Lawrence uses the strength of poetic description to evoke the latent meaning of these relationships, and he relies upon the reader to understand their importance. The reader in turn accepts the implications of Lawrence's use of figurative language and understands that it is a specific device common to literature. A filmmaker finds description difficult to communicate because of the iconic, photographic literalness of the visual image, but information must be encoded into the soundtrack or into the film's iconography and meaning will reveal itself. It is up to the viewer to decode the image according to the specific semantic structure of the film medium.

The literary convention, simili, is often redundant if it is

applied to film by direct translation from it literary source. In Thomas Hardy's Far from the Madding Crowd, the extraordinarily visual simili:

> "It was with some surprise that she saw Gabriel Oak's face rising like the moon behind the hedge" 27

creates a subtly comic image in the mind of the reader. One imagines Gabriel's round, blank face slowly rising inch by inch until it is in full view of the astonished Bathsheba. It would be difficult to recreate the effect which Hardy creates, cinematically. For although the director can show Gabriel's face slowly rising through the frame, it would be unlikely that any viewer would associate the image of his rising face with the appearance of the moon. Indeed it would not even be necessary to make the association as Hardy used the simili to explain Gabriel's movement in terms of something which would be familiar to his reader. Nor would it be appropriate to encode this comparison onto the soundtrack in the form of a verbal commentary. Film can show exactly how Gabriel's face appears from behind the bush and any visual or narrated reinforcement is unnecessary.

An important point can be drawn from this regarding the function of verbal description. It is only necessary for those who cannot see. We are like blind men in Hardy's world and every item, every setting, must be recreated with infinite care and attention to detail. Often the novelist uses the principle of association and what we do not know and cannot see, he explains through what is already common to our experience.

The delineation and presentation of characters in each medium reveals an important difference between the novel and film. In the novel, literary characters exist in the language which forms them and they cannot be externalised in any way. Bluestone explains that when these characters appear to us in a film the usually cannot fulfil our expectations:

> "Because language has laws of its own and literary characters are inseperable from the language which forms the, the externalisation of such characters often seems dissatisfying" 28

and adds that there is a:

> "distinction between the character that comes to us through a screen of language and one who comes to us in visual images..." [9]

Film characters are presented in a series of visual and aural images, but literary characters are subject to the reader's own perception and imagination. So when Lawrence chooses to describe Clara as a chrysanthemum, the reader takes all the associative properties implied by the concept chrysanthemums which seem to him to be appropriate and builds a mental picture of Clara. He brings his personal history to bear upon what he makes of the written word. In a film the viewer is presented with an image, reinforced by a soundtrack, and this image must be decoded to reveal its latent meaning. Clearly then, the difference between 'reading' these two narrative forms is that in film, which is a polysemic medium i.e. it communicates via the twin channels of sight and sound, the viewer deconstructs the message in order to understand it, and in the novel, which is a monosemic medium i.e. it communicates via one channel the written word, the reader deconstructs the message and recreates it in his own mind, subject to his imagination.

Providing a visual environment for the characters in a narrative comes particularly easily to the filmmaker because of the iconic nature of film. A single shot of the Wessex landscape can picture all that Hardy describes in words and more:

> "The hill was covered on its northern side by an ancient and decaying plantation of beeches, whose upper verge forms a line over the crest, fringing its arched curve against the sky, like a mane. Tonight these trees sheltered the Southern slope from the keenest blasts which smote the wood and floundered through it with a sound as of grumbling or gushed over its crowning boughs in a weakened moan... Suddenly an unexpected series of sounds began to be heard in this place up against the sky. They had clearness which was to be found nowhere in the wind, and a sequence which was to be found nowhere in nature. They were the notes of Farmer Oak's flute." [10]

Through his description, Hardy builds a picture of the Wessex

countryside which grows with each new item he adds. The process is combinative and finally results in a complex mental image. Then Hardy places his character into the context and expresses Oak's relationship with his environment stressing its familiarity and the ease with which he can slip into its inherent harmony. Film can show all of these things simultaneously and can reinforce the visual aspect by adding the sounds of the wind and the haunting clarity of Oak's music. The novel is bound by time and only by manipulating time can the novelist create a sense of space. Conversely, the formative principle in film is space and by moving from one area to another within that space the filmmaker is able to give the impression of time. Panofsky first realised that this was an essential difference between the two media and aptly referred to these processes as the dynamization of space and the spatialization of time.

Taking another example from Hardy's novel and comparing it to the equivalent scene in John Schlesinger's Far From the Madding Crowd reveals the way in which non-verbal experience can be successfully translated from one medium to another. Boldwood, a wealthy farmer from the Weatherbury district has received a Valentine from Bathsheba, his neighbour, and the event is causing him considerable mental anguish. Hardy describes him as a man whose passions run so deep that keeping a calm exterior is the only way he can keep his emotions in check. He must maintain his composure at all costs and stifle any strong feeling lest it overpowers him. Boldwood exists in a state of perfect equilibrium - a balance of emotions so tenuous that any upset has the potential to render him insane:

> "His equilibrium disturbed he was in extreme all at once. If an emotion possessed him at all, it ruled him, a feeling not mastering him was entirely latent. Stagnant or rapid, it was never slow. He was either hit mortally or he was missed." [5]

Schlesinger's direction of the dining room scene expresses all Boldwood's inner turmoil in a particularly successful and

cinematic way. Boldwood, (Peter Finch), is seated alone at a large ornate table. He eats slowly, silently and methodically. By his side are two highly strung Doberman Pincers who occasionally twitch and whine, affected by some imaginary disturbance, then lie still but constantly alert. Their quietness is charged with a nervous energy and they lie poised, presumably waiting for something. Throughout the meal the camera cuts to the clock on the mantlepiece next to the Valentine which has provoked this tension, and we watch as the pendulum swings back and forth, and we listen to the loud ticking which assumes a deafening presence marking the time passing and controlling the room and its inhabitants. Bathsheba's card stands as a threat to Boldwood's exterior calm, like an intruder it has the capacity to destroy him. Everything in the room is charged with its presence and only the dull regularity of the clock ticking can maintain the order in Boldwood's mind. Visually and aurally this scene is remarkable in its power, conveying the subtlties of human emotion in a vivid way. Contrary to the opinion of Virginia Woolf, poetic imagery is not accessible "to words and words alone". Cinema has the means and the strength to go beyond the purely iconic.

It is difficult to convey thought visually, since abstract concepts are defined by the lack of them in the visible world. The novelist has the conventions of figurative language and metaphor at his disposal so he can describe thought and convey the impression of emotion. He discourses about what a character is feeling and reads that character's thoughts, recreating them in a linguistic mode so that they are accessible to the reader. Film achieves the same end by the arrangement of objects in space and the signification which is afforded to these objects by the director. They function as signs and thought can be inferred by the spatial arrangement of these signs. Thus we can infer Boldwood's thoughts by decoding his surroundings, the latent content of the image. The clock on the mantle signals his disturbance and inner tension. Likewise the twitching, whining dogs

reflect their master's emotional turmoil. These signs are indexical, there is a cause and effect relationship between the signifier and the signified. Inner thought can also be encoded into the soundtrack, as a voice-over narration, but this is a description of thought, which all manifestations of abstract concepts must be.

Other devices which the filmmaker can use to describe non-verbal concepts are editing and iconography. Iconography is the body of knowledge about a visual subject, and icons are visual signs which are invested with meaning. In film they occur as part of the environment, or as extensions of the character and are used to describe that character or setting. Boldwood's clock in Far from the Madding Crowd functions as an icon, assuming a second-order significance. Clearly Gabriel Oak's sheepskin jacket and shepherds crook are also icons. Their first-order significations are as visual representations of his occupation and their second-order semiology is as a reflection of his character, strong, rustic and pastoral. Like Lawrence's use of flower imagery to describe his women characters, Schlesinger's iconography reflects the intrinsic character of his men. Boldwood is a ticking clock, Oak a strong crook, and Sargeant Troy a glistening sword. Where Lawrence made his comparisons by using conventional literary devices, Schlesinger has to show his visually. Once again, the necessity to naturalise the discourse is being emphasized here. Troy uses his sword as an extension of himself, to mime an assault on Bathsheba. It is expressive of his nature, and signifies that he is as bright and lethal as the sword.

Editing is one of the filmmaker's most powerful stylistic devices and can be used to imply the same information which the novelist couches in metaphor and figurative language. Hardy explains the difference between Bathsheba's relationships with Troy and Boldwood by narrating the encounters with each and revealing her thoughts to the reader afterwards. Schlesinger implies these differences by juxtaposing these

scenes and encoding their content with significant visual information. For instance, the style of dress and the way Bathsheba wears her hair on these occasions reflects her feelings for them both. With Boldwood she is dressed in a tight riding habit and her hair is tied, while with Troy she only wears a white cotton shift and her hair is loose. Editing these scenes to evoke a comparison between them, foregrounds the differences between the two men and their relationship with the women in a strictly visual way.

The conclusion which becomes evident from this, is that metaphor is possible in film, but it is necessarily different, both in where it occurs and in appropriate and how it communicates. In exchange this difference in between the filmmaker's necessity to show a subject, and the novelist's necessity to describe one. In film, the subject is attached to its spatial image, whereas in the novel that subject is created in the mind of the reader, from the description of language. The problem which the filmmaker faces is that often the audience does not recognise an object as a sign. Manifest meanings are so obvious in a visual sign that the latent content can be ignored. Because of film's photographic literalness many fall prey to the trap of the visual media where recognition becomes synonymous with understanding. But as Barthes pointed out, it is only an impression of reality which we are presented with in film, and it is always subject to someone's mediating influence. Although in many films the discourse appears natural, and we can match up the details of the narrative on a one-to-one basis with our own experience, a deeper probe into the visual content of a film will isolate many of its latent meanings. Visual signs are the equivalent of literary metaphors, and arise naturally from the setting. It must be remembered also that film is a polysemic medium and therefore metaphor and verbal description can be included on the soundtrack. However it is up to the filmmaker to decide whether or not it would be appropriate to include certain information in this way. It is certainly not, when the visual image is capable of conveying the same information and the soundtrack only repeats it. Sound should complement

and reinforce the visual narrative. Film metaphor can therefore communicate in two ways, visually and aurally. Thus the understanding, and consequently the teaching of this concept must be based upon an awareness that it is autonomous to the film medium, and is an integral part of the structure of cinematic semantics.

Symbolism

According to Peirce's definition, a symbol is a sign in which there is no necessary or intrinsic relationship between the signifier and its signified. The relationship is arbitrary and depends to a large extent upon the process of institutionalisation which affects an ordinary sign. For instance the colour red is suggestive of passion, danger or anger depending upon the context in which it occurs. Culturally determined symbols have permeated our society and are accepted as natural. Levi-Strauss maintains that symbolic thought is a characteristic of the human mind and explains that it begins at an early age when one tries to establish arbitrary links between clouds and objects. [32]

A distinction should be made between linguistic symbols and visual symbols, the former are subject to the language in which they are formed. While the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary in both cases, film symbolism is characterised by the closeness of the signifier to its signified. An image of a car has an ontological relationship with the object in the 'real' world despite the arbitrary signification which the director encodes into the image to make it function in a symbolic mode.

Time and Space

An analysis of the ways in which literature and film communicate meaning, must consider their use of the two formative principles of time and space. In other words, how the two forms manipulate time and space to encode a narrative with signification. The novel describes internal action, different states of consciousness and perception by appearing to move

through time with the narrative. James Joyce's use of the stream-of-consciousness technique proves how powerful the novel can be in creating a sense of time, space and different modes of consciousness. Many, like George Bluestone, believe that internal action cannot be as well represented in film:

> "The rendition of mental states - memory, dream, imagination, cannot be as adequately represented by film as by language. If film has difficulty presenting streams of consciousness, it has even more difficulty presenting states of mind which are defined precisely by their absense in the visible world. Conceptual imaging by definition has no existence in space." [3]

What Bluestone is ignoring here, is the polysemic nature of film. It must not be forgotten that film has two channels and states of mind can be encoded into the soundtrack. States of mind can also be inferred from the visual image, and the power of the close-up shot to reveal emotions is one of the cinema's strongest traits. Through an expression, the performer can convey a subtle range of human emotions. Add to this music and dialogue, and immediately the film communicates a complex web of meaning. Although Bluestone argues that conceptual imaging has no existence in space, by definition it has no logical existence in language either. All definitions and descriptions of experiences and emotions must not be mistaken for the experiences themselves. So film and novel are both subject to the same difficulties and each must cope with them according to their specific capabilities. The question which automatically arises, is how do these two different media relate dreams, memories and other conscious states? The answer is easy regarding the novel. Quite simply the novel describes them and can move back and forth through time without difficulty. When we consider film the issue becomes more opaque. It is difficult for film to signal that it is recalling past events or relating a fantasy sequence. Film is not at liberty to slip from reality and illusion and even though flashbacks, superimpositions, soft focus and dissolves are all acceptable filmic conventions they are not always appropriate in certain films. Usually a verbal

commentary is required on the soundtrack, to explain or at least suggest a change in the time sequence or the character's consciousness.

Some of the finest and most successful fantasy sequences have been executed in the musical genre category. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, because the genre is characterised by its stylisation and adherence to formulae and convention, the audience readily accepts the medium of dance as a form of expression, although it consciously foregrounds itself. Dance is ideally suited to the presentation of fantasy and dream sequences because it has no claim upon realism. Secondly, the dihotomy of reality and fantasy is built into the thematic structure of the musical film and the narrative can shift easily between the two. Gene Kelly's 'Broadway Rhythm Ballet' is a musical sequence which expresses his vision about the capabilities of film, using dance as the means to visualise the fantasy. Similarly, in Vincente Minnelli's remarkable 'American in Paris ballet', dance and music are used to signify Kelly's vivid fantasy about his career as an artist and his love for Lise. The complexity of his emotions and the vivid beauty of his imagination are shown visually and heard in the music. This type of dream sequence is acceptable because it is framed within the context of the genre and fulfils the expectations of the audience.

Dreams, memories and fantasy sequences must be handled carefully in film because they automatically foreground themselves, and do not occur naturally in the discourse. They must therefore be framed without using the clichéd devices of soft focus or a dissolve.

While the novel has three tenses past, present and future, film has only one, a continually unfolding present. Consequently, the director faces a problem when he attempts to render the flux of time. Through dialogue, he has the means to refer to other tenses, and can recall to mind the past by

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talking about it but any attempt to show it always renders it present. This is a distinct characteristic of any visual medium, and while an image may suggest its history or even its future, our perception of it is always 'now'. Because the image conveys many things simultaneously, it creates a sense of past and of time in motion, but it is only an illusion of time, bound to its spatial dimensions.

A distinction should be made, at this point, between the two concepts of time which are applicable to the novel and film. Chronological time, is measured in precise units which are constant and unchanging. Psychological time is flexible and is dependent upon perception. Thus real time may be stretched or compressed, but it is nevertheless presented in a continuous stream. In literature, chronological time occurs in three ways, the actual duration of the reading, the duration of the narrator's time and the span of the narrative events. At first glance these appear to conflict. Obviously the span of events in the narrative may take fifty years while one reads the novel in a week. However if we accept the narrator as a storyteller, we tacitly agree to the convention which allows for time to pass while we read. In film, chronological time takes two forms, the actual duration of the viewing, which is usually between one and four hours, and the span of the narrative events. Psychological time varies in rate and is subject to the reader's or viewer's perception of it. The human mind is capable of accelerating the 'feel' of time if it is filled with activety. Unfilled time appears to pass more slowly. Therefore psychological time is subject to variation and exists in unmeasurable units. Film may compress time by using the speed up device, or extend it through the physical use of the slow motion effect. With the consent of the audience time can be manipulated to suit the purpose of the director.

Style

The differences between a novelist's style, and the style of an individual filmmaker, are subject to the unique characteristics

of the media in which they work. In essence this is the difference between a linguistic and an iconic narrative mode. Style is constructed from the choices which an artist makes in the distinct portrayal of his subject. whether these choices pertain to the formal, thematic or content aspects of the work they are all dependent upon the vision of the artist. The manifestation of style is directly related to the organisation of signs in the framework of the narrative. It has already been noted that signs can either exist in a paradigmatic or syntagmatic relationship, and the options which are open to the artist fall into these two categories. First of all he can choose from the alternatives which are posed in the paradigmatic or vertical axis. In other words all the possible or absent units in a relationship which could have been used as signs. For the filmmaker this would imply that his choice of technical devices, whether he uses a wide-angled shot, freeze frame, soft focus, mid-shot and so on and his choices regarding the visual content, the setting, costumes, iconography would add to the building of a style. The choices which he makes from the combinative, horizontal axis i.e. the syntagmatic axis will further influence the style of his work. These aspects include the filmmakers use of editing and his presentation of events in a sequential order, and his manipulation of time.

The style of the novelist is also dependent upon the arrangement of signs in a narrative structure. He too, chooses from the options which exist either in the paradigmatic or syntagmatic axes. Paradigmatic elements include the range of possible words which can be used to communicate a message and the range of stylistic devices which the novelist has at his disposal for example metaphor, symbolism, poetic imagery and irony. The syntagmatic choices open to the novelist are his use of sentence structure i.e. the combination of the words in a sequence and the structure of the narrative, which involves the choices he makes when arranging events in a sequence.

So style is constructed by the artist through the choice and

arrangement of signs in a semantic system. Any analysis of style must therefore consider these two fundamental points. An examination of D.H. Lawrence's prose will clarify this point. Lawrence's novels are characterised by the intensity of his descriptive passage, his attention to detail and the vividness of his imagery. Certain images recur throughout his works as stylistic motifs. His choice of flower imagery is particularly important, so is his concern with industrialisation and man's relationship to his environment. He also uses women's relationships with nature to express their sexuality. In the following two passages from Sons and Lovers and Lady Chatterley's Lover Lawrence displays his particular sensitivity and understanding of two very different women:

> "Paul looked into Miriam's eyes. She was pale and expectant with wonder, her lips were parted and her dark eyes lay open to him. His look seemed to travel down into her. Her soul quivered. It was the communion she wanted... She looked at her roses. They were white, some incurved others holy, others expanded in ecstasy." [34]
>
> "He turned again to look at her. She was kneeling and holding her two hands slowly forward, blindly, so that the chicken should run in to the mother-hen again. And there was something so mute and forlorn in her, compassion flamed in his bowels for her." [35]

Lawrence's style is a result of his choice of signs, the words he uses, the feelings he expresses and the sequence in which he arranges them.

Film style can also be identified in its semiotics, but the choice of signs available to the filmmaker are necessarily different. Firstly because film is iconic and secondly because film is polysemic. Vincente Minnelli's musicals are marked by their internal cohesion and the density of their visual and aural content. A Minnelli musical is recognisable by its brilliance of colour, the detail and beauty of the mise-en-scene, the fluid camera movement and the sensitivity with which he directs the musical sequences. They are always a balance and harmony of all their cinematic elements.

An important point has made itself clear in the course of this discussion, which is relevant to the analysis and teaching of film. Any method which is devised for this purpose must consider firstly the iconic nature of film and secondly the polysemic nature of film i.e. that it is made up of visual and audible signs. The concepts which are found in literature, such as metaphor, cannot logically exist in film in the same form. Literary concepts are subject to the structure and artefact of language, while film concepts exist in visual images or are encoded onto the soundtrack. Any attempt to understand film concepts must therefore be done in terms of its particular autonomous characteristics. Victor Perkins states that films do two things. They have the power to capture 'reality' by holding the appearance of it, and they present an image which is the subject of and is ordered by the filmmakers will and imagination. [36] What Perkins is emphasizing here, is the iconic nature of film and its artistic function as a signifying communicational medium. We must therefore develop a critical methodology which takes account of the visual ontology of the cinema and the artistic endeavours of the filmmaker.

Genre criticism calls for its own method of analysis, one which falls within the wider discipline of film theory. We must develop criteria which recognise that there are certain 'classes of texts' which conform to a cohesive narrative structure i.e. Genre. As individual texts, genre films must be consistent with the overall generic system. The approach which follows in the remaining chapters of this work considers the individual musical film texts both as film, and as part of a generic category.

NOTES

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15. Barthes, Roland Elements of Semiology

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20. Bluestone, George op. cit. pp 19 - 20

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27. Hardy, Thomas op. cit. pg 27

28. Bluestone, George op. cit. pg 23

29. ibid. pg 23

30. Hardy, Thomas op. cit. pg 18

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32. see Hawkes, Terence op. cit. pp 54 - 56

33. Bluestone, George op. cit. pg 47

34. Lawrence, D.H. op. cit. 198

35. Lawrence, D.H. Lady Chatterley's Lover pg 119

36. Perkins, Victor Film as Film

CHAPTER 2

THE THEORY OF GENRE

2.1 Towards a Critical Approach to Genre Film

The emergence of a cohesive Genre Theory, was facilitated by a desire to promote critical discourse about a hitherto disregarded film category, the mainstream commercial cinema, and in particular, Hollywood film. During the late nineteen sixties and early seventies, genre theory fulfilled two important functions. In Film as Film,[1] Victor Perkins notes that it effectively challenged the orthodox film culture establishment by questioning the relevance of a critical theory based upon the notions of taste and aesthetics, and which protected the status of the cinema as a 'high-art' institution. Secondly, it illuminated the need for an approach to film which considered the social structures underlying a specific class of texts.

As I have already pointed out in my introduction, early genre theory did not attempt to analyse the structures and meanings of various genre films, but focused upon the relationship between the author and his text. Many critics saw this relationship in terms of a conflict between the individual auteur and the Hollywood genre system. The director had to prove his artistic capabilities in spite of the medium in which he was working and the restraints placed upon him by the mass culture industry. Tom Ryall discusses the problems and contradictions inherent in the auteur approach thus:

> "One of the major impulses behind genre criticism lies in the common sense assumption that commercial films are produced according to generic formula, that film tradition and the history of the cinema play an important role in determining the actual specificity of any single American picture. The 'auteur theory' though important and valuable during the 1950's and 1960's for drawing attention to the importance of the

> American [illegible] popular [illegible] 'high culture'. [illegible] films were discussed in terms of their directors personal vision, world view, individual style and so on." [illegible]

So the auteurist theory which characterised genre theory was finally deemed inappropriate for analysing what is essentially a popular culture mode and a shift in emphasis occurred. This led to an active examination of the various sign systems and [illegible] within a specific class of texts.

Serious theoretical work about genre and a method of genre criticism has been sketchy especially when compared with the vast amount which one finds written about literary genres. In Beyond Formula : American Film Genres Stanley Solomon cites the need for a valid genre theory:

> "Popular as genre criticism has become in recent years, the subject still lacks the kind of intellectual approach that could qualify the genre approach as a plausible category of film criticism." [illegible]

And Stephen Neale reinforces this sentiment by noting that since the articles entitled [illegible] by Tom Ryall, and [illegible] by [illegible], and Jim Kitse's [illegible] and Colin Mcarthur's Underworld U.S.A.:

> "Very little has been published since that has sought to extend it, (the work on genre) either through a more systematic working out and application of the concepts and ideas it had already developed, or through a coherent critique and subsequent transformation of these concepts and ideas." [4]

This thesis will examine some of the most relevant concepts which have been raised and discussed by various genre critics in recent years, and co-ordinate them into a viable theoretical framework.

Initially we must ask the question: What exactly is a genre? Although primarily concerned with literary criticism, in The origin of Genre, Tzvetan Todorov answers that genres are "classes of texts." [5] While this definition appears to be very simple, it raises an important question. Because

although one can group any two texts together on the ground that they share certain characteristics, it is not always logical or desirable to refer to this grouping as a genre. Todorov therefore qualifies his statement that genres are classes of texts by adding:

> "those classes of texts that have been perceived as such in the course of history." [6]

and he cites the example that tragedy is a genre because of the historical evidence of its existence and the evidence provided by the existence of the word 'tragedy' itself. Thus the starting point of the theory of genre is the proof of the existence of genres. Todorov also notes that genres can be described in two different ways; they can be "empirically observed" or analysed in an abstract way. [7] In other words information can be deduced from the content or induced, brought to bear upon the content. A genre is produced as a result of the institutionalisation of certain narrative patterns. Individual texts will manifest these recurring formulae and be perceived by the reader (audience) in relation to the whole generic system.

Tom Ryall reinforces the notion of a class of texts which is vital to the theory of genre:

> "The master image for genre criticism is the triangle composed of artist/film/audience. Genres may be defined as patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual films and which supervise both their construction by the filmmaker, and their reading by the audience." [8]

and argues that for genre criticism to be valuable it must deconstruct the relationship between the artist, his film and the audience. However, Ryall omits to mention the necessity to analyse the genre film firstly as a cohesive individual entity and secondly as part of a larger generic system. He does, however, make an important point about the twofold function of genre which Todorov supports. It supervises the construction of a film by the director or as Todorov says it acts as a "model of writing and it influences the audience's reading of the text acting, in Todorov's words, as a "horizon of expectation". [9]

One of the most vital points about the theory of genre is that genres demand public recognition. Todorov shows this in the way he describes how certain discursive properties which recur in individual narratives have been institutionalised. [10] His argument for the historical existence of genres, based upon the evidence of discourse on genre supports the claim that genres are produced in society. Colin McArthur talks about "an agreed code between filmmaker and audience" [11] thus emphasising the relationship which the public has with the film industry. The audience is partly responsible for the building of formulae and conventions and the creation and naming of a genre. So there are no real rules concerning the creation of categories or classes of texts. Genres are usually defined by common practice. Once a narrative pattern has been repeated enough times to make it familiar, a new genre will result. 'Westerns', 'Gangsters' and 'Musical' films became categorised as definite genre once their thematic structures and visual content became familiar from one film to the next.

The difference between literary genre and film genre is an issue which needs discussion. Literary genres are defined, by the form of the discourse and thus ballads, odes, sonnets, and narrative poems are all genres. So a genre depends upon how the content of a text is structured and organised. They may also be defined by the content alone, romance, science fiction or crime all constitute the raw material for generic categories. And finally, they can be synthesis of the two i.e. form and content presented in a familiar recurring way. Thus tragedy, comedy and tragicomedy may all be logically defined as genre. Film is different because the definition of genre is more strictly drawn. For a class of film to be regarded as a genre it must be part of the popular culture mode. In the context of film theory, genre theory was specifically designed in response to a need for greater critical appreciation of commercial films. Genre theory must examine the social structure which underlies certain groups of texts, and it is particularly relevant to Holly-

wood film. So genre theory is only applicable to a certain type of film and not film in general. In a film context 'genre' is synonymous with popular culture because that is where the theory had its roots.

In his discussion of which classes of film can be regarded genres and which cannot, Solomon explains that tragedy, comedy and tragicomedy, while they are literary genres, are not film genres but 'modes of presentation'.[12] He also rejects that the category of 'film-noir' is a genre because, he says, it involves too many other genres and each individual film noir text could just as easily be categorised as a gangster, horror or war film depending on one's personal point of view. German Expressionism and Italian neo-realism are also not considered genres for two reasons. Firstly, because they are divorced from the commercial film industry and popular culture and secondly they support the ideology of the filmmaker or an influential group of filmmakers, not the current public one. Both German Expressionism and Italian neo-realism exhibit a specific style of filmmaking which is repeated in films belonging to these categories, for example, German Expressionism can be recognised by the nightmare setting, diagonal unmotivated lighting and strange outlandish characters, but this style must not be confused with the narrative formulae and re gated discursive properties of the genre film.

Genre film is thus intrinsically connected to the notion of popular culture, which has been largely ignored as a subject worthy of serious critical analysis until recently. The " 'high art' film culture establishment" have tended to be somewhat contemptuous of mass media entertainment and dismissed it as escapist. In Culture and Society Raymond Williams shows how the split between so called 'high-art' and popular culture came about during the Romantic period, when art began to move away from its general audience towards a more intellectual elite.[13] Ed Buscombe notes that the division between 'highbrow' and 'mass' culture

rests upon the level of understanding which the audience has of each:

> "The conventions of... genre are known and recognised by the audience and such a recognition is in itself a pleasure. Popular art, in fact, has always depended on this..." [14]

Popular culture is to a large extent determined and modified by various constraints. The Hollywood film industry is characterised by its overriding commercialism and adherence to conventional and formulaic patterns of film making. However, as a result of the rejection of these values, the films themselves have likewise been rejected:

> "... rejection of Hollywood and it's values, though understandable and even laudable, has led to a rejection of American movies which is neither. When one discusses literature and to or painting and up to a point, drama, one can place the artist, his work and his audience in a very direct relationship. However no such direct relationship exists for the director in Hollywood. There are at work several modifiers of meaning, factors which complicate these relationships. The most obvious are the star system and the subject of this book, genre - both, of course, partly explicable in terms of the overpoweringly commercial basis of Hollywood production." [15]

McArthur's point here is that genre film should be analysed as popular culture and all the constraints and conventions of genre must be considered. The 'auteur' relationship is important in all films and genre films are no exception but it should not be used as the focus of one's critical discussion. This relationship belongs more properly to the discourse of 'high art' aesthetics. Hollywood film is modified by the constraints of genre, its formulae, and its narrative patterns. So these must be of prime importance when considering a critical approach to this popular art form.

Genre film categories are also partly defined by their content, which usually adheres to a recognisable narrative structure or visual pattern of expectation. A Western film is normally about two conflicting ideologies, the anarchy of the West against the progress of the East, which takes place at the turn of this century somewhere in the American mid-west.

Similarly, the musical film is always about love and includes sequences of singing and dancing. These are narrative elements which act as 'horizons of expectation' for the audience. Other narrative elements include plot formulae, character types, settings, recurring thematic structures and generic iconography.

There is always an intertextuality between the films that are part of a specific generic category, which not only leads to definition of that genre but continually reassesses it. Each new film will either reaffirm the genre as it stands or redefine its limits. Genre is a structure, according to Piaget's definition which includes the following three fundamental principles.[16]

a) the idea of wholeness
b) the idea of transformation
c) the idea of self-regulation

By wholeness Piaget means that a structure must have coherence. All the parts of that structure conform to a set of laws which govern it. So as an integral part of structure they are different to what they would be if they were separate entities. Without the encompassing whole, individual parts have no meaningful existence. Applying this concept to genre film, the following becomes apparent. Within the framework of genre normal signs are made to mean and mean again. For example in the western genre horses function as indexical signs, suggestive of the cowboy's relationship to his environment. The meaning of signs will change according to the governing structure in which they occur.

Piaget's next point is that a structure is never static but always incorporates new material, processes it accordingly and adds it to main body of the structure. Structure is continually structuring and therefore exists in a state of flux. Piaget uses human language as evidence of a transforming structure because new words and sounds are constantly added to it. Similarly, genre structures itself in the same way and changes in the structure are directly dependent upon how the

film industry perceives audience desires and needs. Genre are evolved from a combinative process of film making and formulae which are never static. Narrative elements which make up the structure of a genre are always undergoing analysis and change. In answer to the question: "From where do genres come?" Todorov responds:

> "Why, quite simply, from other genres. A new genre is always the transformation of one or several old genres: by inversion, by displacement, by combination." [1]

Every text arising from a genre is an absorption and transformation of other texts. To show how a new genre arises from an old one, let us consider the examples of Cabaret and Flashdance. Traditionally, the musical film has avoided the presentation of sexuality in an overt way, prefering to couch this sensitive subject in sequences which function metaphorically as exhibitions of lovemaking. In Cabaret and Flashdance the need to hide sex has been displaced by a desire to show it openly. So Sally Bowles (Cabaret) openly asks her lover to go to bed with her and Jennifer Beals (Flashdance) boasts about her sexual aggressiveness. Having the woman as the protagonist in what was always a male-dominated role is indication of the inversion of one of the genres narrative elements. A vital part of the Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly personae was their function as the woman's Svengali. This role is reversed as Jennifer Beals invites her lover to 'feel the music'. Flashdance also combines much of the spirit of the great American dream - personified by Gene Kelly in the musicals of the 1950's, with the new spirit of the 1980's. It revives a popular sentiment in a totally new setting, New York's Mawby's bar, and hides none of the seaminess. From this rather sordid environment, Jennifer aspires to the New York Academy of Dancing and in accordance with the formulae of old musical films, and with help from her friends, she achieves this goal.

Piaget's final point is that a structure is self-regulating and needs no outside rationale to validate its existence. A structure has its own internal laws which have no reliance

upon other systems. Its structure exists and regulates itself without having any necessity to call upon outside 'reality' or 'objectivity'. In this sense it is 'closed'. Piaget's example is the word 'rose' which exists as a constituent of the English language without necessarily refering to the red bloom with green leaves and thorns. Thus the musical film exists as a closed structure, and regulates itself according to its own rules without reliance on or reference to any other system. The use of music as a stylistic feature of the musical film is consistent with the structure of this genre, familiar to the audience and needs no outside rationale to make it valid.

In his book Hollywood Genres Thomas Schatz has outlined four points which he feels any critical approach to genre film must incorporate.[18] These points provide a valid summary of most of the relevant issues which have been covered above.

1. It must accept that filmmaking is a commercial art which is intrinsically tied to success at the box office.

If a film is successful financially, then the reason for success will be isolated and the formula exploited for commercial profit. The success of a genre film therefore, lay in its capacity to make money for the studios, and the studio's 'star' performers were judged similarly.

2. It must recognise the cinema's contact with the audience. That from this contact it develops the formula for subsequent genre films.

Popular culture art forms are always rooted in the societies of which they reflect. One of the purposes of critical discussion about such popular art forms as genre film, is to uncover the sociological patterns which underly certain classes of texts. Public morality is often reflected by genre films in a myth-like way. Popular culture helps to reveal, transmit and permeate these myths throughout society. Thus genre films may

be regarded as ideological corners. Take for an example the image of women reflected in the musical genre. Cathy Seldon, the heroine of Singing in the Rain (1952) is a pert young chorine showing innocence, coyness and conventional feminine charm. Twenty years later audiences are presented with Sally Bowles (Cabaret) who is brash, bohemian and sexually liberated, yet still vulnerable and easily hurt. Both conformed to the current myths regarding the status and image of women in society.

3. It accepts that the cinema is a narrative (story-telling) medium. Stories are dramatic but based upon cultural conflicts.

This point is especially relevant to the musical genre as plot formulae are often based upon class conflicts. There is a preoccupation with seemingly ill-matched lovers poor boy/rich girl, gambler/heiress, chorus girl/male 'star' and the genre generally proves the sentiment that love overcomes social barriers.

4. In the Musical Genre artistry is measured in terms of the filmmakers capacity to work within the established generic conventions.

This reinforces McArthur's point that the auteur relationship is not of supreme importance to genre criticism although it is a valuable issue. Any analysis of the work of genre directors and performers must take the constraints of the industry and the genre into consideration. If the director/performer can use the genre, its conventions and formulae, in a new and exciting way then he may be regarded as successful. Fred Astaire's persona is indicitive of this type of success, and so is Vincente Minnelli's brilliance in creating films which are marked by their harmony of all the visual and sound narrative elements. Unlike the 'high art' film director who can indulge his own 'world vision' and 'individual style' to the full, those working in a popular culture mode tacitly agree to work within certain limitations. which is not to

say that they must relinquish any personal artistic aspirations, but simply acknowledge that the conventions of genre must be respected.

2.2 The Elements of Genre

In his important study Story and Discourse Seymour Chatman successfully outlines the concept of narrative structure in fiction. Much of his theoretical work can be applied to the film medium as Chatman does throughout the book. In the preface to Story and Discourse he notes that Literary critics are inclined to confine the concept of narrativity to the verbal medium while they consume stories via film comic strips, paintings, sculptures, dance and music every day.[19] He maintains that every discipline is underpinned by a substratum which explains how its narrative communicates, and he adds that the two singlemost important concepts upon which narrative theory rests are its 'what' and its 'why'. In other words its story and its discourse, discourse being the meaning through which the story is transmitted.

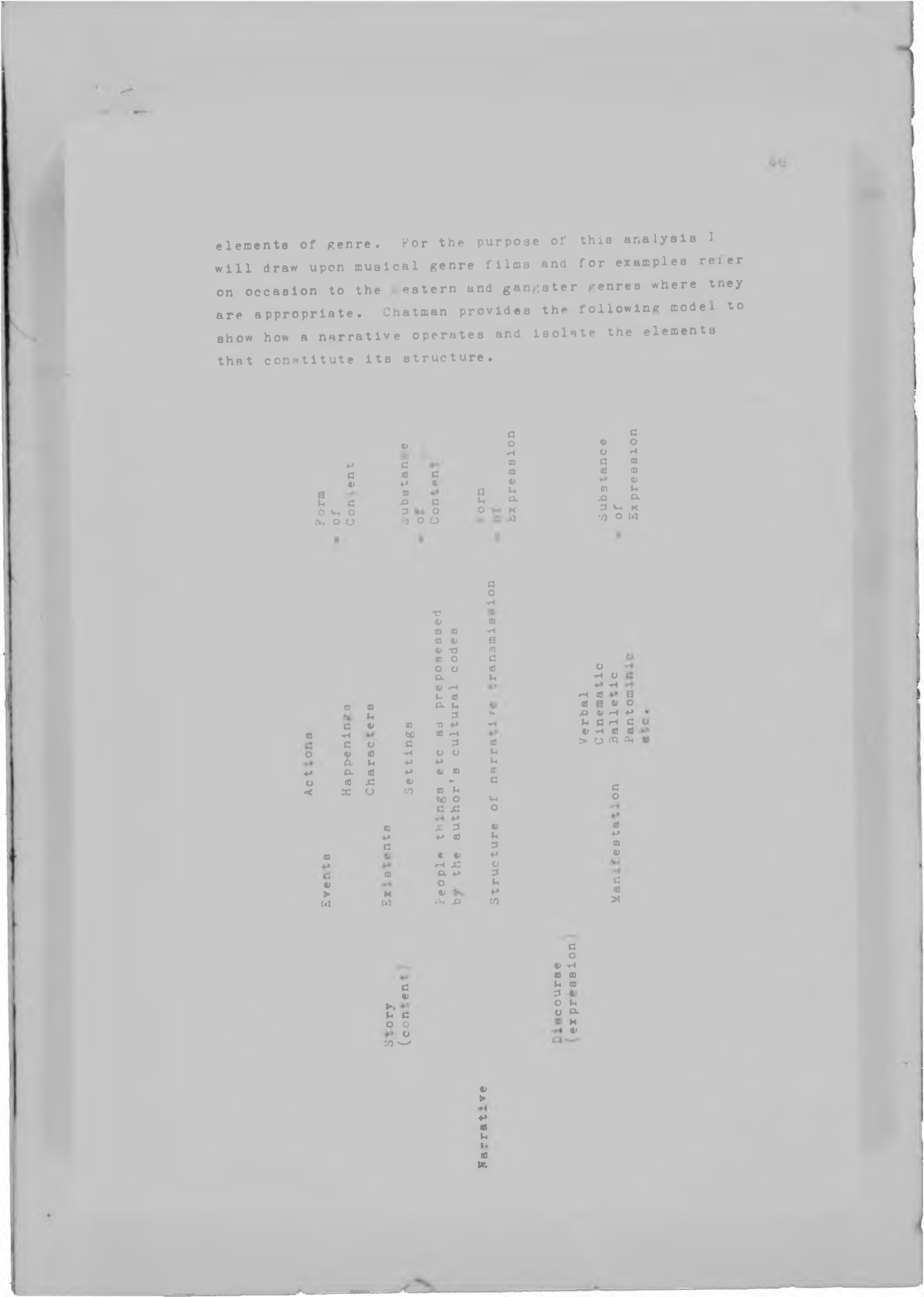
Of narrative theory Chatman states the following. It:

> "... has no critical axe to grind. It's objective is a grid of possibilities, through the establishment of the minimal narrative constitutive features. It plots individual texts on the grid and asks whether their accommodation requires adjustment of the grid. It does not assert that authors should or should not do so-and-so. Rather it poses a question: What can we say about the structures like narratives organise themselves?" [20]

and goes on to note that structuralist theory states that narrative has two parts a story (histoire) the content, and a discourse (discouse) the means through which it is communicated.

Since genre is a narrative structure i.e. it transmits a narrative through the twin channels of story and discourse, a breakdown of this structure and the way that it is communicated will provide interesting insights into the theory and

elements of genre. For the purpose of this analysis I will draw upon musical genre films and for examples refer on occasion to the western and gangster genres where they are appropriate. Chatman provides the following model to show how a narrative operates and isolate the elements that constitute its structure.



Clearly the musical genre is a narrative structure and in each film a story is communicated via the specific medium. By deconstructing the genre using Chatman's model, one can get closer to the essential elements of this narrative system. Chatman explains that any narrative is built up around a structure of '_events_' and '_existents_'. 'Events' are organised in such a way that they form the plot of a narrative, while the 'existents' are physical manifestations of the content and create a specific environment against which the plot can be unfolded. So the 'existents' are the characters of a narrative and the settings in to which the characters are placed. Chatman makes a further distinction between the types of 'events' which form a plot and notes that while some events are essential to the advancement of the plot, these he calls '_kernels_', others only provide incidental interest for the reader/viewer. These secondary events, or '_satellites_' form the subtext of the narrative and add various layers of signification to it. The major events or kernels advance the action in a specific way, raising questions pertaining to the main event and deciding the course of the narrative at climatic moments. Events may also be classified as '_actions_' or '_happenings_' depending upon whether the protagonist had direct control over the event (action) or whether it was a result of external forces over which he had no control (happening).

The narrative elements of the musical genre will be analysed under Chatman's categories of events and existents. Under the heading 'events' one must naturally include a discussion of plot and in the musical film genre one can isolate several plot formulae, all of which are characteristic of the genre. The most common narrative pattern underlying almost all musicals though, involves the following sequence of events: boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy sings song and gets girl. Around this one generic core, numerous variations have been evolved, and the most familiar plot formulae have been identified by Timothy Scheurer in an essay entitled "_The_

Aesthetics of form and convention in the movie musical". [21]
The existents of the musical genre i.e. the narrative elements of character and setting will be discussed at length and the section on setting will include an examination of the concept of iconography, the body of knowledge about a visual subject.

Events : Plot formulae

Scheurer identifies the following six plot formulae in the musical film genre:

1. The All-Star Revue

Busby Berkeley was the major proponent of this plot formula in which a string of 'happenings' were joined together under the umbrella of a huge revue, which could logically be described as the only 'event'. Beginning with the Hollywood revue of 1929, he, under producer Darryl F. Zanuck, released a vast number of similar musicals each more extravagant and ambitious in design that the last. It was to Berkeley's credit that he released the cinema from the camera's unidirectional gaze and allowed it to move. In his insatiable quest for dramatic lavish sequences he used vast crowds of chorines as anything from human harp's to typewriter ribbon. His inventions included an aquacade which pumped water over a studio built waterfall at the rate of 20 000 gallons a minute, and what could be regarded as the largest staircase in the world at that time. However outrageous these films appeared one must give Busby Berkeley credit for his cinematic innovations, the likes of which had never been seen before. He used the film medium in a way that could not be translated into any other form, it was specifically cinematic. In each film of this type there was no plot as such but the text served to perpetuate the reputations of the studio's star performers. Broadway Melody of 1929, Paramount on Parade 1930 and The Broadway Melody of 1936 all exhibit the indulgent style of Busby Berkeley.

2. The Backstage Musical

This type of musical was similar in concept to the All-Star Revue, except that in the former the revue was framed by a story. It was not just another filmed revue, but a show within a plot which adhered to a typical formula. Set in the depression years, the story revolved around a group of characters who try to stage a revue which is beset with financial problems. Generic necessity demands that there is also a love story to be told, and usually the neglected chorus girl wins the heart of the leading actor. Another familiar 'event' is that the leading lady should fall ill and a member of the chorus is auditioned to take her place. Predictably she achieves a resounding success. Satellite events involve the traumatic lives of the chorus girls, the backstage cameraderie and conflicts, and the lavish functions held by the theatre management. In these films the musical numbers are generally incidental to the narrative and are part of the show which is in rehearsal. Although they may reflect the thematic concerns of the musical genre, they are not integrated with the film's thematic structure. Busby Berkeley excelled at this type of film musical as well, and to his credit can be listed 42nd Street in which the star of the show faces an internal conflict between choosing her lover or her career. Circumstance forces her to decide upon the former when she suffers a leg fracture. The frantic director offers the role to Anytime Annie who refuses it and suggests it should be offered to the most deserving and unobtrusive of the girls. Also in the same mould were Gold Diggers of 1933, Gold Diggers of 1935, Fashions of 1934 and Footlight Parade. Follow the Fleet which starred Astaire and Rogers is similar in type and features Rogers as the typical chorine trying to stage a show which is beset with the usual financial difficulties. The Depression years were characterised by films all showing the same problems, lack of money, fear of unemployment and concern for the future, but musical films were all unanimous in their optimism. No one ever starved as a result of poverty and no one was victimised or unemployed forever. In the musical film aid always came to

the deserving. Mention should be made in this category of Vincente Minnelli's film The Band wagon, which narrates the story of a 'has-been' performer (Fred Astaire) trying to make a comeback on Broadway to a theatrical world which has quickly forgotten his previous success and enormous talent. As is customary in a Minnelli musical, the song and dance sequences are all fully integrated into the film's thematic structure. The plot is basically the same as other backstage musicals and involves the rehearsing of the show which is to be the vehicle for Tony's comeback. Singing in the Rain, Stanley Donen's examination of the film industry and the business of manufacturing illusions could also be grouped as a backstage musical. Through this often hilarious film Donen reveals the true nature of the movie industry, its overriding commercialism and its carefully constructed web of myths which are fed to a willing, believing audience. In essence it reveals the dicotomy between reality and illusion, a theme which is manifested in many musical films. Two plot formulae can be distinguished in Singing in the Rain, the simple love story of Don and Cathy, and the shooting of the studio's first sound film.

3. The Cinderella rags-to-riches story.

This plot fomrula rests upon the Pygmalion allegory. As the narrative unfolds a young girl is gradually refined until she achieves womannood. In each case we watch as she reaches her true potential and casts off her girlish awkwardness. Invariably the hero is the catalyst for this remarkable growth, and it is because of her love for him, and under his sensitive guidance, that she matures to full self-awareness. In My Fair Lady the Pygmalion allegory is entrenched in the plot and the story shows how Eliza Doolittle a lowly working class flower girl, rises above her station to attain sophistication and social acceptance among the upper classes. Vincente Minnelli's Gigi is the simple tale of a young French girl who blossoms into a woman and wins the love of the hero. From a clumsy, adolescent she transforms to reveal her natural elegance and composure. Annie Oakley's meteoric rise to fame (in Annie get

Your Fun) is a superb [illegible], whose influence upon her coarse habits and bearing. She only realises the need to be feminine when she falls in love and desires to be treated as a woman, not just 'one of the boys'. A chorus girl who achieves recognition for her talents and becomes a 'star' is another variety of the overall plot formula and in this category can be classed Busby Berkeley's Golddiggers film, George Sukor's A Star is Born, Stanley Donen's Singin' in the Rain and Mark Sandrich's The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle.

3. Love/hate between lovers

This category of film musicals refers specifically to those made for the Radio Corporation in the 1930's starring the partnership of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Although these films reveal similarity with other plot types, the rise to fame of a chorus girl, the transformation from girl to womanhood, the backstage setting, the dominant plot i.e. the love story is marked by the chequered feelings of the lovers. In each film the audience is presented with the same character types, Astaire's suave music-man and a wisecracking blonde. The plot reveals the same basic consistency and the success of these films relies to extent upon the interplay of conflict and resolution, the latter being achieved through the exploratory medium of dance. Usually the reason for their conflict is because of a lack of verbal communication, but suspicion and lack of trust cloud their relationship. Astaire and Rogers learn to communicate in their films and every dance reveals their inherent sense of harmony and unity. Each of them learns the value of honesty and sincerity in a relationship and the conflict is only resolved when they allow themselves to express their true inner feelings. The plot of this type of film concerns the lovers and the events which make up the narrative usually go something like this: Astaire courts Rogers and wins her affection. Either he or she is betrothed to a third party. The one who is betrothed (for example, Astaire) keeps this a secret for fear that he will lose his new love. When Rogers

discovers that her lover is betrothed to someone else and breaks off the relationship. Astaire cannot understand why her love for him has altered, but accepts that he must return to his fiancé. In the meantime the fiancé has found someone else and this allows him to return to Rogers and claim her for himself. Swing Time, The Gay Divorcee and Top Hat all conform to this simple plot formula.

The Screen Operetta

The Screen Operetta was Hollywood's attempt to incorporate the 'highbrow' art form of the Opera into the commercial film industry with the aim of making a profit. They succeeded in this venture, and miraculously some of the films escape sentimentality, which is to the credit of their two most important and influential directors, Ernst Lubitsch and Rouben Mamoulian. These films were usually vehicles designed to display the talents of the studio's star performers, notably Jeanette MacDonald, Maurice Chevalier, Nelson Eddy, Grace Moore and later Mario Lanza and Kathryn Grayson. Normally, they are set in exotic European locales, in period setting and costume. The love story (plot) is usually heartrending, and the songs are quasi-poetic in flavour. At their best, these films display a lavish opulence and magnificenc of colour and maintain an overwhelming sense of fun and enjoyment. Of the most successful are Lubitsch's The Merry Widow and Mamoulian's Love me Tonight.

A subtype of this plot formula is the fantasy/romance in which the characters inhabit a world of 'make-believe'. Once again the love story is the most vital thread which runs through the film. Minnelli's Brigadoon and Joshua Logan's Camelot are the best examples of the fantasy/romance category.

The Musical Biography

One of the most successful plot formulae, in terms of its

capacity to make money, was the musical biography, in which the career of a famous composer or dancer was unfolded. The musical sequences contained in these musical biographies were usually drawn from the actual works of the composer but the story of his life and career were usually tampered with by the studio script-writers in order to make it more marketable, and allow it to conform to the conventions of the genre. The plot of these 'biopics' as they came to be known centred around the character's love life and dealt with his career second. The Jolson Story (1946) contains the two great Jolson songs 'April Showers' and 'Mammy' but the film unfortunately revels in his unsuccessful personal relationships. In The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle the relationship of the lovers is highlighted, while the careers of the Castle's are only dealt with superficially. Dancing for them is not so much a means of gaining employment as a display of their essential unity and love. The life of Johan Strauss is the subject of The Great Waltz which a apts the work and career of this composer to the conventions of the genre. It shows how artistic endeavour is improved when the artist has a loving partner to encourage and inspire . The Great Waltz shows a romantic view of how music is written and how the artistic impulse is channelled into a concrete form. Inspiration is found in the environment, and absorbed, processed and manifested by the artist. He is a vessel through which music makes its presence felt. While driving through the park one day Strauss receives the inspiration to write his Great Waltz and does so there and then. Although inaccurate, the film exhibits an engaging simplicity which adheres to the spirit of the musical genre. In Gotta Sing Gotta Dance John Kobal writes of it:

> "The Great Waltz is an intoxicating flow of heady images dedicated to the spirit of Strauss, while letting the facts take care of themselves. It is not so much a biography as glorious musical imagery in waltz time." 22

Existents : Characters

Within the framework of the musical genre, characters have been categorised into easily recognised 'types', thus functioning as recurring narrative properties and 'horizon's of expectation' for the audience. Their successful repetition within the genre as part of the total formula is due to the level at which the audience identifies with them. They fulfilled a specific need which the public has for its 'stars' and also for characters who they could relate to on a one-to-one basis. I have identified the following groups of characters and will discuss them under two headings male and female.

Male Characters

The Hero: In this critical essay The Theory of Modes which appears in The Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye has identified five categories of fictional modes, each defined by the relationship of the protagonist to his fellow man and environment. [23] Consequently there are five types of hero which can be identified in literary works, and these five apply equally well to film.

In the Mythic mode, the hero is superior in kind to man and his environment and is classed as a divine being. He is a god. This type of hero is found in classical Greek mythology where the gods could defy their environment and manipulate lesser beings.

In the Romantic mode, the hero is superior in degree to man and the environment. He is capable of performing marvellous feats, although he is only superior in station to his fellow man. His power is usually invested in him by a superior being and even though he is a prince or a king, he has the might of a god. In fiction of this sort, belief is suspended and the laws of nature may be reversed. Folk tales and legends are written in the Romantic mode.

The high-mimetic mode has a hero who is superior in degree [illegible] but equal in environment. His talents to control his environment and command the power, is often the cause of his tragedy. His tragedy or success is partly the result of his experimenting in witchcraft and upsetting the balance of the cosmos. In the high-mimetic mode the hero is generally tragic. A hero as a crimes.

In the low-mimetic mode, the hero is akin to his fellow man and his environment. He shares a sense of humanity with others but is identifiable as a hero because of a [illegible] which differentiates him from other men.

A hero cast in the ironic mode is inferior to man and his environment, usually [illegible] of his station but sometimes in intelligence as well. He is persecuted by the community and occasionally made a scapegoat of, but he often reveals his truth about a situation [illegible] childlike honesty. The court jester as an example of the ironic hero, he reveals truths because others esteem him for a fool. His truths may be cleverly couched in metaphor, and are therefore incomprehensible to most of the community.

In the musical genre the hero is generally of the low-mimetic mode as he is akin to his fellow man and also to his environment. His particular differences, which sets him apart from other men, is his musical talent, for to able to express himself in another medium. As one of the narrative conventions of the genre implies, most because he is talented, he has greater self-awareness and conviction than his peers. The hero of the musical film will also lower himself into the ironic mode, to jest about a situation which he finds himself in. He is not averse to appearing inferior or uncomfortable in alien surroundings where people are from a higher social class. Yet to the audience he always maintains a self assurance and dignity, even when he is clowning. We know that it is just a performance. This cinematic irony is successful in the musical genre because the hero's message is not dogmatic.

It cannot threaten our sense of social order, or acceptable behaviour. When Astaire arrives at a society party, feigning inferiority and discomfort in the presence of socialites he expresses our own reservations, our own difficulties and fears and allows us to accept them. For if he can admit his own shortcomings, surely we can too.

The hero has a number of characteristics which are conventionalised and easily identifiable within the genre as a whole. Firstly, he is talented as a musician and by implication, self-assured, sensitive and loyal to his convictions. He is an artist, and his occupation reflects this, also leaving him freedom to pursue his loved one. Dancing, painting, gambling and national service are all appropriate occupations which the hero might be involved in. With regard to gambling, it should be noted that the instinct to gamble reflects the personality of the hero and he is never seen to amass a huge fortune. His gambling is an extension of how he lives, and he is prepared to risk everything in the hope of improving his life and gaining fulfilment. When courting his girl, he casts all responsibility aside, although he would rather lose her forever, than renounce a previous committment to another and have to live with his guilt.

His quest is for truth and pure love and as a lover he is also a woman's Svengali. Under his assurance and with his sensitive guidance and care, she changes from a girl and achieves womanhood. He shows her the power and beauty of dance as an exploratory medium, and awakens her to new rhythms and feelings in her body. This metaphoric lovemaking emphasizes the intensity of their union, and the physical and mental harmony which they achieve together as lovers.

Within this section, Thomas Schatz's concept of the generic persona should be raised and analysed. In Hollywood Genres he makes it clear that certain actors who have made their mark in the various genre have done so because they have created an identifiable persona.[24] Certainly much of the

success of many genre films can be attributed to their performers. And in the musical film in particular, two men can be singled out as being the life force of the genre. Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly are largely responsible for the shape, the artistry and the success of the musical film. Not only did they create the formula for success, but they accepted the responsibility of always adhering to that formula. They realised that one cannot take liberties with genre, even if one's name, especially if one's name is Astaire or Kelly. Yet within the generic system both of them were continually breaking new ground, Astaire as a performer and Kelly as a choreographer.

Astaire's persona is successful because it is always familiar and inspires the admiration of his audience. During the depression years it met the needs of the American public, who felt reassured to see that at least someone was coping. Astaire could share the same concerns as his audience, making them believe that living is as easy as dancing. He created the boundaries of his own character and ensured that his motives were always clear, he was always self assured, generous and sensitive, poised on the verge of dance, wise to the world around him. His physical presence has become iconic, his style, elegance and sheer artistry are encapsulated in the familiar top hat and tails, his cane and his dancing shoes. They are synonymous with Astaire persona. So too is the slim, dapper figure, easy smile and slightly balding head. He arouses a certain expectation in the audience and he never fails to fulfil it. His dancing is as breathtaking today as it was in the 1930's, timeless in its brilliance. In Gotta Sing Gotta Dance John Kobal writes of Astaire:

> "None have been able to make dancing appear as effortless and natural as breathing, one of the normal functions of life as does Astaire. Choreographically, there is nothing anyone has done that Astaire couldn't do, but his dancing has never succumbed to a display of athletic prowess... Astaire was and is the essence of the grace and beauty of the dance... The reason for his large appeal over the years, is in part, a very

> lovable personality. He possesses a dignity combined with modesty, and intelligence about himself, about production, and the entire film business. He also has a perfect knowledge of the beauty of movement and an absolute surety of what he does. His dancing creates a succession of images infinitely flexible, sometimes a precise statement, as often a vague evocation, expressing feelings that range from the most simple to the sublime."

Gene Kelly's persona is characterised by his dynamism and his boundless energy. He expresses the hope and idealism of the 1950's, and the natural optimism presented in the musical genre. Like Astaire, Kelly believed he knew what the American public would believe in and identify with and tailored his character to meet these needs. Kelly's 'American' shatters old outmoded values with the strength of his idealism and his belief in and hope for the new America. He is the physical embodiment of the American Dream and like Astiare's top hat and tap shoes, his strong athletic body, frank open face with its large smile, pants cropped above the ankle and open-necked shirts have become visual icons signalling the energy and zest of this performer. His honesty and clear-sighted conviction whether in An American in Paris, Singing in the Rain, The Pirate, On the Town or Brigadoon have won him the respect and admiration of his audiences. He challenges them not to lose sight of their goals personal or public and to always strive to achieve them.

The Heroine's Suitor: One of the most common character types to be found in the musical genre is the heroine's suitor, a weak-willed, usually untalented, man upon whom we are allowed to waste no sympathy. He is sentimental in the extreme and faithful to his adored one going so far as to be regarded as a laughing stock. In his self-indulgent hope, he imagines that one day she will turn to him and requite his passions, even on the rebound. But his love is the kind which goes no deeper than words and sighs, although he declares his love he cannot love. He enjoys the pain which he imagines he is feeling and suffers his love as a martyr suffers persecution. We cannot but presume that he will derive the same masochistic

pleasure from being a [illegible] [illegible]. The [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] in this man is his [illegible] indulgence, his tendency to wallow in his feelings, and this filters into every aspect of his life. [illegible] [illegible] [illegible], as Ricardo Romero does in Swing Time and Freddy does in My Fair Lady they express no real sentiments, they only give a performance of their love. Love is objectified and afforded the status of a myth, not a deep seated emotion which evokes growth and sensitivity. Their love is not for the woman but for themselves.

The Hero's Best Friend/Surrogate Father: This character can take one of two forms, both of which are appropriate and necessary in the musical genre. He is either an energetic young man who shares the same interests as the hero and understands his motives like Cosmo Brown in Singing in the Rain and Frank Sinatra in [illegible] Society (1956) or an older more experienced father figure who accepts that the hero is young and in love and therefore capable of rash, impulsive behaviour. Both leave the hero enough space to pursue his love but will restrain any [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] he might have. The friend/father figure, will also act as mediator between the lovers should a misunderstanding occur as he is respected and trusted by both parties. Cosmo Brown provides a perfect illustration of this character type. He is a [illegible] likeable young man who has been Don's (Kelly's) best friend and confidante since [illegible]. Cosmo is a loyal friend and remains with Don through adversity and success. Even when Don achieves superstar status Cosmo keeps him in contact with the simple pleasures of life, the joys of singing and dancing. He prevents Don believing in his Don Myth and accepting the illusions which Hollywood manufactures about him. In Swing Time Lucky's (Katnire's) surrogate father 'Pops' follows him to New York, providing both companionship and a watchful eye. He knows that Lucky could easily lose his sense of perspective or fall into bad company since he has gone to New York specifically to gamble and make enough money to allow him to marry his fiancé. True to generic convention the older man has a

somewhat portly figure [illegible] in t[illegible] [illegible] [illegible]. [illegible] reads the newspaper, all indexical references to a certain group of the population.

Women Characters

Women characters are usually subordinate to their male counterparts and fulfil a passive role, concurrent with society's [illegible] image of the female person. Certain types of women can be identified in the musical film as being specifically generic and recognisable to the audience. They are:

The Innocent Naive Heroine: In this role the woman is inexperienced and has little knowledge of life and men. She has led a sheltered life, her past is enclouded by scandal, she is virtuous and serially [illegible]. In aspect she is short, pretty without being too beautiful, and slim. To become a woman and achieve her full potential she needs the love of a man who will answer all her latent desires. The hero, in his role as Svengali evokes her inner feelings and leads her to true self-awareness and fulfilment. By dancing together and expressing their love in song form he teaches her to experience the beauty of rhythm and harmony in a spiritual as well as physical way. As lovers they commit themselves totally to each other. The vulnerable heroine usually occupies a job in which her talents and potential are wasted. She may be a poorly paid chorus girl who desires to escape from her social rut but has neither the means nor the impetus to achieve this. Her vulnerability is often couched in a stream of caustic repartee, which according to generic convention, provides a suitable cover for her essential innocence. At the opposite end of the social stratum is the rich, unattainable heiress for whom the hero goes to great lengths to court and win. She suffers the same kind of emotional stifling as the chorus girl, but hers is the result of a cloistered upbringing. Her need of love and fulfilment

are just as strong and she too is dependant upon the hero to realise her transformation to womanhood. Cathy Selden (Singing in the Rain) is a pert young chorus girl whose love for Don satisfies all her emotional and physical needs, and provides her with enough courage and conviction to pursue a career in the film industry. And in Top Hat, Dale Tremont a socialite who moves in closed circles, is released from her class upbringing and taught the value of love.

In The Sound of Music this character type has evolved into Maria, a woman of great strength and conviction. Although her experience of men and love is small, her appreciation and understanding of music and joy and living mark her as a person with confidence and depth of feeling. When she finds love, it is of the purest sort, evolved from genuine caring and a desire to cherish her loved one. Of all the woman types, Maria is the most complete.

The Vamp: As a counterpart to the heroine, the musical genre often uses a 'vamp'. She is a worldly, experienced woman with dubious morals and a shady character which illuminates woman's evil qualities. Like Eve she tempts her man, appealling to his greed and lust. Her beauty is intense and physical, and she uses it to arouse her partners senses. Dance provides a welcome means to display herself and she uses it powerfully. Her function in the context of the film musical is to tempt the hero so that he can prove his strength of character by resisting her charms. In the Broadway Rhythm Ballet sequence from Singing in the Rain, the dancer (Cyd Charisse) embodies the evil and materialism of Broadway. Cunning, erotic and sensual, she exploits Kelly's sexual inexperience and trust. Ava Gardner's Miss Julie (Showboat (1951)) exhibits the strength of personality and sensual charm characteristic of the vamp, but her ultimate suffering for past sins, evokes the sympathy of the audience.

The Unrefined Coarse Heroine: In this category the woman

transgresses the rules governing socially acceptable behaviour for the female sex and is loudly proud of her achievements, usually in a male-dominated sphere. She places no importance on her looks, scoffs femininity and boasts her equality with men. Refusing to manipulate herself in a refined manner, she ignores conventions, dons men's clothing, speaks in a loud aggressive tone and laughs heartily. She believes she has no need of a man because she can do anything they can, and consequently no need of love either. It is only when she finally falls in love that she realizes the folly of asexual masculinity. She predictably wants a woman that she can cherish and protect, thus satisfying a deep egotistical male need. A coarse woman inspires competition not love. Its attitude towards her combines grudging admiration for her successes and strength of character and disgust at her unrefined nature. These attitudes are all based upon dominant public opinion and fulfil the expectations of the audience. The musical film reflects society's role models and thus a coarse woman is branded as unlovable. A hero regards her as a partner and if she wants to be equal to him he treats her like a man, but he cannot love her or consider her as a potential wife. Genre films help to entrench the dominant ideology and do not question the accepted social norm. Society saw the ideal female form differently now to how it was during the 1930's. Then, she was passive and allowed the man to dominate her. She accepted the responsibility of being feminine in her bearing and disposition. Even the coarse heroine always has to undergo a transformation in order to win her man and inevitably the hero is the last one to see this change. In Annie Get Your Gun, Annie Oakley finally accepts her role as a female, when she realizes that by always outshooting her lover, she is destroying her chances of marriage, and deflating his ego at the same time. She invites conflict rather than love. Cyd Charisse as the Russian commissar in Silk Stockings inspires awe and fear by repressing her feminine instincts. These are finally released when she puts on a pair of silk stockings, and in a sensual dance unleashes her sexuality. Gigi, in

Minnelli's film of the same name, is an [illegible] [illegible] she matures to [illegible], before the hero notices and proposes to her. And in My Fair Lady, Eliza Doolittle rises from her working class beginnings to become a woman who can claim a place in any society. Until the closing scenes of the film, her mentor Higgins fails to notice that she is a lady of bearing and elegance, not just a distasteful object that he plucked off the street.

The Mother Figure: Like the surrogate father, the surrogate mother replaces the heroine's natural mother and watches over her with all the experience of age. These women are the matrons of society and have staunch convictions which reinforce society's views about how respectable girls behave. She controls the impulsive, irrational desires of youth and oversees the lovers' courtship, acting as a chaperone when necessary. The Mother Superior in The Sound of Music is a model of restraint, chastity and sound advice. Also in the same mould are Mrs Pearse (My Fair Lady) Mrs Higgins (My Fair Lady) Hermoine Gingold (Gigi) Mabel Anderson (Swing Time) and Madge Hardwick (Top Hat).

A few general points should be made about the various musical genre heroines before concluding this section. They are all musically talented and have the ability to sing and dance well. Often they are unaware of their talent, its full potential and the implications that it has upon their characters. The necessity to dance is [illegible] when she falls in love, it becomes their means of expression as well as the primary mode of discourse between the lovers. Heroine's of musical films are also always physically attractive, or they have the potential to be and realise this potential at the end of the film. Plain, dusky girls are not suitable material for creating heroines in whom the audience can believe. Society unfortunately clings to the notion that external beauty implies inner beauty and the commercial film industry always has, and probably still will confirm this belief as long as it prevails.

Existents : Settings

Settings are relatively unimportant to the musical genre in a specific sense, because the narrative can be unfolded in any location which is deemed appropriate. What is important in the musical film is its iconography i.e. the system of recurring visual signs which occurs in the narrative structure. Stephen Neale has drawn attention to the problem of using the concept of iconography in the field of cinema explaining that:

> "The problem with the concept of iconography - and with the uses to which it has been put - is not that it does not fully correspond to the concept specified by the term in the field of art history from which it derives. It is rather that it is loosely and imprecisely defined within the field of cinema. Ed Buscombe for instance, uses the term simply as a synonym for 'visual conventions', themselves unspecified in general terms, and Colin McArthur similiarly refers to iconography simply as 'patterns of visual imagery.' [26]

What Neale is objecting to here is the imprecision with which many genre theorists use the term 'iconography' and he calls for the term to be clarified. As a discipline in the field of art history, iconography has meaning in a very definite sense. It is a body of knowledge about a visual subject. Panofsky uses the example of how the crucifixion is presented, and shows that different visual images may be used to signify the same event. [27] Some artists paint Christ's feet crossed while others paint them side by side. He may be pictured with legs bent or straight. Taken together all these images constitute a body of knowledge about the crucifixion. It is the iconography of the crucifixion.

The iconography of the genre film is built up of various images pertaining to the visual subject i.e. the setting. Before discussing this concept with regard to the musical film it would be more appropriate and ultimately more revealing to consider the Western genre, in which the thematic structure is intrinsically linked to the setting. An analysis of the relationship between the setting and the various recurr-

ing visual signs will clarify the concept of iconography and its application to the theory of genre. The western film is attached to its location and essentially it is a genre of conflict played out in two opposing settings each reflecting a particular sociological order. On the one hand is the west, a wild semi-desert frontier, which demands the respect of its inhabitants, and reflects their violent, brutal rules. And on the other is the East, the 'Garden of Eden' which represents progress and change. It embodies modern justic and law enforcement, education, in short 'civilisation'. Each of these settings has its own iconography. Visual images which reflect their deeper meanings. Among the icons used to visualise the west are horses, cattle, guns, leather, dust and cacti, all objects which show man in conflict with the environment and with other men. Contrasted with them, the iconography of the East includes books, carriages, moccasins, trains, railway systems and tailored clothing, all icons of progress and change. These various icons occur not only in the individual western film but are repeated throughout the genre. But repetition of a visual sign will not necessarily define it as an icon. John Ford has used a single image once and made a strong enough impact for that image to be added to the iconography of the western genre. His cactus flower in The Man who Shot Liberty Valance is indexical, reflecting the beauty of a woman, Hallie, beneath her rough exterior, worn by the hardship she has had to endure. The bicycle in Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid is also indexical, a picture of the changing world to which Butch and Sundance will be outsiders. This single image summarises the essence of the western's conflict and confirms that time must pass and the ways will die with its passing.

An examination of the gangster genre reveals a strong dependence upon the visual aspects of setting. This setting, the nightmare world, reflects the gangster's intense fear and his warped psychi. His environment is a place of darkness and sinister shadow, never light enough to remove the all-embracing sense of danger and impending doom. As in German

Expressionist films, the gangster setting magnifies the internal dilemma of the protagonist and his distorted perception of the world. It presents 'the city' as a conglomeration of menacing shapes catacombed by a maze of dark claustrophobic alleys. The gangster is never truly alone, he is constantly being watched, by the unseen faces in buildings, the camera's omnipresent eye or the audience. He is a victim of his own paranoia, pursued by an unknown enemy who gradually closes in on him. His sense of a distorted reality is mirrored by the use of unusual camera angles, expressionistic lighting and unnatural framing. The iconography of the gangster genre is familiar and conventionalised including guns, black limousines, the 'moll' and telephones, but the context in which they occur often makes them shocking, some times terrifying. One particularly striking icon is Francis Ford Coppola's image of a severed horse's head placed in bed next to a film producer. This riveting symbol of the power and violence of the mafia has become one of the genre's most significant images. Although it occurs only once it embodies a recurrent theme and visualises it in a new and gruesomely vivid way. Directors who have worked so successfully within the confines and constraints of genre filmmaking, have over the years, provided the cinema with some of its finest visual imagery.

The iconography of the musical genre is more difficult to isolate because it does not arise naturally from the setting. Because the musical slips in and out of the fantasy and reality modes, settings are often not locatable but are either created and used by the characters themselves to reflect their internal realities, or used by the director to visualise the thematic structure of the film. Therefore a specific type of lighting or the use of a particular colour could be called iconic if it is visually significant and adds to the meaning of its subject. In Singing in the Rain Gene Kelly evokes a sense of theatricality and illusion in the sequence 'You were meant for me', by transforming a bare sound stage into a fantasy setting within which he can declare his love for Cathy.

The warm atmospheric lighting, soft colour and gentle breeze form the iconography which describes Kelly's mental state, and reflect visually the inherent harmony and calm beauty of their relationship.

Vincente Minnelli's American in Paris ballet is a masterpiece of visual harmony which powerfully unites the artistic elements of colour and form with the cinematic possibilities of camera angle, focus and framing and the grace and balance of dance. He adds to this the various styles of French painters impressionism, caricature and expressionism, thus creating a mise-en-scene which is visually rich and symbolically dense. All these visual signs create the iconography of Kelly's imagination and reflect his internal reality both as a lover and a confused artist. One could also argue that the American in Paris ballet presents us with the iconography of Vincente Minnelli's style. His use of colour is particularly iconic and is repeated often in the musical genre. So too, is the overt theatricality and stylisation of his settings, and his use of the foregrounding technique. In Gigi he recreated the visual style of Paris in the early 19th Century using Gem's drawings as his inspiration, and in in American in Paris he once again foregrounded the aspect of painting. For The Pirate he created a brash display of firework colours against which Kelly displayed his natural energy and strong athleticism. Minnelli used the visual elements of film to illuminate the deeper thematic structure. Setting, in the musical genre, is part of the highly conventionalised mode of its presentation, and is characterised by theatricality and stylisation. It defies realism and consequently its iconography is complex and vast.

There is another iconographic category which bears discussion and this relates to the iconography of the persona. Fred Astaire's top hat, tail coat, tap shoes, and cane are all visually significant and reflect his persona, the generic character of the performer. Similarly, Gene Kelly's dress code is another iconographic system which is meaningful in

the context of this genre. His boater and blazer function as indexes signifying the exuberance and idealism of an American youth.

To return to Chatman's model of the structure of narrative, any narrative can be divided into its two essential elements story and discourse. The content of the narrative, or story, is made up of two components the events and the existents, which Chatman describes as:

> "The people and things as they are preprocessed by the author's cultural codes." [28]

In this case the preprocessing is a result of genre. Under the heading of events I have outlined the various plot formulae to isolate the observable narrative patterns of the musical film. And in the category of existents I have discussed character and setting as they appear and function in this particular generic structure. Chatman also makes a distinction between the form and substance of the content which is relevant here. The form of the content consists of the actual events and existents as they occur in the narrative structure, in other words the types of plots, characters and settings. The substance of the content i.e. its meaning is mediated by the various agents working upon it. Filmmakers and performers all encode the narrative content with a certain amount of visual significance. The director will choose his semiotics from the various technical and stylistic elements at his disposal. And the actor will add his own artistic performance and thus change the substance of the content still more. A film is successful when these mediators of meaning fuse together to afford it internal cohesion and clarity.

In this section then, I have examined the 'story' part of narrative structure, the form and substance of its content related to the specific context of genre theory. Analysis has focused upon the 'what' of the genre film, its events and existents, in order to plot the narrative elements of genre and determine the structure of that content.

NOTES

1. [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

2. Ryall, [illegible] '[illegible]' in [illegible] no 17 pg 28

3. [illegible], Stanley [illegible] pg 1

4. Neale, Stephen [illegible] pg 5

5. Todorov, Tzvetan [illegible] in [illegible] History VIII no 1 pg 161

6. ibid. pg 162

7. ibid. pg 162

8. Ryall, Tom op. cit. pg [illegible]

9. Todorov, Tzvetan op. cit. pg [illegible]

10. ibid. pg [illegible]

11. [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] pg 20

12. [illegible], [illegible] op. cit. pg [illegible]

13. [illegible], [illegible] [illegible]

14. [illegible], [illegible] [illegible] in [illegible], Vol 11, no [illegible], pg 43

15. [illegible], [illegible] op. cit. pg [illegible]

16. Piaget, Jean Structuralism pp 5 - 16

17. Todorov, Tzvetan op. cit. pg 1[illegible]

18. Schatz, Thomas Hollywood Genres

19. Chatman, Seymour Story and Discourse pg [illegible]

20. ibid. pg 18 - 19

21. Scheurer, Timothy 'The Aesthetics of Form and Convention in the Movie Musical' in Film Genre : Theory and Criticism Grant, Barry F. (ed)

22. Kobal, John Gotta Sing Gotta Dance pg 1[illegible]

23. Frye, Northrop Anatomy of Criticism

24. Schatz, Thomas Hollywood Genres

25. Kobal, John op. cit. pg 137

26. Neale, Stephen Genre pg 10

27. Panofsky, Erwin Studies in Iconology

28. Chatman, Seymour op. cit. pg [illegible]

CHAPTER 3

A STRUCTURALIST ANALYSIS OF THE MUSICAL

3.1 Structuralism and film

The structuralist analysis of the musical film genre, relates specifically to the discourse plane of its narrative structure. It considers the 'how' component of the narrative. Returning again to Chatman's distinction between the 'what' and the 'how' of narrative form, the discourse or 'how' involves the arrangement of the content.[1] This, in turn, determines the overall structure which the narrative takes. The content of a musical film is encoded into a framework of binary oppositions, and therefore a structuralist analysis of this genre is both appropriate and revealing.

Structuralism is a method of thinking about the world, which is rooted in the premise that reality does not exist in individual events, objects or ideas, but in the relationships between them.[2] Its main theoretical activity has centred upon the perception and study of the structures which comprise our world. These structures must, according to Piaget's three point definition, display a sense of wholeness, continually transform themselves and be self-regulatory. Structuralism looks at the ways in which societies organise themselves, and examines the structural patterns which arise as a result. According to structuralist thinking, every phenomenon is assumed to have many simultaneous structural relationships, which are continually transforming within, and in adherence to the rules of a governing construct. Furthermore, an object has no objective existence as a separate, isolated entity. It only has meaning when it relates to another object within a structure.[3] An object is therefore only observable in terms of its relationship to something else. This leads us to

another important concept, that it is only the relationships between objects which are visible to us, not the objects themselves. The aim of the structuralist activity is to create as full a perception of the world as possible, by isolating and examining the relationships which make up the world.

The structuralist movement can be traced back as far as the Italian Giambattista Vico, who in his book The New Science, proposed that man constructs the world as he perceives it, and in doing so he creates himself. Vico maintained that this structuring process is a characteristic of, and is inherent in the human mind. Modern structuralist thinking has developed along these lines and has been influential in the theory and study of linguistics and anthropology, and later in the fields of philosophy, psychiatry and literary criticism. The structuralists have shown how the apparently random items and objects which make up human behaviour and human artefacts are governed by certain structuring principles and are organised according to them. From this, they conclude that it is the structures themselves which are the fabric which comprises our world.

If we accept the structuralist legacy, which states that "we invent the world we inhabit" then any notions which we might foster of an objective, pure existence or a definitive reality are immediately dispelled. For how do we even begin to define reality if each person is inventing and reinventing his own? The word itself is only a construct, and derives its meaning in terms of its place in the vast structure of human language. Also, it must be remembered, that the word 'reality' and the definition of the concept 'reality' are not to be mistaken for the thing itself. A word is only a linguistic representation of what it refer to and the relationship between the two is arbitrary. If it is true that each person constructs his own world, or invents his own reality, a universal understanding or perception of reality, and realism is impossible. Everyone determines his own reality, and each person brings his past

history, his cultural background and his own personal integrity to bear upon his construction and understanding of the world. This pattern-making or organising process is different for each individual, but societies and cultural groups will tend to interpret their 'realities' along similar lines. Finally, say the structuralists, our understanding of things is never complete, but is subject to continual revision as new information and experiences become apparent to us. Structures like our perception of the world, are never static but are always in a state of flux, always subject to man's unending structuring processes.

Social and cultural phenomena, are not simply events or objects which can be isolated and examined in themselves, but function as signs within a larger mediating structure. Within a culture or society certain objects are invested with particular meaning and significance. But they can only mean as signs within the context of that culture or society. The relationship between signs makes that culture visible and naturalises its social structures. In Subculture : The Meaning of Style, Dick Hedidge explains the function of signs in a culture:

> "All aspects of culture possess a semiotic value, and the most taken-for-granted phenomena can function as signs : as elements in communication systems governed by semantic rules and codes which are not themselves directly apprehended in experience. These signs are, then, as opaque as the social relations which produce them, and which they represent." [5]

This point has valuable implications when we consider the semiotics of film. The filmmaker chooses to frame an object in a certain way, making it function as a sign. For instance in a shot of a businessman alighting from a helicopter to attend a meeting, the helicopter is a sign of the businessman's wealth and power. If that sign forms part of a system of signs, all of which signify the man's wealth and power then we can recognise the formation of a code which describes the concepts of wealth and power. Other signs might include his car, his clothing, his wristwatch, a briefcase or his home and office. These signs constitute a code of "being wealthy and powerful".

When these signs are repeated enough times to make them visible and recognisable to an audience as a narrative pattern a genre results. To extend the example used here, it would be a genre about wealthy powerful businessmen and and the signs would function within that generic narrative as icons. The body of visual icons or the code pertaining to the subject now functions as the genre's iconography. Film, like so many other disciplines, naturalises its discourse by making its signs appear natural and 'realistic' within the structure of the narrative.

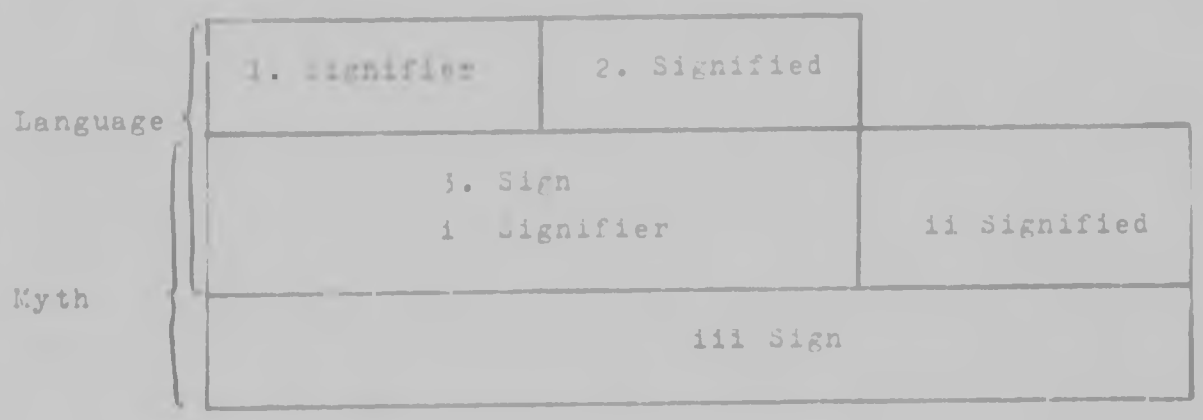
Roland Barthes reveals the fallacy of literary realism in the book S/Z, in which he deconstructs Balzac's novel Sarrasine to show how an impression of realism is conveyed through a carefully constructed code. Works which purport to be realistic, cater to the mythology surrounding the concept of realism, they entrench what the reader perceives to be real. Balzac's 'realistic' style served to reinforce the dominant ideology of the society for whom he was writing. He presented them with a mediated impression of reality.

By accepting a code of realism as natural and hence right, society makes certain statements about itself and its ideology. Novelists and artists who present a code of realism in this way, confirm the dominant ideology and entrench society's prevalent beliefs. Their works are ideological carriers which promote a certain attitude about the world as being natural and correct. Film is particularly successful in carrying ideological messages in this way because of the iconic nature of the visual image. It is easy to recognise an image of a house or a horse or a dress for what it is, and it is this easy recognition which has led to a lack of understanding about the visual media, and a dearth of serious examination of their content.

Roland Barthes explains how myth is created and perpetuated by society in his classic work Mythologies, and shows how ideology is naturalised by the media and fed to a willing

accepting audience. Popular culture functions as an ideological carrier in this way, and we have already seen how the musical genre reinforces society's feminist attitudes. But to explain how myths are created and transmitted in society it is necessary to deconstruct the meaning of Barthes' statement that myth is a "second-order semiological system". In a "first order semiological system" the relationship between the signifier and the signified results in the formation of a sign. These signs are given new meaning when they are framed in a different way i.e. as part of a new ethiological system. Thus, in the second order system the old sign becomes a signifier with a new signified and a new sign is created. Barthes represents this 'lateral shift' in the following model, reading now:

> "Everything happens as if myth shifted the formal system of the first significative moment. As this lateral shift is essential for the analysis of myth, I shall represent it in the following way, it being understood, of course, that the spatialization of the pattern is here only a metaphor:" [6]



Myth works in film by systematic reinterpretation and re-representation of the world. So currently upheld myths are represented in films, in a way which appears natural and lifelike. This code of realism involves the twofold process of a naturalisation of the discourse, which in turn results in a reduced palpability of the sign. This can be shown with particular reference to the private detective film genre, in which private detectives are seen solving crimes involving murder, rape, robbery and espoinage. A common sign (3. Sign) becomes a

second order sign (iii Sign) or myth when it is framed in a new context. Thus, the detective worker in his professional capacity (i. sign) is framed by generic convention, as a solver of murder cases. The secondary signification of this, is that the private detective is both professional in his approach to his work and ultimately successful. (ii Signified). Consequently we are led to believe that private investigators solve crimes of murder. (iii Sign or Myth). This premise has every appearance of corresponding to our view of the world, and our view of how a private investigator operates. The private investigator is portrayed in situations which match up to situations in our own lives. Myth therefore legitimises the ideology that it represents by giving the appearance of being life-like, realistic and hence right. In this particular example most private investigators agree that much of their work involves trailing their client's adulterous spouses and photographing them in compromising situations.

One of the cornerstones of structuralist methodology is rooted in Claude Levi-Strauss's premise that man perceives and structures his world according to a series of binary oppositions.[7] His research in the field of anthropology, led him to devise a theory of how the human mind functions in its most natural state, and while studying the non-literate, indigenous Indian peoples of South America, he established and expanded his theories about what he termed 'savage thought'. The concept that Levi-Strauss would come to call man's natural state, which is the state of a human mind before it has been subjected to the processes of systemisation and acculturation, was with these so-called primitive societies. For in studying these societies, he aimed to discover the fundamental structuring processes which govern man's actions and behavioural patterns. He believed that non-literate peoples organise themselves in terms of a 'poetic wisdom' which pervades their social system, and they make sense of the world by creating mythological meta-structures against which to understand and analyse single events. The full

implication of this concept, is that it supports the structuralists' beliefs that man creates his own reality.

Through his research, Levi-Strauss found that the primitive or 'savage' mind tends to organise the world along the lines of a series of binary oppositions. Even in its most 'natural' state there are a few basic organising principles which are integral to man's thinking, and from this evidence Levi-Strauss concludes that structuring and organising the world is inherent in man's nature. The human mind, he says, has a natural passion for classification that:

> "builds mental structures which facilitate an understanding of the world in as much as they resemble it. In this sense savage thought can be defined as analogical thought" [8]

From this original premise that man is by nature a structuring and organising being, grew the theory that society is made up of a pattern of relationships. It is these relationships which are visible to man as 'reality' and constitute his perception of the world. Returning to Levi-Strauss's study of non-literate societies, he maintains that in the most natural state man perceives a few fundamental relationships such as the differences between "raw" and "cooked", and "hot" and "cold". Terence Hawkes explains the notion of analogical thought in more detail, writing that it:

> "works by imposing on the world, a series of structural "contrasts" or "oppositions" to which all members of the culture tacitly assent and then proposing that these oppositions are analogically related in that their differences are felt to resemble each other. As a result, the analysis of the analogical relationship between the oppositions of 'up' and 'down', 'hot' and 'cold', 'raw' and 'cooked', will offer insights into that nature of the particular reality that each culture perceives" [9]

Hawkes maintains that in order to understand a society one must isolate and examine its governing structures. He gives a particularly apt example of how different societies perceive themselves using the analogical relationship between the common culturally defined opposition regarding what a society thinks is edible and inedible:

> "Analogical thought will move a culture to distinguish

> a 'foreign' culture from itself on this basis, so that the opposition 'edible-inedible' will become analogically related to the opposition 'native-foreign'. This means that 'transformations' between the two sets of 'similar differences' become possible : 'that which is inedible' becomes a metaphor of 'that which is foreign'. So one of the persistent english metaphors for the French occurs because frogs' legs, placed under the heading 'edible' in France, find themselves under the heading 'inedible' in England." 16

Each society organises itself according to a set of given rules, a structure which defines and legitimizes its own existence. Levi-Strauss maintains that these organising principles are constant in every society, since the analogical thought pattern is inherent in the human mind, it is not learned as one grows older. So although different societies may perceive these relationships differently, as is shown in the example of what is defined as edible-inedible, their actual structuring process is fundamentally the same and revolves around the analogous relationships between certain binary oppositions.

Levi-Strauss's study of the human mind reveals an encoding structuring agency capable of creating a whole culture based upon perceptible relationships. These basic principles have been incorporated into every act of communication which man undertakes, including his artistic expressions. All of the works which he produces are subject to the structuring and encoding procedures which the human mind naturally indulges in. By implication then, all art is structured according to the principles which govern thought and behaviour. Thus structuralist thinking has been incorporated into the discipline of literary criticism and the structuralists main critical thrust has centred upon an analysis of the structures of literature. Structuralist critics have revealed how all literary works are consciously mediated by their authors. I have already shown how Roland Barthes uncovered the fallacy of narrative realism and singularity of meaning in his book S/Z. An author's work, carries ideology, and therefore it is the critic's vocation to isolate these myths wherever they are

found and show their cultural meanings. In this way the critic de-mystifies his world.

Structuralism is a method with ideological overtones. The structuralists hold that it is only a method for understanding the signs and semantic systems which comprise our world. Whether or not one accepts Levi-Strauss's belief that man has a natural passion for classification, which reveals itself in the way he order his world, is ultimately not important. What is important is its implications for the theory and criticism of literature, art and visual media. The principles of structuralism can be incorporated into an appropriate method for the deconstruction and analysis of any narrative structure. Because all art is subject to the personal vision and cultural background of the artist, he will structure and organise his narrative in a certain way. Structuralist methodology is important because in applying its principles to a work and analysing the relationships in, and structure of a text, one can grasp its latent meanings.

Structuralism is particularly relevant to the theory of genre criticism, as a generic category is by definition a structure. All successful genre films adhere to and respect the internal rules which govern its broad structure. Any analysis of a genre film should therefore consider two factors. Firstly the structure of the genre as a narrative form, and individual text. The meaning of a musical film can be gleaned by analysing the analagous relationships between its primary oppositions, 'reality-fantasy', 'talented-untalented' and so on. A musical film presents a certain view of the world which corresponds with these fundamental relationships. The structuralist analysis serves the purpose of deconstructing, isolating and examining the content of the genre film.

3.2 A Structuralist Analysis of the Western

In his book Horizons West, Jim Kitzes has devised a binary

Binary Oppositions in the Western

Desert/Wilderness	Civilization/Garden of Eden
a) Individual	a) Community
freedom	restriction
honour	institutions
self-knowledge	illusion
integrity	compromise
self-interest	social responsibility
solipsism	democracy
b) Nature	b) Culture
purity	corruption
experience	knowledge
empiricism	legalism
pragmatism	idealism
brutalisation	refinement
savagery	humanity
c) West	East
America	Europe
the frontier	America
equality	class
agrarianism	industrialism
tradition	change
the past	the future

bureaucracy and corruption come hand in hand with education, federal laws and industrialisation. There is no guarantee that the new system of justice is more fair, ethical or appropriate than the old 'eye for an eye' morality which is practiced in the harsh, hostile environment of the West, but it is instituted nevertheless. And when the structures of this 'new order' become too complex, the individual personality becomes submerged in the community identity. Institutions are upheld as the measure of society's worth. A town is judged according to whether it has good schools, a railroad, or a courthouse. Although the old Western frontier was characterised by the brutality of its inhabitants, their crude justice and their anarchic government, individuals developed a sense of personal integrity, honour and conviction. Justice was generally carried out, albeit according to the old Testament ethic of "an eye for an eye". Being a natural existence, reliant upon and subject to a hostile environment, one of the fundamental laws of nature prevailed: only the strongest and the fittest survived. Kitses' model isolates the dominant forces on both sides of the conflict, and shows the shifts and contradictions apparent in each.

In The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, John Ford presents this generic theme of conflicting ideologies in a profound and striking way, nostalgically recalling the images and lifestyle of the old West. John Wayne plays the part of the archetypal Westerner Tom Donofan, a man of honour and personal integrity who commands the respect and awe of his fellow men. Liberty Valance (Lee Marvin) is the outlaw who has no respect for humanity, or decency, and wages sporadic assaults upon society. He is a constant threat to the citizens of Shinbone inspiring fear and dread. He is yet another hardship which they must all live with, a product of the harsh hostile environment. Into this setting, which is characterised by its stark scrubland, cacti and thornbushes, comes Ranson Stoddard (James Stewart) a newly qualified lawyer from the East acting as a missionary of civilization. His purpose is to bring justice and progress to the people of the wilderness. Ranson's character contrasts

bureaucracy and corruption come hand in hand with education, federal laws and industrialisation. There is no guarantee that the new system of justice is more fair, ethical or appropriate than the old 'eye for an eye' morality which is practiced in the harsh, hostile environment of the West, but it is instituted nevertheless. And when the structures of this 'new order' become too complex, the individual personality becomes submerged in the community identity. Institutions are upheld as the measure of society's worth. A town is judged according to whether it has good schools, a railroad, or a courthouse. Although the old Western frontier was characterised by the brutality of its inhabitants, their crude justice and their anarchic government, individuals developed a sense of personal integrity, honour and conviction. Justice was generally carried out, albeit according to the old Testament ethic of "an eye for an eye". Being a natural existence, reliant upon and subject to a hostile environment, one of the fundamental laws of nature prevailed: only the strongest and the fittest survived. Kitzes' model isolates the dominant forces on both sides of the conflict, and shows the shifts and contradictions apparent in each.

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sharply with those around him, both in attitude and appearance. He is defined by Eastern values, showing an inherent belief in the system which he represents. Idealistic, refined and learned, he attempts to institute a just system of law and order in Shinbone. He refuses to submit to physical violence even when threatened by others in the community. Ransom transgresses the norm of what is socially acceptable behaviour for a man, by donning an apron and working as a waiter. Such actions inspire the disgust and scorn of the town's citizens who see physical strength and courage as fitting male attributes. Yet despite their insults and jibes, he refuses to succumb to pressure and like a true martyr, simply turns the other cheek. By direct contrast, Tom is physically strong where Ransom is an intellectual, he uses a gun to achieve justice, while Ransom uses a book and he wears boots and spurs while Ransom always wears a suit and is prepared to put on an apron if need be.

Ford portrays Ransom as a man of deep integrity and singularity of purpose and by perseverence he finally wins the respect of the townsfolk and even Tom himself. It is to Ford's credit that both of these men are shown as characters who can be upheld as model citizens. Tom expresses all that is good about the old way of life, he is strong out of necessity and sees that justice is always carried out. But finally it is Ransom and the new order which succeed in the wilderness. He is elected as a senator and we witness the fruits of his efforts to tame the desert, a new schoolhouse, the railway, refined Eastern clothing and Eastern methods of justice. Part of the tragedy of the Western genre is that there is no place for men like Tom Donifan in the new civilized society. He cannot be expected to change because he is the old life, he and others like him have tamed and respect the frontier but their time has come to an end and they must make way for progress. Tom is destroyed along with the barren wasteland upon which he thrives.

Day and night provide interesting contrasts in this film, and Ford equals day with light and justice while night symbolizes

the evil, and uncertainty and anarchy which threaten the folk in Shinbone. Liberty Valance, the outlaw, is an embodiment of all that is evil in the West. While Tom reflects the inherent good in this society, Liberty is savage, brutal, lawless and dangerous. He always makes his assaults at night, victimising the community and scorning all decency. Liberty is the force of evil, a 'devil' who shuns goodness and preys upon the community. The iconography of Ford's presentation shows Liberty always wearing black and carrying a silver whip, indexes reflecting his cruelty and self interest. On the other hand Ransom, by bringing progress and ridding the town of the evil Liberty Valance and all he stands for, symbolizes the new day a new era in which men do not need to feel threatened. Ford portrays him as a Christ-like figure, a martyr who accepts insults and responds with compassion. He brings 'light' to the community and drives out the darkness.

Caught between these two forces, one of evil destruction and the other of progress and civilisation, is Tom Donofan, who by accepting the responsibility of shooting Liberty Valance signals the way for a new society. Had he not done this, progress would have come to a halt and Liberty would have protected his domain. But now that the outlaw has been destroyed, Tom finds he has no place left in the community. He is a lonely hero, haunted by the past and a true victim of change. Tom is like other mythic heroes caught between two forces which threaten and finally destroy him.

George Roy Hill's classic film Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969) reworks the mythological and ideological conflicts of the Western genre in a particularly striking and entertaining way. Butch and Sundance, the two outlaws are extremely skilled criminals who in the course of their professional lives avoid harming anyone. Hill presents them as two enormously charismatic and likeable characters, who are trapped by their inability to escape the life which they have created

for themselves. Their lives are marked by a sense of futility, as even when they are successful in their criminal activities they never seem to improve upon their lot. Always on the run, whether from 'the law' or their criminal past, they have no other option open to them. They must keep running. Butch and Sundance are hunted men, and are finally slaughtered in an obscure Bolivian village by a massed force of police and soldiers.

The tragedy facing Butch and Sundance is that they are unable to retire from the myth of their own characters. They have become part of the legend of the old West, and although that world is changing, Butch and Sundance are allowed no place in it. They are entrenched in the mythology of the old world and society cannot let them escape it. Killing them is a necessary part of destroying the old ideology of the West, it is a 'cleansing' process which must be done before new ways can be introduced. Society needs their corpses as proof that the old West has died. Butch and Sundance must be located in history as part of an era, their characters define that era and will ultimately declare its passing. In the Greek classical tradition, the Western genre demands that justice be carried out and the criminal must be forced to pay for his criminal activities. If he has killed, he must be killed and if he has lived according to the old ways, he must die according to them too. Butch and Sundance are pursued relentlessly by the forces of order and civilization. There is no escaping their ultimate destruction because it fulfils the requirements of the mythology.

In the sequence of 'Raindrops keep falling on my head' Hill makes a strong statement showing the changes which are taking place in the mid-west. As Butch and Etta ride around on a bicycle temporarily ignoring their fate, we hear the lyrics of the song:

"Raindrops keep falling on my head
and just like the guy whose feet are too big for his bed
nothing seems to fit..."

and realise that the outlaws will never be comfortable in the changing world. They are symbolic of and tied to the old western mythology. Ironically they attempt to alleviate this feeling of exclusion:

"But I'm never gonna stop the rain by complaining
because I'm free
Nothing's worrying me Nothing's worrying me."

and maintain their comic rapport until they are killed, but society could never allow them to be free. In their own minds they believe in their freedom, but in the eyes of the community they are condemned.

3.3 A Structuralist Analysis of the Musical

The binary opposition model which I have devised as a basis for analysing the structure of musical films, is divided into three parts. Part (a) considers the opposition between reality and fantasy and the presentation of this relationship in various films. Each of these concepts undergoes a process of reversal in the genre so that reality is revealed to be fantasy and fantasy is ultimately reality. Part (b) deals with the stylistic elements of the musical, and shows how the narrative is expressed in the musical sequences of the film as opposed to the non-musical ones. This section isolates antinomies which become oppositions within the framework of generic convention, as a result of the moral values which are attached to them. An emotion which expressed in a song for example, is usually considered sincere, while the same emotion expressed in speech does not have the same effect. Generic convention accepts that singing implies conviction and truth. Part (c) shows how the characters who are generically opposed i.e. those who have talent and those who do not, express themselves and their emotions.

In Hollywood Genres, Thomas Schatz makes an important distinction between the ideologically contested settings and ideologically stable settings of genre films. [13] The western genre is characterised by a setting which is ideologically contested.

This ideological conflict is at the core of most western films. New values are introduced at the expense of old ones, and the destruction of these old attitudes is both sad and inevitable. In contrast, the musical film is underpinned by an ideology which is stable and universally accepted. Only the hero, or the musically talented, transgress the code of socially acceptable behaviour but then it is never to evoke conflict, merely to express an identity. Even the talented characters adhere to their places in society, and although the hero may mock social etiquette and and class distinctions, it is always in jest. So when Fred Astaire arrives at a society event in Flying Down to Rio (1933), he feigns discomfort initially, but adapts to the situation with relative ease. As a fully-realised Music-Man, his inherent confidence allows him to transcend social restrictions. But he does not take advantage of his position and poses no threat to society. He realises that others need their institutions and their myths to rationalise and legitimise their existence. Musically talented characters may act in a way which goes against the behavioural norm, rather like the court jester who can be taken lightly and laughed at. Gene Kelly's singing and dancing in the rain is a classic exposition of unconventional behaviour in response to a particular circumstance. Kelly threatens no one, his is a joyful expression, a persuasive argument in favour of the original response.

The oppositions which are found in the musical genre are not, therefore, ones concerning the ideology or the setting. For although the musical reflects the cultural conflicts prevalent in society, it does so in a myth-like way. In devising a model for the deconstruction of the musical film genre, other elements come into consideration. The most obvious and vital relationship in this generic category is between what is musical and what is not. It is this fundamental formal difference which embodies the oppositions suggested by the narrative content. An examination of the relationships between, and the content and implications of the musical and non-musical modes, will

Binary Oppositions in the Musical

Non Musical	Musical
a) Reality	b) Fantasy
reflection	interpretation
stasis	growth
emotions repressed	emotions expressed
strict social institutions	social freedom
illusion	self-awareness
Fantasy	Reality
b) Naturalism	b) Stylisation
dramatic	theatrical
speech	lyric
soliloquy	song
dialogue	harmony
sentence	melody
rhythm improvised	rhythm metered
walking	dancing
c) Conflict	c) Resolution
reason	instinct
senses	emotions
rationality	imagination
suspicion	trust
compromise	risk
physical fulfilment	emotional fulfilment

reveal the essence of this genre's structure and meaning.

Before discussing the model in detail it is necessary to illuminate the implications of using music as one of the primary modes of expression. It is used in accordance with generic convention and is therefore familiar and acceptable to the audience. As a non-naturalistic form of communication it consciously foregrounds itself and draws attention to its own artefact. An examination and discussion of Roman Jakobsen's communication model will reveal the way in which music works.[14] Jakobsen distinguishes between six different functions of communication which adopt the character of whatever function is dominant in the communication event.

Jakobsen's categories of Communication

referential
(context)

(addresser)
emotive

(addressee)
conative

poetic
(message)

phatic
(contact)

metalingual
(code)

If communication is orientated towards the context, the referential function dominates and the message will contain objective information about about an event. If the communication is concerned with the addresser, the emotive function dominates and the communication makes a statement about the emotional state of its agent. Communication aimed at the addressee has a conative function and shows a necessity to force him into an awareness that the message is aimed at him. If the communication is orientated towards the contact then the phatic function is dominant and the communicator simply wishes to communicate for its own sake. Communication events

which foreground the code which is used, indicate that the metalingual function is dominant and the addresser ensures that both he and the addressee understand each other. Finally, if the message is foregrounded for its own sake then the poetic, or aesthetic function is dominant in the act of communication.

Music foregrounds itself and draws attention to its own artefact, and therefore the poetic function is dominant when music is used as an expressive mode. A song or a dance emphasizes the formal aspects of its own structure while simultaneously conveying the deeper, latent narrative content.

Within the generic structure of the musical film, music itself is used as a complex metaphor, which is understandable only in terms of the generic conventions which govern the musical film. Any attempt to deconstruct this metaphor must consider the iconic nature of film and distinguish between the literary and filmic concepts. If a novelist writes "My love is a red, red rose" he implies a transference of the qualities of the rose (the referent) to his love (the analogue). He is stating that his love is beautiful, delicately proportioned, fragile and strong enough to withstand the passage of time by comparing it to the rose. His love has certain 'rose-like' characteristics and if the reader understands the concept 'rose' he must understand the novelist's love.

In film, the metaphor is conveyed somewhat differently. Because film is a polysemic medium, metaphor can be encoded into the visual content of the film or into the soundtrack. It is therefore not subject to the structure of language, but can be received directly, either visually or aurally. So in film, it is possible for visual images or aural signs to function as metaphors, and this has resulted in the occurence of the following generic metaphors which can be expressed verbally as "My love is a dance", "My music is my imagination" and "I can sing therefore I am sensitive and self-aware".

[illegible] self-realisation and so musical talent is a characteristic of those who are loyal, confident, sensitive and sincere. Conversely, a lack of talent implies that a person is insensitive, shallow and morally flawed. 'I can sing', according to generic convention, implies that the person is "good" whereas the metaphor "I cannot sing" is also convention bound, and characterises the "not so good" characters. Exactly the same process of transference would apply if the metaphor was expressed as "I can dance"/"I cannot dance". These metaphors are only valid and applicable to the musical genre where they are easily recognisable and form part of its cohesive internal logic. "My love is a dance" means that love has the qualities of dance at its finest. It shows a perfect union of all the elements of dancing, harmony, artistry, balance, form and physical interaction. Dance is a visual expression of the concept of love and demonstrates its beauty and complexity in a particularly vivid way. Film is especially successful in this kind of visual communication which conveys non-verbal concepts. The other metaphor frequently repeated in musical films "my music is my imagination" shows how song and dance can be used to express and reveal a characters inner life. Music allows the character to explore his imagination and results in the translation of a subconscious thought into a visual or aural sign. The effect of using song and dance as metaphors is to foreground the poetic or aesthetic function of the communication event, while simultaneously reinforcing the message.

The opposition between talented and untalented characters is complicated by the fact that many of the talented characters are unaware of their true potential and accept their places in society without question. Music is an acceptable mode of expression for anyone who has a genuine need to communicate a message. So although a character may be a member of the film's internal community, and may also adhere to the values which that society upholds, generic convention allows for that person

to express his message in a song or a dance. The singing nuns in The Sound of Music, are the epitome of rational thought and reason. They live in a strictly structured society which makes ritual a part of every day existence, and organises the spiritual lives of its members. Maria, although genuinely devout, is unable to conform to the normal standards of behaviour expected in the convent. She flouts the rules, however unconsciously and the nuns are forced to ask in desperation:

"How do you solve a problem like Maria?
How do you catch a cloud and pin it down?
How do find a word that means Maria?
A flibberty jibbet? A will o' the wisp? A clown?"

By using a song, the nuns draw attention to the metaphoric descriptions of Maria which have been encoded into the lyrics. She is a "clown", a "cloud" and a "will o' the wisp". They are able to sense that although she does not conform to their strict regimen, it is because she cannot. She is too influenced by her imagination and her essential desire for freedom. Maria cannot be pinned down by institutions and rules, she needs to be close to her environment and experiences it through her love of music and singing.

Any of the films which use a chorus of singers from the film's community are using the conventions of genre without their metaphoric implications. Consequently, there is no indication that those characters are necessarily 'good'. What will become apparent are other aspects of that community which the director will encode into the narrative content. For example in the sequence of "How do you solve a problem like Maria" the orderly pattern of spiritual life is foregrounded The chorus characters are not truly generic musical characters as music does not give them insight into their situation, it only provides an acceptable means of expression.

Songs are therefore not the prerogative of the musically talented hero or heroine. A director may choose to use a musical sequence to reinforce a thematic point. George Cukor's remarkable 'Ascot Gavotte' from the musical My Fair Lady shows

the class structure of Edwardian England in a striking, particularly visus way. He effectively highlights their sense of community identity, and shows how the individual attitude has been submerged into a group consciousness. This is emphasized by the iconography of the Ascot setting, in which Cukor avoids naturalism and uses costumes which are entirely black and white. The chorus moves and sings in unison, without expression, without emotion and without any real interest in the event. Who wins the race is immaterial, what is important is that all protocol is observed and "everyone who should've been here is here".

Often, certain characters are summoned to sing despite their shallow, egocentric personalities. When the ardent suitor expresses himself in this way, he reinforces everything that we have been led to believe about him. Ricardo Romero, the ardent suitor to Ginger Rogers in Swing Time is obsessed with the technical perfection of his own performance. He strikes a stiff pose and sings hand on heart to his audience. His primary concern is that he is articulate, and any expression which is incorporated is done so as a necessary formality, thus rendering it insincere. That expression is also so lavish that it destroys the simple beauty of the aria. Ricardo's use of music is like his love, it is so indulgent and cloying that one can feel no sympathy for him. His insincerity only serves to amplify the real talent and sincerity of Astaire. Any character can use song, but only those who use it well and respect its strength as an expressive medium, will achieve the kind of self-awareness characteristic of the true musical persona.

Maria's rendition of "My Favourite Things" in The Sound of Music draws attention to her lack of pretension and material wants. For her, the valuable things in life are the simplest, and her celebration of these things is both sincere and compelling. Maria's simple joy contrasts with the sour attitudes of Captain von Trapp whose life is filled with all the trappings of wealth and is a barren wasteland of emotion. His children

have grown up without love or gentleness, and Maria is able to instill in them a love of special things which are beautiful for their own sakes not for the monetary value attached to them:

"Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens
Bright copper kettles and warm woollen mittens
Brown paper packages tied up with string
These are a few of my favourite things...
When the dog bites, when the bee stings
When I'm feeling sad
I simply remember my favourite things
and then I don't feel so bad."

To cheer her when she is depressed, Maria only needs to remember that the world is a beautiful place. Self-pity is against all her principles and material gifts are of no real value to her. The musical film is underpinned by a very simple philosophy which is shared by all its truly talented characters; there is always something to sing and dance about, even if it is only the thought that the world contains many beautiful things. Maria and others like her, have no desire to possess what they love, they simply wish to experience it and derive pleasure from it. Just being capable of admiring the world is enough to bring happiness.

Having explained the implications of using music as an expressive medium, and shown how it functions as a metaphor within the narrative structure of the genre, a discussion concerning the analogous relationships between the binary oppositions manifested in the musical film will provide interesting insights into this generic category. These binary oppositions which have been isolated in the model can be found in most musical films and it is therefore offered as an appropriate framework within which to deconstruct the individual film.

3.3.1 Reality/Fantasy

The opposition between reality and fantasy is integral to the thematic structure of the musical genre, and can be isolated in each of its individual films. Music is a non-naturalistic medium which foregrounds itself in two ways. Firstly, as a

metaphor for self expression, and secondly, as a stylistic device which defamiliarises the action. Consequently, a mode of expression that appears to remove its content from reality, seems to imply that that content must deal with fantasy. Society, as portrayed in the musical, perpetuates a view of the world which is accepted as natural, objective and hence 'realistic', while music lifts characters from this 'real' world and transports them to a fantastical, imaginary setting where they can indulge their dreams. The binary opposition model isolates the stages of reversal which evolve as the terms 'fantasy' and 'reality' are clarified within the generic context.

Any attempt to define 'reality' is, according to the structuralists, futile, because definition is only a linguistic representation which has an arbitrary relationship to the actual concept it refers to. We must remember also, that reality is a construct which is created by each individual in the community - we 'invent our own reality'. An examination of the world which is presented in the musical film as 'real' reveals two things. One, that there is a code of realism working in society and two, that this code of realism is presented as a second-order semiological system (myth) in order to be acceptable to that society.

Barthes himself has shown how the author always mediates reality and can only create an impression of it, a code which is familiar to the audience. Likewise, in each genre film, the director presents us with an impression of reality and creates a semantic system which the audience decodes according to its own perception of what is 'real' or 'life-like'. Applying this concept more specifically to the structure of the musical, the untalented characters accept the dominant ideology easily and uphold it as 'natural'. They are by implication, emotionally inhibited and socially class-conscious, erecting barriers to define their specific community and their necessary collective identity. Myth is an ideological carrier which reveals certain things about the culture which accepts

it. It allows a successful to [illegible] its own existence and form a structure which governs its behavioural patterns.

Within the musical genre, which as a popular culture mode, mirrors the society to whom it communicates, a number of myths are represented. A deconstruction of these myths will show the fantasy inherent in the musical's 'reality'. George Cukor's My Fair Lady (a film which examines class structures in Edwardian England) perpetuates the myth that class structures should be rigid, and shows what happens when they are transgressed. An ordinary sign: Alfred Doolittle's rise to the middle classes, is framed as: The result of his working class ethics being accepted as a new, fashionable morality. The secondary signification of Doolittle's rise in status is that: Alfred has become miserable, he is uncomfortable in his new role and is a social misfit. Alfred Doolittle's case seems to prove that class structures should be rigid. However Cukor shows the opposite in his presentation of Eliza's rise from her humble beginnings as a flower girl. By successfully shedding her class affiliations she proves that being a member of any class is not a necessary part of human existence. Providing she is sensitive and self-aware, she can live a fulfilling life.

In Singing in the Rain Stanley Donen unravels the myth that good speech consists of proper articulation and precise grammar, and shows that it is not always true. The simple sign: A film fails at the box office is framed in the following way: It was the result of the actor's poor speech. The secondary signification is that: The performer must learn to speak correctly, he must articulate and have an awareness of grammar and syntax or he will fail. Kelly and O'Connor show that this is only part of the issue, and in the musical sequence "Moses supposes his toeses are roses" they reveal how 'good speech' is primarily the ability to communicate and convey emotions. The formalities of speech are necessary but only as a secondary function. The major purpose of speech is to communicate.

Those who are untalented believe in the myth that song and dance should be reserved for performances where it is properly framed. Music has a place in society which is rigidly defined, it is acceptable in the theatre or in one's living room or at the Opera. Anyone who sings or dances in a place, or at a time not conventionally used for singing and dancing, is considered anti-social. So the sign: Gene Kelly is singing and dancing in the rain, is framed as: Singing and dancing in the wrong place, wrong time and in wrong conditions. He is therefore going against the established norms of correct behaviour and being anti-social. Song and dance must be kept for the proper occasion it is abnormal to sing in the streets or the rain.

Because such myths are presumed to be natural, and have the appearance of being 'life-like' they are accepted as facts which make up the fabric of reality. The untalented members of a community have no means to transcend the artefact of reality and discover the truth which lies beyond surface appearances. For if they could, then they would discover that Kelly's singing in the rain is a celebration of the joy that he feels and it doesn't matter that it is raining. He doesn't expect anyone to understand that he is responding to a strong inner impulse because he knows that it is beyond their comprehension. They have unwittingly fallen into the trap of mistaking recognition for understanding. Although they recognise what Kelly is doing, it is easy to see that he is dancing, they cannot decode the deeper signification. They are only capable of using what they see to bolster their own ideology. Recognition of the social order is easy, each member of the community accepts that he belongs to a class of society and agrees to abide by its rules. But they fail to realise that man has constructed his own world and institutions can be changed, they are not necessarily rigid or static. The music-man has the ability to invent and reinvent his own reality, he can reveal the fallacy of man's myths to all who are prepared to listen. Truth for him exists beyond the common-place world.

The setting of the music-man's world is often fantastical, a creation of his own imagination, but within that world the character forms a true awareness of self and self in relation to the world. Although his understanding of reality is incomplete, he makes no attempt to try and define it universally or objectively since his vision is always subjective. Reality is experienced but never defined. The true musical character needs no code of realism to objectify his existence and rationalise his life because definition implies limitation, and he cannot function totally if he is retricted by an established norm. By creating a fantasy setting (the term fantasy is used here to describe a situation which does not correspond visually to our perception of the world i.e. it is not 'life-like', natural or 'realistic' but theatrical, stylised and non-naturalistic) a character can transcend reality i.e. the construct which is perceived to be real, and examine his place in it, or explore the nature of a feeling he does not fully understand - like the love he feels for his partner and the strength of their emotional, physical and sexual fulfilment. True awareness is achieved as a result of this searching self-analysis.

A reversal has therefore become clear. The reality of the non-musical characters is one which has been created by themselves, accepted as objectively correct, and serves to justify and reinforce their daily existence. It appears natural, and it corresponds with all their knowledge about 'reality' as a concept. The musical characters seem to indulge in 'unnatural' behaviour - singing and dancing in the streets defies all convention, but because they invent their own world and explore its vital relationships and structures, their grasp upon reality is far stronger.

The model isolates the stages of this reversal horizontally, and each of the binary opposition relationships will be discussed in turn.

Characters who are not talented, and who cannot use music to

express themselves, remain bound to their society and are subject to its constraints. They only reflect upon the events and issues which occur in their lives. Since these events appear to be motivated in terms of the ideology which they adhere to, they feel no real urge to question or examine their meanings. Lina Lamort in Singing in the Rain is only concerned about her status as a Hollywood 'star', her looks, and her desire to possess Don and make him care for her, because the public demands that he should. In other words, she believes the myth which the studio has created around her. Their concerns have become her concerns and she has confused reality and fantasy in her own mind. A true musical character interprets his experience of the world and will not allow false values and illusions to cloud his vision. He needs to understand the latent meaning of the structure and relationships which comprise his world and is not content with surface appearances. When Don begins to believe in his own 'star' image, he is prompted by Cathy's pertinent comment about films "Once you've seen one, you've seen them all" to be himself, not the image created by the studio system.

Similarly, in The Sound of Music, Maria is an interpretative character who realises that loving a person means sacrificing one's own desires and being willing to allow that person to make his choices. She does not lust after material things, and her love for the Captain is not influenced by his social position and the comforts that she will derive from being his wife. Her love has grown out of a response to his person, she senses his repressed gentleness and restores his ability to love. In contrast to Maria, the Baroness Elsa is a woman from his own background who is of no real value to him or his children as she has neither the means nor the inclination to truly care for him or them. She enters Von Trapp's household without noticing that it is a loveless artefact, while Maria is immediately aware that it lacks the warmth, laughter and happiness which all families should share.

As a result of their lack of true perception and interpretation of their surroundings, the non-musical characters allow personal prejudices to cloud their vision, and they stagnate in their environment believing it is as it always will be. The systems which have been created leave no room for change, because when beliefs are accepted as truths very few people attempt to question them. Musical characters are fortunate because society does not regard them as a menace or a threat to the social structure. Unlike in the western or the gangster genre, the setting and the ideology which is perpetuated by the musical film is uncontested, and although not bound by it, the hero accepts his place in society. Also unlike the hero of the western or the anti-hero of the gangster genre, the protagonist of the musical genre may question his society and reveal its structural weaknesses without fearing condemnation for his opinions. Through continual questioning, and vigorous exploration of the issues which confront him daily, the musical character never falls into the trap which others succumb to. He cannot stagnate. Music affords him the means to grow, providing an expressive medium which enables him to constantly invent and reinvent his world.

Expression of emotion comes easily to a musical character, because emotion is something which he understands, accepts and readily articulates. Song and dance is a convenient and acceptable mode of expression within the genre, and it implies that the performer is both sincere and committed. Consequently, the talented characters are most articulate in these two expressive modes, and convey their true emotions either in a song or a dance. Consider the differences between Maria's character and the Captain's in The Sound of Music. He represses all feelings for his children and for life until he meets Maria. He refuses to allow his children to indulge in 'normal' child play and is angered when Maria makes them playclothes, and teaches them to sing and romp around. Although his engagement to the Baroness is appropriate socially, their relationship lacks any real warmth or love. Maria, by contrast, is vital, exuberant and capable of expressing her joys and her fears. In "I have

confidence", she questions her fear of the future and by analysing what lies ahead she realises that she has no need to be afraid:

"A Captain with seven children, what's so fearsome
about that?
Oh I must stop these doubts all these worries
If I don't I just know I'll turn back
I must dream of the things I am seeking
I am seeking the courage I lack
The courage to serve them with reliance
Face my mistakes without defiance
Show them I'm worry and while I show them I'll
show me so
Let them bring on all their problems
I'll do better than my best
I have confidence they'll put me to the test
But I'll make them see I have confluence in me."

By singing, and readily expressing her emotion, Maria is able to exorcise any feelings of reserve and discomfort. When she enters the Von Trapp household, she inspires the Captain to search for what is missing in his life, and release the deep emotions that he is capable of feeling.

One of the vital issues which is raised and examined in the musical genre, is class and social structure. During the years of Hollywood's "Golden Era", class distinctions were central to American life and the musical reflects this. As a popular culture mode, many of the musical genre's themes are drawn from the society it represents. Song and dance allow the characters to transcend the restrictions imposed upon them by rigid social definitions. Plots may match a poor boy with a rich girl or vice versa, and in South Pacific love even ignores the colour bar when a young white American soldier falls in love with a Polynesian island girl. The musical film bears a subtle message which is that man creates his own social orderings and man has the means to change or transgress them. Music leads one to recognise myths for what they are.

Astaire's heroes have what each man strives for, the ability to adapt to any level of society at any time, in any place. The Astaire persona has no definite class affiliation, nor is

it specifically located in a particular era. He is a kind of musical "Everyman". This is probably the reason why his films have a timeless quality about them, they don't age but remain exciting and understandable even to contemporary audiences. His dancing has a rich elegance and versatility which defies any attempt to categorise it or locate it in film history. Gene Kelly's persona is more easily located as the young, vital American of the 1950's, the embodiment of the proverbial "American Dream". He has no class affiliation because he needs none to make him secure. Providing he can always be sensitive to, and always explore his world he will remain aware and confident. In his book America at the Movies Michael Wood explains that:

> "Fred Astaire is a style, but Gene Kelly is a state of mind, almost an ideology. Astaire is our enduring dream of the effortless conquest of recalcitrant circumstance; Kelly is the indefatigable American..." 15

In the musical genre it is not really important that the hero and heroine come from similar backgrounds, as long as they share the same desires and fulfil each other's emotional needs. The vital issue is that they resolve any differences and the boy gets his girl. In High Society, the heroine is the daughter of a wealthy businessman while the hero (Bing Crosby) is a 'ne'er-do-well' suitor, of average means, who croons his way into her heart and finally wins the blessing of her family upon their marriage. The musical film usually presents an optimistic view of relationships and one is never left to feel that either partner will regret the decision to marry a person from a lower or higher social class. In accordance with the function of popular culture in society, the musical film never seriously challenges the dominant ideology. The racially mixed lovers in South Pacific were unable to marry as the hero was killed in action during the second world war, while performing in a heroic engagement against the enemy forces. Racially mixed marriages were still widely unaccepted in 1956, and this attitude was reflected in the ending of South Pacific.

Ultimately, society creates a distorted sense of reality which manifests itself in the myths which that society holds to be

...ruct, 'reality', undergoes a reversal of meaning and becomes fantasy. The musical character invents his own reality by observing and examining the relationships which surround him in his world. His vision and perception are entirely subjective, as say the structuralists, all understanding of 'realism' must be. Nevertheless his grasp of reality is far deeper than that of the community because it despels any fallacies of 'objectivity', 'singularity of meaning', and of 'pure existence'.

...3.2 Naturalism/ tylisation

In his theoretical work concerning the nature of film, What is Cinema? Andre Bazin makes a distinction between dramatic reality and theatrical reality, stating that:

> "Drama is the soul of the theater but this soul sometimes inhabits other bodies. A sonnet, a fable of La Fontaine, a novel, a film can owe their effectiveness to what Henri Gouhier calls "the dramatic categories". From this point of view it is useless to claim autonomy for the theater... That is to say a play cannot be dramatic while a novel is free to be dramatic or no... Nevertheless if we insist that the dramatic is exclusive to the theater, we must concede its immense influence and also that the cinema is the least likely of the arts to escape this influence." [6]

Theatrical reality implies a conscious awareness of the formal aspects of performance. In other words theatrical reality draws attention to its own artefact. While any text may be regarded as dramatic, by virtue of its communicating a sense within a specific narrative code, drama has its roots in the theatre. Bazin admits though that dramatic reality is not exclusive to the theatre and may be found in different literary forms and most important, in cinema. Theatrical reality may also be seen in film, especially when the director uses the technique of foregrounding to defamiliarise the visual and thematic content. Applying this distinction to the musical film it is evident that the plot is dramatic, but the song and dance sequences are theatrical. Any event

in which the form is consciously foregrounded is theatrical. Similarly, any visual settings which are non-naturalistic, or which draw attention to their iconography, are theatrical.

An analysis of Vincente Minnelli's sequence 'Dancing in the Dark' from the film The band wagon illustrates the difference between the dramatic, and theatrical reality. The ballet is a visual representation which shows how the two performers interact on an emotional level. They explore the possibilities of their relationship by testing each other in the dance. Each one's sub-conscious reservations and conerns are gradually revealed as their movements become more expressive. Minnelli's setting is New York's Central park, but he presents it in a non-naturalistic way, emphasising the theatricality and the formal aspects of dance. His contrast of light and dark is both spectacular and incisive. One cannot help noticing the brilliance of Gaby's white dress offset by the rich deep blues and greens of central park at night. The image foregrounds itself because it is so striking, and the message unfolds effortlessly. Although it is a dance sequence, a non-naturalistic form, the attitudes which emerge from it are important to the two performers and are inherently real. Tony (Fred Astaire) has been selected to perform in a new show opposite Gaby (Cyd Charisse) a dancer who is trained in the classical ballet. He is 'only' a tap dancer and is unsure whether he can match her capabilities. Gaby, in turn, convinced that he is not up to her standards, is disdainful of his abilities and treats him with coldness and disinterest. As a result, they argue about the show, and here we are presented with a perfect example of 'high art' aestheticism clashing with popular culture. In the final analysis Astaire proves that he is as competent as she is, technically and artistically. Their two styles of dancing can merge provided they allow them to. Neither of them needs to compromise their artistry or lower their standards, but each of them must be sensitive to the other's rhythms and respect their individual capabilities. While driving through central park in the evening after a disastrous rehearsal session, Tony and Gaby come upon a group

of young couples dancing to the music of an outdoor band. They wait until they are alone, and then tentatively begin to improvise a few steps. When each of them feels confident they join and dance together, proving that by this unity of movement they can achieve a harmonious partnership. Through the stylisation of dance, Minnelli unites 'high art' and 'popular culture' stripping away the cultural pretensions of aestheticism and status, and proving that they can coexist.

Stylisation and theatricality are the hallmarks of any Minnelli musical, even the non-musical passages are played out in an arena of colour and spectacle. Cecil Beaton's design for Gigi (1958) is marked by its heightened style, vivid colour and visual charm. It is non-naturalistic because it is based upon the essence of a specific era, and it is this vital aspect which is used as the basis for a whole design concept. Minnelli wrote that Gigi was filmed after the style of the Sem drawings which pictured Colette's original characters. Stylisation is therefore found in varying degrees. It is more marked in the musical sequences where the narrative content is reinforced by the formal aspects of singing and dancing. The converse is also true, and the non-musical sequences are more dramatic than theatrical.

In everyday practice, one generally communicates verbally through the medium of speech. Communication is also usually more denotative than connotative. In the context of the musical genre, speech normally reveals literal meaning while a song is encoded with complex connotations and latent meanings. Dramatic works use dialogue to suggest natural verbal discourse and the soliloquy is a conventional poetic form which signals character revelation. By using the soliloquy, the character has the chance to reveal his inner motives and conflicting emotions to the audience. Similarly, dialogue is a stylistic construct which serves to show the character's participation in a communication event.

A song can replace either of these two dramatic forms, and is

usually employed to reinforce an action or a thematic strand, or as a vehicle through which the character can express his feelings. 'Soliloquy' from the musical Carousel is Billy Bigelow's exploration into the problems which he is due to face when he becomes a parent. His realisation that he will soon have an added responsibility, prompts him to analyse the issue from all possible angles and finally resolve to take action. If the child is a boy, Billy imagines that he will teach him to do all the things he does, and proudly ponders whether his son will become President of the United States, or "marry his boss's daughter", or "bark for a carousel". It suddenly occurs to him that perhaps the child will be a girl, and he expects that she will be as beautiful as her mother, desirable to the opposite sex and besotted with her father. The thought of having a girl appeals to his protective instincts and his ego, so he resolves to prepare himself financially, morally and emotionally for the birth of his daughter:

"I've gotta get ready before she comes,
I've gotta make certain that she
won't be dragged up in slums with a lot of bums like me.
She's gotta be sheltered and fed and dressed
in the best that money can buy
I never knew how to make money
but I'll try, by God, I'll try
I'll go out and make it, or borrow it, or take it, or die."

Eliza Doolittle's 'Just you wait 'enry 'iggins' (My Fair Lady), Higgins' 'I've grown accustomed to her face' (My Fair Lady) and Maria's 'I have confidence' (The Sound of Music) are three more of the genre's many songs which provide the means for character revelation in a musical soliloquy.

Music is characterised by the formal elements of rhythm, melody, meter and harmony which are organised into a definite structure. Language is also a construct but it differs from music in that it does not draw attention to its own artifice. Speech has the appearance of being naturalistic and 'life-like', displaying less adherence to the formal aspects of communication. Meaning is created by the syntagmatic and

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paradigmatic combinations of linguistic signs, and the flow of words is highlighted by inflection and emphasis which gives the impression that the act of communication is improvised and there is a minimum of contrivance. The relationship of the lovers is reflected by their use of speech and music as expressive modes. Speech leads to mutual distrust and suspicion while in music all their conflicts are resolved. Gaby and Tony resolve their differences while dancing in Central Park and Don and Cathy reveal their love for each other in the musical sequence "You were meant for me.

Speech/lyric, soliloquy/song, dialogue/harmony, sentence/melody and improvised rhythm/metered rhythm are all stylistic antinomies which are framed as binary oppositions in this generic context because of the moral values which each implies. Characters who use songs as their primary means of discourse are by extension sincere, while those who rely upon speech have less impact. Speech is used to converse about everyday subjects, but a myriad of emotions and feelings can be revealed through a song and the genre's repertoire is vast. There are songs of joy:

I'm Singing in the Rain (Singing in the Rain)
My Favourite Things (The Sound of Music)

of hope:

You'll Never Walk Alone (Carousel)

of parting:

Never Gonna Dance (Swing Time)

anger:

Just you wait 'enry 'iggins (My Fair Lady)
Without you (My Fair Lady)

expressing confidence in oneself:

I Like Myself (It's Always Fair Weather)
I Got Rhythm (An American in Paris)
I Have Confidence (The Sound of Music)

of love:

Something Good (The Sound of Music)
I Could've Danced All Night (My Fair Lady)

Gigi (Gigi)
You were meant for me (Singing in the Rain)
and of exuberance and zest:
Make 'em Laugh (Singing in the Rain)
Good Morning (Singing in the Rain)
Be a Clown (The Pirate)
There are songs of conflict:
Anything you can do I can do better (Annie Get Your Gun)
A Fine Romance (Swing Time)
songs celebrating beauty:
The way you look Tonight (Swing Time)
and songs to cheer the depressed:
Pick Yourself Up (Swing Time)
What do the Simple Folk do (Camelot)

The final stylistic antinomy to be considered is that between walking and dancing. It shows once again, how communication takes place in the context of the musical genre. Dance is a stylised form of movement which foregrounds itself thereby reinforcing the narrative content and revealing its latent meanings. Applying Jakobsen's categories, walking serves a referential function, while dance serves a poetic or aestnetic one. The hero of the musical film, who's vital means of communication is song and dance, is always conscious of the inherent rhythms in the environment and his own body. Fred Astaire is the visual embodiment of the potential to dance. In each film he elegantly strolls, hand in pocket, with his body subconsciously responding to the rhythms of his world. In a similar way Gene Kelly perceives his reality in terms of its musical relationships. Subconsciously he channels society's noise into a tangible structured music.

Through the expressive modes of song and dance, the musical characters create a world which is subject to their own visions of reality and invented in response to their perceptions of the world and its structural relationships. Astaire finds music among the streets, cars and turmoil of a discordant city, and that music affords him a strong awareness of self and

environment. In the city cars move at random, people rush from place to place against a background cacophony of noise. The hero discovers rhythm amongst the discord by filtering it through his imagination and allowing it to structure itself into a pattern. His world is a source of inspiration for music, and anyone who cares to look and listen will find it. Song and dance allow the musical character to give vent to his emotions by channelling them into an acceptable medium. Within the formal structure of music, emotions revealed are rarely rendered sentimental. Song is an alienating device which results in an awareness of its performance aspect. The latent content of the song is very tightly contained in its form and must be decoded by the audience as opposed to merely accepted. One of the characteristics of the songs written for the musical films is that their lyrics are familiar and correspond with our experience of ordinary speech. When they are unfamiliar it is specifically for the purpose of reinforcing a thematic point. For instance, the heroine's ardent suitor uses quasi-poetic, lavish phrases to declare his love and alienates his audience by evoking their scorn and disgust. The hero who sings the heroine's praises in a simple lilting melody is guaranteed to win the respect and sympathy of his audience.

In the musical genre, the cinematic techniques incorporated by the director to complement the performance of a song add to the iconic, formal aspects of the film, while simultaneously adding complexity and signification to the narrative content. Vincente Minnelli's films illustrate the powerful capacity of film as an artistic medium and display a vast array of cinematic techniques. His use of the camera is always sensitive to the situation and emphasizes its visual and aural content. A tap dance is complemented by brisk, sharp editing, while a close-up shot of a character can communicate intense emotion, and the melodious lyricism of ballet is reflected by a slow tracking camera. The 'Dancing in the Dark' sequence of <u>The Band Wagon</u> is enhanced by the subtle movement of Minnelli's camera, poised almost like an eavesdropper, acutely aware of

the tension between the performers. The action is not stated by one more stylistic element which adds to the visual harmony of this scene.

3.3.1 Conflict/Resolution

An interesting opposition becomes apparent when one considers the ways in which different categories of characters respond to situations and emotions. The non-musical character attempts to verbalise his feelings in order to rationalise them in terms of his own predetermined, personal framework of experience. He is inclined to repress any action which he cannot understand, or ignore an event which falls outside of his perceptions of 'normality'. Conversely, the musically talented, self-aware character interprets his reality through dance, which brings a range of complex emotions into focus. The musical character will not ignore these feelings, but explores and experiences them. Instincts and impulses are never repressed but are allowed to gain expression. Emotions are used to feed the imagination in order to transcend the limitations of the visible world and discover new facets of human experience. Fred Astaire learns that he can transform a hatstand [illegible] dancing partner (The Band Wagon), do battle with ball[illegible] (Easter Parade) and even dance on the ceiling (Easter [illegible]). He shows how objects can be made to have new meaning and need not be reserved for a single purpose. As the structuralists maintain, each phenomena which makes up our reality, has several different functions which operate simultaneously. The hatstand/dancing partner, lives on the strength of Astaire's own energy, he has the capacity to transform it from an inanimate object, into a dancer. Without Astaire, the hatstand is only a hatstand, but as his partner, it is the essence of grace, elegance and perfect balance, a mirror of Astaire himself.

Reason and rationality characterise the untalented characters who attempt to explain the present in terms of their past experience, and what they perceive to be 'natural'. They will create order in their existence even where it is in-

appropriate. This is best exemplified with reference to The Sound of Music in which Captain von Trapp runs his house like a barracks and treats his children as he would a military outfit. All seven of them are dressed in sailor suits, march in a 'crocodile' formation, are hailed with a whistle and dare not speak out of turn. In the sequence where the Captain introduces them to Maria they announce themselves by taking a step forward, loudly proclaiming their name and retreating a pace back into the line. The extremity of this 'rational behaviour' results in its appearing theatrical and highly stylised. What begins as a simple ordering of life, i.e. creating patterns to make sense of one's existence, shifts to the bizarre and fantastical when it is taken to its furthest limits.

In direct contrast to the Captain, Maria is a creature of impulse and in conducting her life she is led by her instincts. Unlike the untalented characters who use the world to form a rigid lifestyle into which they must submerge their individual identity and compromise their personal values, Maria's 'reality' is subject only to her own vision and perception. She is prepared to take risks, and is repeatedly 'late for chapel'. Maria has even been heard to 'sing in the abbey', an institution which demands the quiet respect of its inhabitants. She teaches von Trapp's children to appreciate music and is shocked to find out that they have never heard songs or learned to sing.

The hero or heroine of a musical film is a gambler, governed by keen instincts and motivated by a desire to improve his life. He does not always wait to consider the risks involved when sacrificing what he already possesses. If he believes something is worth gaining he makes his bet without hesitation o regret. His personal growth and wealth of experience are partly a result of his courageous gamble with the future. Too many people are reluctant to part with what they already have. They fear that by striving for something better they will lose everything and gain notning, and as a result they content themselves with what is common to their experience. Characters stagnate

when they believe that they have achieved the best that they are capable of. Pessimism, [illegible] and prejudice result from this refusal to believe that life has something better to offer a person. Lack of experience generates the perpetration of myths throughout all levels of society, because that society has no means of rejecting them.

The Lovers' discourse often takes the form of conflict and resolution in the musical genre. According to generic convention suspicion and distrust resolves itself within the two narrative modes of song and dance. Usually the man dominates in the love relationship and the woman undergoes a transformation from naivity to awareness, in other words girlhood to womanhood. The love dance in which they resolve any misunderstandings, characteristically begins with a complex courtship ritual in which the partners test each other's responses and reveal the true depth of their emotions and feelings in a slow, trusting way. In [illegible], Dale and Jerry are caught in a rainstorm and take shelter in a covered bandstand for the sequence "A Lovely Day". Until now their relationship has been marked by conflict and Dale has shunned all Jerry's heavy-handed advances. When he begins to sing to her, she softens and becomes less disdainful of him. She is even prepared to listen when he courts her and invites her to dance. Soon they become so engrossed in their dancing and in each other that they joyfully release themselves and accept the possibilities of this new romance. The sequence "You were meant for me" is another fine example of how conflict is resolved in the dance. Don and Cathy's initial meetings have been clouded by their need to impress each other and they create false impressions of themselves. When they finally dance together these false impressions are cast aside and they respond to one another truthfully and sensitively.

In the musical film there is very little embracing or love-making overtly presented in the narrative, but the conventions of the genre make dance an acceptable equivalent of sexual expression. Gene Kelly's dance with Cyd Charisse in the

'Broadway Rhythm Ballet' shows the woman in two different sexual role models. Firstly, she is an aggressive tartar who ravishes the inexperienced naive Kelly and then abandons him, and her second role is as a symbol of purity and virginality. Musical films tend to exploit the latter as the dominant view of women. Women are shown as submissive sexually unaware creatures who need a strong male partner to awaken their desires and fulfil their sexual needs. By couching the physical aspect of sexual experience in a symbolic dance, the lover's fulfilment and unity is heightened and afforded maximum cinematic impact. Those who do not dance, by implication, do not express their total characters, nor do they truly understand their world. Consequently they cannot be completely fulfilled. Their relationships only give them a sense of physical fulfilment, while those who are talented will achieve complete emotional, spiritual and physical fulfilment in their relationships with the opposite sex. The musical genre celebrates the purest form of love and shows that love is characterised by caring, respect and sensitivity to another's needs.

Although musicals were provided in response to a certain need in society, and reflect that society's cultural attitudes, the finest genre films are marked by a dense and complex narrative. This examination has focused upon the structural relationships inherent in the narrative content, as well as isolating the formulae and conventions of this popular culture mode. The structuralist model is valuable because it provides a grid of possibilities upon which the narrative content can be mapped, in order to reveal how that narrative is structured, and how meaning has been encoded into it.

By examining the implications of using music as an expressive medium, and realising that the binary oppositions which are found in the musical genre result from the juxtaposition of music and 'natural' discourse, we can finally strike at the

core of this score and assigns its individual files in an appropriate way.

NOTES

1. Chatman, Seymour Story and Discourse pg 19

2. Hawkes, Terence Structuralism and Semiotics pg 17

3. ibid. pg 18

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5. Hebdidge, Dick Subculture : The Meaning of Style pg 13

6. Hawkes, Terence op. cit. pg 131 - 132

7. ibid. pp 52 - 53

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9. Hawkes, Terence op. cit. p 52

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12. Solomon, S Beyond Formula American Film Genres p 14

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CHAPTER 4

SWING TIME : CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

Conflict and resolution are characteristic of the Astaire/Rogers musical films and Mark Sandrich's Swing Time (1936), displays this vital generic opposition particularly strongly. It adheres to the love/hate, mistaken identity formula, the lovers become involved in a complex web of confused attitudes about each other and are mutually distrustful. As is usually the case, conflict arises in everyday living, and resolves itself in song and dance. The partnership of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers resulted in nine extremely successful films which were made for the Radio Corporation, and as a combination they have been acclaimed as the greatest song and dance duo to grace the screen. Commercially and artistically they were a success, and their 1930's musical films, helped to lay the foundations of the genre.

The magic of Astaire and Rogers is difficult to define. Both are superb dancers, Astaire more so than Rogers, and each have adequate, although not exceptional, singing voices. The reason for their success is not their capabilities as solo artists, but the effortless ease with which they combine their individual talents. Astaire and Rogers interact on all levels, physical and mental. They complement each other perfectly and none have matched their joined elegance, grace, wit and fluidity of movement. Their success is a result of the sum of their parts and together they communicate the exciting energy which flows from two artists perfectly matched.

With the arrival of Astaire, the musical genre suddenly took an artistic turn, as he was not one to compromise his personal standards. Astaire was a perfectionist, and no one will dispute the sheer genius of his work. He was inspired and his audience responded in a way that shocked the Hollywood film industry.

Quick to jump on the bandwagon, they took as much advantage of this new success formula as possible, and it is to Astaire's and Roger's credit that in none of their films was artistic merit ever compromised.

The Astaire persona was the first of the musical genre, and found enormous sympathy with the American cinemagoers. In each film he is always the familiar, casual debonair man-about-town, while Rogers plays the pert-wisecracking blonde. Astaire's hero is never an innovator, or an outcast or a social misfit, but simply a sensitive, good humoured, essentially ordinary man who has the gift of insight. He understands every aspect of a situation, and if he doesn't he explores it until he does. He is prepared to take risks and will not shy away from the unfamiliar. In a very gentle, persuasive way, he shows others how life ought to be lived. It is as easy to him as effortless breathing, he makes us believe that anyone can dance, anyone can sing, anyone can hear music if they care to listen, anyone, in short, can live like Astaire lives. Living and dancing are synonymous, and if one dances, by implication, one lives life to the full.

Lucky (Astaire) is a gambler, but not with the common-place material world. He takes chances with his life and shows us that to gain true happiness, one must be prepared to risk what happiness one might already have. If one does make that sacrifice, Astaire proves that fate always supports those who are most deserving. This idealistic attitude is characteristic of most musical films and struck a sympathetic chord in the audiences. It's message of fulfilment and hope was particularly relevant to the American people who were caught in the grip of a national depression. Those who are untalented will never improve upon their lives, but those who sing and dance, and allow their true feelings to be expressed, will enjoy a richer more rewarding life.

The name Lucky Garnett is obviously signified in the film, and

in terms of the Astaire persona. Lucky always wins in the end. Although he may appear to be losing his girl, Penny, his inherent optimism and belief in himself ensure that finally his luck will turn. Penny too, is aptly named as he even gambles his love for her and risks losing her rather than have their love compromised and tainted by past events. When he can eventually claim her without guilt, their love remains pure and fulfilling.

The film opens as Lucky is about to be married to the daughter of a powerful and wealthy businessman, Betty Furness. Unfortunately, but as it transpires later, fortunately, Lucky spends so much time preening and adjusting his suit to create the correct visual impression that he leaves his bride waiting at the altar for too long and the wedding ceremony has to be abandoned. In order to make amends he decides to go to New York to make his fortune and prove that he is worthy of Furness's daughter. He takes his good friend and confidante, or surrogate father Dr Cardetti ('Pop'), along with him, as a companion and steadying influence. While in New York, he chances upon Penny (Ginger Rogers), a dance instructress and is immediately attracted to her. In order to meet her again, he applies to the studio for dancing lessons and insists that she becomes his teacher. The follows one of the most overtly ironic sequences of the musical genre, when Astaire pretends that he is unable to dance. It is both ironic and absorbing to watch him confuse his left foot with his right, stumble over the most simple steps, misjudge his timing and finally lose his balance completely and fall over. Yet this is so elegantly, and expertly executed that there can be no mistaking that we are witnessing a performance. The only person who is fooled is Penny, we the audience, could never accept that Astaire cannot dance, whatever character he played, in whatever film and Astaire respects his own persona enough to know this. Penny grows impatient with him but perseveres singing:

"Nothing's impossible I have found
For when my chin is on the ground
I pick myself up, dust myself off
start all over again."

By stating this, Penny is revealing a great deal about her own character. She too, is an optimist, who accepts difficulties but overcomes them. Straight away we realise that she, like Astaire, is a talented character and by extension far stronger and more appealing to the audience than Betty, who shelters from disappointment and takes refuge in upper class society. Her father is her strength and she relies upon others like him to guide her in life.

Finally though, Penny loses all patience with Lucky's complete ineptitude and sends him away. Her manageress overhears this exchange and dismisses her for being rude and unhelpful to a customer. Lucky realises what he has unwittingly caused and attempts to rectify matters by showing the manageress how much Penny has taught him. The following dance is a splendid display of Astaire's talents which alleviates all the pent-up tension we have felt while watching him repress his true capabilities. He invites Penny to dance with him and from the start their relationship is perfectly balanced, harmonious and complex. Lucky allows Penny to exhibit her talent to its fullest and shows what she is capable of achieving as a dancer. We know as soon as they start to dance that their partnership is desirable and natural. Sandrich's use of film irony is exceptionally successful and works as a consequence of the genre. He manipulates the convention and familiar formula, Astaire as a dancer, to seem to allow that convention to be transgressed. So without the generic structure, that specific irony could not work as successfully.

This sequence also manifests the central opposition in this film of conflict and resolution. The conflict of the lovers is a result of them using a naturalistic expressive mode through which to communicate and while they cannot dance, their conflict cannot be resolved. Immediately they start to dance, all other problems fall away and they know that ultimately they belong together.

Later that evening, when Lucky and Penny are alone in Penny's apartment, he amuses himself by playing the piano and singing

while she shampoos her hair "The way you look Tonight" is clearly a celebration of Penny's loveliness and is Lucky's way of clarifying al that he knows and feels about her. It is also obvious that Penny is the subject of his song and not Betty, since because Lucky and Penny are compatible as dancers they are ideal mates. He begs Penny not to change, neither her looks nor her character and while he sings oblivious to anyone else, she enters the room entranced. Even in the unglamorous situation of having a head covered in shampoo, Ginger Rogers maintains a sublime charm. In this scene then, there are a number of strange paradoxes which are the result of broken conventions. Lucky should be singing about Betty, but he is singing to Penny. Penny by conventional practice should appear correctly groomed to a lover, but she enters the room with shampoo still in her hair and even then remains ideally beautiful. Such paradoxes reinforce the sense of irony and mistaken appearances which are essential to this film and others in the Astaire/Rogers repertoire. The protagonist is also an ironist, and reveals the illusions which underlie the so-called 'real' world.

The conflict which results from accepting appearances as real, intensifies the following day when Lucky, who is suffering the pangs of a guilty conscience, attempts to resolve the situation and extricate himself from this new romance. He has been both unfaithful and deceitful, but he chooses the wrong medium in which to resolve the crisis. Lucky expresses himself best in song and dance, without them his communication leads to conflict and unhappiness. In order to break his relationship with Penny he feigns indifference to her and refuses to respond to her romantic overtures. When she remarks that she is cold, he suggests that she should try flapping her arms to speed up her blood circulation. She moves closer to him and he moves away insisting that they walk around vigorously. Understandably, Penny cannot fathom his sudden change of attitude and begins to taunt him singing:

"A fine romance with no kisses
fine romance my friend this is

"e should be like a couple of hot tomatoes
But you're as cold as yesterday's mashed potatoes..."

and leaves feeling hurt and confused. Pop's explains the true situation to her and she feels even more alienated because of Lucky's deceit. To complicate the situation even further, Lucky has a change of heart and unable to bear the thought of losing her, he decides to declare his love. He is unaware that she has learned the truth and unwittingly deceives her still more. Penny cannot accept that he really does love her and presumes that he has trifled with her while his true feelings lie elsewhere. Failing to understand Penny's sudden reversal of attitude it is his turn to sing:

"A fine romance with no clinches
A fine romance with no pinches..."

The sequence ends with both of them distrustful and suspicious of the other. Each has been mistaken about the other's motives and neither know the truth. Surface appearances have been accepted as 'real' and the genre once again shows that realism and true understanding are to be found in non-naturalistic discourse. While they are talking and not dancing their relationship will be clouded by conflict and suspicion.

The situation in the earlier scene "A Fine Romance", ultimately leads to a climax and resolution in the musical sequence of "Never Gonna Dance". This is one of the most striking examples of the use of film metaphor, and it is successful because it is specifically cinematic and particularly generic. Metaphor in film, is both visual and audible and is therefore directly perceived via the twin channels of sight and hearing. It also implies that the characteristics of the referent have been transferred to the analogue, i.e. that one object has become another. In the context of the musical genre, dancing and singing, which are both to some extent visual and audible, dance is primarily visual and song primarily audible, have become synonymous with communication. As an expressive medium, music allows this communication to occur simultaneously on many levels, physical, mental, emotional and subconscious. So in the sequence "Never Gonna Dance" music is a metaphor for the lovers discourse. Although they appear to be just dancing,

they are making love, exploring their true feelings, revealing the hurt of parting and expressing a total harmony, commitment and compatibility as lovers. They belong together because their dancing reveals the essential beauty of their relationship.

Despite Lucky's admission of his love for Penny, he is forced to accept that he is morally bound to fulfil his commitment to Betty, and end his relationship with Penny. Both of them understand that their loving must end because as a musical character Lucky cannot break trust with anyone. He has a deep sense of conviction and loyalty, so he is bound to stand by his word even if he must risk sacrificing his own and Penny's happiness. Penny also realises and accepts Lucky's decision and only asks if the girl he loves dances very beautifully. Truthfully, Lucky replies that she does, and sensing that he means her, Penny qualifies the question by adding "the girl that you are going to marry". Lucky has to reply that he does not know. Asking if a man's future wife dances beautifully may seem a strange question, but within the genre it is an acceptable and logical one. Underlying the actual manifest meaning are a myriad of other questions which are implied by the first - Does she share his convictions and loyalty? Is their relationship successful? Are they sexually compatible? Is she a sensitive person? Will she fulfil his emotional needs? Penny is all of these things and their relationship is mutually beneficial, but the relationship between Lucky and Betty has none of these strengths. Penny can be satisfied in knowing that Lucky loves only her, and will derive some comfort from that knowledge. Taking the metaphor a step further Lucky sings "Never Gonna Dance" a comic/tragic song in which he declares that he will never dance again if he cannot dance with Penny. Since dancing is his vital means of expression, his life force, such a sacrifice amounts to emotional suicide. He will be alive, but living will be devoid of all true meaning. But even in the face of his impending tragedy and loss, he maintains his dignity and good-humour singing:

"To Groucho Marx I'll give my cravat
To Harpo goes my shiny silk hat."

However, the comic implications of the song, only serve to amplify its underlying pathos and we become acutely aware and sympathetic of their mutual loss. To provide the climax to this sequence they dance for what they believe will be the last time, and in their dance all previous conflict, misunderstanding and confusion is resolved. Their relationship is pure and transcends the reality of their situation. Dance has replaced a parting embrace and when they cease dancing, they metaphorically end their lives and effectively destroy their future. Together, Penny and Lucky can provide each other with the means to stay alive in the deepest sense, they are perfect dancing partners and by implication, perfect living partners.

The impressive dance duet "Waltz in Swing Time" which Astaire and Rogers perform before a large internal film audience, is a breathtaking display of their combined talents. After the success of "The Carioca" in Flying down to Rio each of their films included one such huge production number which set the American audiences dancing. R.K.O. realised the impact which these dances had upon the viewers and repeated the formula in The Gay Divorcee ("The Continental"), Top Hat ("The Piccolino") and Carefree ("The Yam"). "Waltz in Swing Time" sounds to be something of a contradiction in terms, but the contradiction of two different musical tempos resolves itself in this exciting dance. Astaire and Rogers take a simple waltz and make it 'swing', with new life and vital rhythm. Breaking away from the conventional waltz steps, they move with a joy and zest which is immediately infectious and absorbing. After listening to the bombastic Ricardo Romero performing an Italian aria injected with more sentiment than the song ordinarily requires, Penny and Lucky decide that the atmosphere of the restaurant needs lightening. They ask the band to play a waltz and stifling Ricardo's protests a waltz is eventually played. Their dance is a stunning display of their combined talents and feelings of exuberance. Although they have a captive audience,

unlike Ricardo, it is unnecessary, all that they need is the music and each other. It is fulfilling and concentrated without being indulgent. The dance expresses their mutual harmony and deep sense of unity, and in every new step they learn something new about themselves and each other. This is a visual display of non-verbal attitudes, and the metaphor of dance reveals the underlying feelings between Penny and Lucky. Furthermore, it sets them apart from society, as no one else is capable of performing what they are able to. Yet by their elegance, grace and easy fluidity they make dance seem effortless as walking. Everyone they say, is able to dance, but each of us subconsciously places limits upon what we will try and achieve. We impose our constraints to define and rationalise our lives, and Penny and Lucky prove that these constraints can be broken. Perhaps one will never be as technically competent as Astaire and Rogers, but the point is to take the risk and try. Their audience is stunned at their physical and artistic achievements, but they fail to understand that an open attitude to life and living will allow them to achieve this fulfilment also.

Many of the other Astaire/Rogers films are similar in structure to Swing Time and it is both interesting and revealing to compare some of these films. They, like many other genre musicals are built around a series of binary oppositions which can be isolated in the narrative content of each text. Consequently, there are characters who exhibit true talent and these are juxtaposed with those who do not. Astaire's persona as the elegant, sauve Music-Man is highly formulaic and remains constant in each of his films. He is indicative of true, pure musical talent, and is, by implication, completely in control of his life and a character of excellent moral convictions. His command of the dance is reflective of his command of daily living. But to a certain extent he is an outsider to society, removed from its restrictions by his extraordinary sensitivity and awareness. He is able to mock social institutions without appearing bitter or aggressive. In Swing Time his own talent contrasts sharply with Ricardo Romero's stiff posturing. And

upon entering a society party in The Gay Divorcee, he feigns discomfort, pretending that he cannot find a place for his top hat and cane. This sequence reinforces the Astaire persona as an ironist, since he normally uses his cane and top hat with elegance and dexterity. We know that he is only pretending to be uncomfortable for the benefit of his audience, Astaire is at home in any surroundings. In Top Hat, he once again displays his disrespect for social norms when, as Jerry, he enters an exclusive men's club and folds his newspaper in a loud and obvious manner. To the irritation of the elderly patrons, he is noisy and obnoxious. Then as he leaves, he starts to tap dance and totally destroys the calm, sanctified atmosphere. This bold jab at the status and prestige of men's clubs, is both humourous and illuminating. Real peace is not to be found here, only a false quiet and composure. The slightest imbalance destroys any impression of calmness. Although the patrons are presumably there to be sociable, they are easily angered and upset. In this rarefied atmosphere, any exhibition of individual expression is frowned upon. Patrons are expected to conform to normal standards of quiet and discrete behaviour.

Jerry's pursuit of Dale Tremont is similarly unconventional and evokes her annoyance rather than her affection. Since she is a wealthy young woman of some social standings, his brash courtship is both unfamiliar and at first unwelcome. Inevitably it leads to conflict when he dances noisily in the room above hers, holds her prisoner in a taxi and irritates her by his constant vigil. But Jerry is not daunted, their initial conflict is resolved in the dance sequence of "A lovely Day" and where there was mutual mistrust and suspicion, there is now affection and trust.

In their films, Ginger Rogers plays one of two characters. Either she is a frustrated socialite or a vulnerable chorus girl. Each of these characters is marked by her essential vulnerability which is hidden beneath a caustic repartee. While she appears confident and self-assured, she lacks the

hero's depth of awareness and needs him to awaken and realise her full potential. She teaches him to love while he allows her to unleash her feelings and truly enjoy life. Together they embody all that is necessary for living a full life and express it through the medium of dance. Although in Swing Time, Penny is a dance instructress she does not use the full potential of dance as an expressive medium. Lucky reveals what is inherent in her, but not exploited.

Penny's opposite is Betty Furness, the daughter of a wealthy businessman. Lucky's fiancé has no musical talent and is by extension shallow, pretentious and insensitive. She belongs to a community which is restrictive and prejudiced but she accepts it without question. If Lucky is to prove himself in her eyes then he must be financially successful. Likewise, Astaire's opposite in Swing Time is Ricardo Romero, Penny's ardent suitor who is lavish with praise for her, but lacking in any real emotion. Although he sings, it is with a voice so honeyed and smooth and laden with sentiment, that it is immediately insincere. Song for him is synonymous with performance while for Astaire it is a means of expression so vital to his existence that it is as natural as breathing and moving. Ricardo's courtship of Penny is both excessive and extreme. He is more in love with love itself than the object of his desires. Ricardo wallows in his position as a spurned lover and delights in his own suffering. When he seizes Penny on the rebound we know that she could never be happy with him, and when Lucky claims her and tricks Ricardo into being late for the wedding we can waste no sympathy on him. He is late because of his own vanity and sense of importance.

Other musical characters who are not quite so obvious as Lucky and Penny, are 'Pops' and Mabel Anderson who provide various scenes of comic relief by mirroring the lovers and achieving their own mutual fulfilment. Although they are blissful and compatible their love is fraught with domestic squabbling and bickering. However, they are completely at ease with each

other and delightfully loving. Their dancing is clumsy and awkward, but they are obviously happy and contented with this late-flowering love.

The non-musical characters are representative of the film's internal community. This community comprises the vast majority of characters who neither sing nor dance and therefore believe in false 'reality'. Those who believe in appearances and accept them as natural, and 'real' have been caught in the trap of equating recognition with understanding. For to base one's knowledge and perception of the world upon so-called truths, is not only misguided but dangerous as it blurs the edges between what is real and what is fantasy. Where social institutions are clearly defined, the powerful seek to reinforce them if it is in their interests to do so. Those who belong to the upper classes accept this as proper and right, because it defines their own existence and provides them with a secure identity. Individuals make sense of their lives in terms of a larger structure, they have a sense of belonging to that structure and it fulfils their desire to be a part of something. Astaire and Rogers only need to belong to each other and rely on the strength of their individual characters to live life fully. They do not require that collective identity which panders to itself by creating rules for living.

Astaire demystifies his world by proving that the individual can be stronger than society and there is a deeper reality to be found through exploration and discovery. He strives for greater self-awareness and fulfilment and music provides the means to achieving this personal reality. By filtering his perceptions through an active, questioning imagination he creates order and meaning out of turmoil and chaos. There is an invitation to dance wherever one might be, and one must only respond and accept it. By dancing he is always in touch with his world, and always receptive to what it might offer. When arriving in New York, Lucky finds the city's mayhem an inspiration for music. Astaire's world is never silent and

he allows a bounce to slip into his stride and a whistle to escape his lips.

Perhaps Astaire's most significant attack upon society and institutionalization is to be found in a memorable sequence from the film Top Hat in which he receives an invitation to a very prestigious society event. The sequence is framed as an item in a show and Astaire dances with a chorus of twenty male dancers who reinforce the action. He 'reads' the invitation to his audience as an 'improvised' song:

"Your presence is requested this evening, it's formal,
A top hat, white tie and tails..."

Initially he appears rather pleased to have been invited, but slowly the thought dawns upon him that this is but another one of society's self-erected theatres in which he is expected to play his part and don his costume. The dancing then becomes increasingly sinister as finally he turns on the chorus, raises his cane as if it were a machine gun and shoots them all, symbolically destroying the collective identity which forms society. Although this event is framed as a play within the main structure of the film, which is supposedly unrelated to the plot, it reinforces all that Astaire has advocated throughout. It recalls to mind the earlier scene in the men's club where he exposes that institution as a sanctified, deified centre for the narrowminded, the wealthy and the ill-at-ease who would believe that they are vitally necessary to its existence. By shooting the twenty strong chorus, Astaire pronounces judgement upon a society which demands adherence to conventional practices and needs to redefine its own existence by having regular meetings which entrench a certain ideology. The foregrounding device of the play within a film effectively alienates the event and simultaneously reinforces its message.

The notion of acceptable social behaviour is also examined in The Gay Divorcee in which Ginger Rogers is an unhappy wife trying to divorce her faithless husband. In the process she meets Astaire and falls in love with him. Various friends, aquaintances and members of the upper class pass judgement

upon her because she is still a married woman, and openly indulges in 'immoral' behaviour. At the end of the film her husband agrees to divorce her on the grounds of adultery, and it finally comes to light that he has been unfaithful for a number of years but has successfully hidden the truth from his wife and their friends. This scene aptly uncovers the hypocrisy wich abounds in society, for while he would see his wife unjustly accused he tries to spare himself the humiliation of a just public trial. Society finds adultery acceptable as long as it is discreet, Astaire's and Rogers' honest relationship is frowned upon and condemned.

In an analysis of the musical sequences of the film Swing Time an important point is revealed. Each of them is used to provide a climax in the narrative and each embodies the vital oppositions which are central to the film, reality and illusion and conflict and resolution. All conflict between the lovers is resolved because it is in the expressive modes of song and dance that true reality can be experienced. This is characteristic of all musical films, especially those in which the musical numbers are integrated with the main thematic content. Considering the binary opposition model, a number of factors are apparent. Firstly stylisation has replaced naturalism in the communication of the discourse. Song and dance are non-naturalistic modes which draw attention to their own artefacts, and simultaneously afford maximum impact of the narrative content. In "Pick Yourself Up" Astaire plays out a deliberate courtship ritual in which he leads and she follows, each testing the others physical and emotional responses, indicating whether or not they are compatible as lovers. The latent content is revealed via a non-naturalistic mode of expression.

"The Way You Look Tonight" is a soliloquy which is framed by its form, song. Using this medium gives the content greater impact and meaning. When Lucky celebrates Penny's loveliness, both physical and mental, his song is sincere and truthful. And although in "A Fine Romance" he appears not to care about her

and evokes her suspicion and distrust we know that they belong together. Essentially they share the same harmony because they sing the same song and are united by their love and need of music. Conflict results from circumstances and difficulties which neither of them can control. But when they do control their situation, in song and dance, all conflict is resolved.

By using music as the mode of expression in "Never Gonna Dance", Sandrich affords many different levels of complexity and meaning to the narrative discourse. It implies their total commitment to each other although Lucky and Penny know that they must part. Their union is complete and the end of the dance constitutes the symbolic death of their meta-physical persons. When they finally reunite at the close of the film the resolution is made more meaningful in terms of what has gone before. They have been prepared to sacrifice their love and risk losing each other rather than compromise its purity.

Swing Time is a fine example of how the Astaire/Rogers musical film fulfils its generic obligations. Although it adheres to many of the familiar formulae and conventional narrative patterns it is always striking its sheer artistry. Conflicts which occur in the 'real' world are resolved in the world of the 'fantastical'. The strength of this genre is not that it repeats what is familiar and acceptable to an audience, but that it uses the conventions to create an exciting and wholly new work of art. Astaire's dancing is timeless in its beauty. Every sequence is different and each one magical. Arlene Croce wrote the following lines about "A Lovely Day" which could as easily be applied to any of the Astaire/Rogers dances, and aptly summarises the metaphor:

> "the point isn't tap dancing, it's romance:
> - if this isn't perfect dancing it is the perfect joy
> that dancing like this aims for and a shining
> moment in the history of the musical film."

NOTES

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CHAPTER 5

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS : NATURALISM AND STYLISATION

One of the most obvious recurring features of the musical genre, is that the mode of expression is often overtly foregrounded. The musical sequences display an avoidance of naturalism, both in the organisation of the narrative content, and the formal aspects of presentation. Such sequences are often juxtaposed with those which are in a more naturalistic mode, so that within the narrative structure of one film two opposing styles of presentation coexist, easily and successfully. This interplay of naturalism and stylisation is acceptable within the musical's generic structure, and is familiar to its audience. Vincente Minnelli's film An American in Paris manifests this interaction and opposition in a particularly striking way, and to discuss the film successfully, one needs to examine how Minnelli has used the medium to juxtapose styles which appear to be incompatible. In other words, one must isolate and deconstruct the various elements which constitute his individual style, in order to show how the narrative has been encoded with meaning.

The notion of film style raises a number of important issues, and in the specific context of genre film analysis the question is even more opaque. In the early days of genre theory, when an acceptance of the auteur principle was both fashionable and widely adhered to, it was generally held to be true that Hollywood directors were capable of exhibiting a definite personal style despite the rigid constraints and limitations placed upon them by the studio system and generic convention. But film style goes beyond the individual vision of the director and must include the influences of any number of artists and technicians. A successful film is the product of a harmonious marriage of all the visual, aural and thematic elements which

are presented.

However, none will deny that Vincente Minnelli's musicals bear the stamp of his unique vision and artistry. That they are different, and usually superior to many of the genre's films is clear, for although they adhere most strictly with generic conventions and formulae they have a visual complexity which is without doubt 'beyond formula'. Minnelli's style resides in the conscious choice of the means at his disposal, the camera angle and choice of framing, the mise-en-scene, his choice of actor, the use of music and iconography all mark his work as distinct.

Discussion of this film will centre upon the American in Paris Ballet, and will only examine the remainder of the film briefly. Structurally, it breaks down in similar ways to any musical genre film, it has its 'good' characters and its 'heavies', its songs of love, of self-questioning and of courtship, parting and reconciliation. Gene Kelly's character of Gerry is indicative of his persona in most musicals, and in An American in Paris he is the same confident, brash, 'all-American', idealistic Kelly. At the outset of the film Gerry is portrayed as a character torn by internal conflict. He is a grasping young painter who accepts the patronage of an older wealthy woman against his better judgement, in order to further his artistic ambitions. His treatment of Milo is insensitive, and he makes no pretence of it being otherwise, but it is difficult for us to pronounce judgement upon him. It would go against generic convention to have a hero who's motives are clouded, and Minnelli does not take liberties with the genre. So judgement must be reserved until the situation becomes clearer. Contrasted with the desperate artist, is Gerry's alter ego whom we cannot help but admire. Enthusiastic, idealistic and energetic, he is the Kelly who exhibits the purest talent as a singer and dancer. His delightful rendition of Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm" on the banks of the river Seine, is a manifestation of his sincerity and uninhibited joy in living. This is the Kelly we know and identify with, and his simplicity

and zest restore our belief in his character. Concurrent with the conventions of the genre, music is the deeper expression and carries connotations of sincerity, strength of character and conviction. We can only surmise therefore, that Milo is in some way to blame for Gerry's treatment of her. Singing;

"I got rhythm
I got music
I got my girl who could ask for anything more"

is an admission of what is truly important to him. He already has music, rhythm and a girl, and by implication self-awareness. conviction and love, so although he would enjoy recognition as a painter it is secondary to his fulfilment as a person. Gerry is insecure about his abilities as an artist, but because of his musical talent we are sure that he must have potential. In the musical genre it follows that one influences the other.

Yet the fact remains that although Gerry's motives are acceptable to the audience, they are questionable for a conventional hero. He pursues Lise, a young shop assistant although he knows that she is engaged and he is answerable to Milo. In essence he is both a cheating lover and a parasite, but because of his enormous talent we are willing to believe that he is in the grip of circumstance. He needs to prove that he can be successful as a painter and believes that there is no other option than to accept Milo's patronage. Although unsavory, the choices which he has made are the most acceptable owing to his position.

Gerry is marked as a person of conviction because he falls into the category of talented characters. His imagination and sincerity become more apparent as the film progresses and his love for Lise deepens. It amplifies all that is good in his character and he comes to understand what he truly wants, love, and recognition as a painter without having to prostitute himself or his work.

Milo by contrast, is characteristic of the untalented members

of the community and although perhaps she does not deserve Gerry's insensitive treatment of her, she only has herself to blame for believing that loyalty and caring can be bought for a price. While the patronage system provides many opportunities for talented unrecognised artists, it also reinforces society's vanity. Milo considers patronising an artist as somewhat chic, and it is to her social credit. It gives her a sense of self-satisfaction, to have participated in the cultural aestheticism of 'high art' however vicariously. But her interest in art is subordinate to her sexual interest in Gerry, and by her patronage, she believes that she is owed not only his gratitude but his love and affection.

The heroine Lise, is also noticably talented as a dancer, taught in the rigid conventions of the classical ballet. Her simple innocence is attractive to Gerry, especially in the light of his own moral quandary. She needs the contact with Gerry to release her from everyday experience and show her things beyond 'realistic' appearances. For although she is engaged to another man, her knowledge of true love and deep relationships are small. His strong, complex love for Gerry affords her the means to grow and mature from a girl to womanhood. Under Gerry's guidance she becomes poised and self-assured. It is obvious that they belong together. Lise's subsequent desertion of her fiancé must be condoned since it is Gerry and not him who is responsible for the transformation of her character. She is no longer the young girl who he was engaged to. Predictably the fiancé is not portrayed altogether favourably, as his essential weaknesses, combined with his failure to realise that Lise is slipping from his grasp make him an unworthy lover. He is characteristic of a specific generic character type, 'the ardent suitor', who proves himself more in love with love itself, than with the object of his desires. The character is indexical and familiar to the audience, so it is difficult for us to feel sympathetic to his plight.

One of the most salient features of <u>An American in Paris</u> is

Minnelli's juxtaposition of America and Europe (particularly, in this case, of France). It refers not only to two different environments, but more importantly, to two opposing states of being. Gene Kelly is the American in Paris, an alien residing amidst a foreign culture. For although he is an artist among artists his discourse with his colleagues often leans towards cultural pretension. They all speak "the language of art", but they use it cleverly, without the conviction of a true artist. Gerry is an ousider in the world which belongs to Toulouse-Lautrec, Renoir and Manet, and there is a sense that other artists believe that he is not French enough to truly appreciate and participate in French art. Underpinning this situation and attitude, is the notion that style is a manifestation of culture. So anyone who does not conform to that style, places himself outside of that culture.

In his book Subculture : The Meaning of Style, Dick Hedidge explains that subcultures make themselves visible by adopting a style which defines and rationalises their existence. There is a visible style of being a Teddyboy or a Rastafarian, which to the onlooker may seem outlandish, but which is vital to that subculture as it provides them with a definite sense of identity. Objects become a form of stigmata which are made to build up a style throught imparting a symbolic significance to them. They function as part of that subculture's iconography, and signal a refusal to conform to the dominant ideology:

> "...this process begins with a crime against the natural order, though in this case the deviation may seem slight indeed - the cultivation of a quiff, the aquisition of a scooter or a record, or a certain type of suit. But it ends in the construction of a style, in a gesture of defiance or contempt, in a smile or a sneer. It signals a refusal." 1

Hedidge is emphasising the role of style in subculture, but his point can be applied to larger cultural groups in which style does not necessarily signal a refusal. Dominant cultures also impart significance to various objects, and in their own way create a style of existence. Roland Barthes' classic work Mythologies exposes the ways in which society's mystify the world in which they live and shows how a certain view of the

world is purported to be natural, 'life-like' and hence realistic. Barthes shows how any society creates its own code of realism in which certain objects function as signs, in short, it exhibits a specific visual style.

In An American in Paris, Minnelli shows us that there is a style of being American, and a style of being French, and these are two diametrically opposed states. He presents them as juxtaposing worlds of experience, masterfully portraying their conflict and interaction. The similarities with the Western genre are obviously here as the juxtaposition of opposing cultures is integral to its narrative structure. The East symbolises all that is new and progressive and the West is indicative of an older, more established ideology. In An American in Paris this adds another layer of vital significance, and yet another important structural opposition.

Minnelli's inspiration for the film, was George Gershwin's original American in Paris score. From this work, Minnelli draws his notions of what it means to be French or American, and what visual and aural elements define their different styles. Gerry's character is a result of Gershwin's music and Minnelli's close examination of American society. He had to be sure of creating a character with whom the public could identify. This character also had to be synonymous with Kelly's developing persona within the genre. What is most striking about Minnelli's American is his overwhelming zest and idealism. He is the embodiment of the proverbial "American Dream", a character of conviction and inner strength, who suffers the same moral shifts as 'Mr Average', and who has problems, although they are never insurmountable. Within the context of the musical genre, and considering its function as a popular culture mode, this character is enormously successful, expressing all America's hopes and beliefs for a bright future.

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began to be indigenous sounding with the voice of its people. Americans were party to the rise of jazz and the blues, from the now vocal Black minority, and its rhythms and specific tonal qualities were incorporated by popular white musicians like Gershwin, Irving Berlin and Jerome Kern.

France, on the other hand, was an established culture and exhibited a style which was elegant, polished and restrained. Musical forms were classical, and the indigenous music of France had charm, without being anti-establishment. Unlike Jazz, it was easy to listen to, and did not assault our expectations. It had a flowing melody, a regular rhythm and a gentle harmony, which was played on a very solid piano accordion by a smiling Frenchman with a moustache, wearing a striped T. shirt and a beret. France was also a young girl, shy, naive and flirtatious; but guarded by a strict code of morality and courtship procedure. Inevitably, Minnelli portrays Paris as the lovers' paradise, where courting is visible and smiled upon by the older, wiser Parisians. It exudes a timeless charm, captured and immortalised by Renoir in his paintings. Minnelli fulfils all of our expectations of what Paris is about, and has taken no liberties with our fantasies. In this, the most convention bound of the generic categories, he gives us a picture of Paris which is exactly faithful to our dreams. There are miniature cake shops, florists, butchers, onion sellers, vegetable sellers, grand mansions, grande dames, vast pianos and discreet servants all painted in Minnelli's glorious colour. His style is the style of fantasy, in which everything is brighter and more vivid than life.

The small community of artists who are predictably living and working in a variety of old garretts, exhibit the kind of style which Hebidge explains is characteristic of subcultures. It represents a refusal to conform to acceptable standards of dress mainly, and the artists generally wear a shapeless smock and a beret. They also display a marked untidiness which is presumably indexical of the artistic imagination. His own

appearance and living conditions mean very little to him, his concern is with creative degradation and inner well-being. This refusal to conform has an element of charm about it, for the style of an artist is a gentle one and in the context of this film, cannot be read as anarchic or threatening to its dominant culture.

The 'American in Paris Ballet', which many regard as Minnelli's masterpiece, provides the climax to this complex film and incorporates many of its visual and musical themes. Of it Minnelli wrote:

> "The ballet had to be true to the spirit of the Gershwin music. The different sections were to be in the style of different painters who had painted Paris, because this boy was a painter. Also it had to be a mental hysteria within him - a time when he was very upset emotionally, not only his love affair, but the story of Paris where he meets the girl, loses her and gets mixed up with the painters. So the ballet had to keep you out of the line of the story and also help the story progress, because when the ballet was over the picture was over. It was quite a mental exercise."

The whole ballet is a brilliant piece of overtly stylised narrative, which is juxtaposed with the more naturalistic sequences showing the 'reality' of Paris and the Parisian lifestyle. Because it is a fantasy, the visual aspects of setting and iconography are foregrounded, and the deeper reality of Kelly's imagination is revealed.

The sequence begins with the image of five hats raised in the hands of their owners. As the music starts they move forward and upward into the frame, and the dancers, led by Kelly, come into view. He and the others are dressed in the style of French middle class young men, brightly coloured blazers, pale trousers and boaters. The mise-en-scene is deliberately theatrical, with a landscape of green fields decorative cottages, cobbled streets and gay flowers. Kelly is both confident and aggressive at this point, and moves quickly towards the camera. The frame opens to reveal Lise, who is posed in an exaggerated ballet position waiting to follow his lead. He dances around her in mock courtship, alternately

preening and acting the buffoon, until she agrees to follow him. They then join the chorus of dancers, and meet with five gendarmes when they greet one then two, they, feigning fear of the law and society.

This first section of the ballet is intrinsically tied to the Gershwin music, which begins with a tripping allegro phrase that is repeated in a form of musical dialogue between one instrument and another, a violin and the percussion block. It starts with a burst of energy as Kelly enters the frame and keeps up a brisk pace until he meets Lise, whereupon it breaks momentarily. While he courts her, the score echoes his flirting and repeatedly pleads with her to dance. Finally he is answered and she takes a step towards him. The music reinforces the visual narrative by answering with a quick phrase and stopping. Kelly then tries to persuade Lise to start again and she responds by moving to dance with him, and gradually the music gathers momentum. When the gendarmes are introduced, a large bass drum sounds at regular intervals, indicative of the stabilising force of community justice. At the moment when the characters hesitate before these symbols of law and order, the music also hesitates. In Gershwin's score, and in Minnelli's mise-en-scene, French culture is dominant at this point. The landscape is French, the characters are French, and even Kelly is dressed in the style of a Frenchman. Although it is a sequence of top dancing which uses the conventional iconography of boaters and canes, many of the gestures and positions manifested in its choreography are drawn directly from the classical ballet, for instance Lise dances on points. Kelly is brash and energetic, true to the spirit of America, but it is Mise's culture that is dominant.

This first section of the ballet is a visual display of one members of a society communicate amongst themselves. Certain rules are agreed upon and adhered to, like the one which states that policemen inspire age and respect. Courtship procedure is also strictly patterned, and a man must be prepared to go to great lengths to court a girl. He should also

expect rejection initially, before he finally wins her affections. As well as this, there are a number of rules pertaining to the status of foreigners in a community. If an outsider wishes to be acceptable to that community, he must conform to the dominant culture and adopt its mannerisms and idiosyncrasies. He must use the visual language of that society, in other words, its semiotics in order to communicate as one of them.

By a conscious stylisation of the narrative, Minnelli has invested the dance sequence with a complex web of latent meaning which communicates on many levels, visual, aural, indexical and metaphoric. A naturalistic mode of expression could not have signified the density and quantity of this narrative subtext.

The middle section of the American in Paris Ballet, is to my mind the most monumental and visually stunning sequences of musical genre film. It brings together all the different levels of meaning and signification, and in a comparatively short space of time, it excludes only one element which is vital to the genre, song. Music, dance, performers, setting, camera and director all combine perfectly to create one of the most harmonious and beautiful sequences of the cinema. Above all, it is a dance of love, beginning as Gerry and Lise realise that they are alone, after fleeing the others at the end of the first section. Their dress has been transformed from a caricature of French style, bright colours and candy stripes, into an ordinary costume. He wears black, and the style is indicative of the Kelly persona, tight trousers cropped above the ankle and a cotton-knit shirt with a V-neck and a collar. Lise wears a simple white dress with a flowing skirt which is particularly American in design. From this moment we watch as Lise is transformed from a girl to a woman, as they dance, we become aware of their total absorption in one another and complete harmony as dancers/lovers. Although the dance form is essentially balletic, it incorporates a softness of line and shape and emphasizes the relationship between the

dancers. There is a greater sense of the conveyance of emotions, than in the articulation of an aesthetic.

When looking at the mise-en-scene which forms the backdrop to this section of the dance, one can only marvel at the visual complexity and mood which Minnelli achieves through his use of lighting, properties and camera. The artistic style is without doubt reminiscent of the impressionist movement, and must have been influenced by the work of Cezanne and his followers. Cezanne's major belief, which was incorporated into his painting, was that a canvas has its own internal source of light, and that light should not be imposed from the outside, but discovered internally. Light, therefore, reveals itself to the artist. His paintings bear out this theory and show a vague translucent quality, truly, light seems to radiate from them bringing them to life. They seem to be capable of casting their own shadows, and appear, almost, to be alive. Minnelli echoes this in the ballet setting which is translucent and almost transient, as if one could never grasp its essence. It is the ultimate in fantasy, a scene which would disappear if one breathed too deeply or stared too boldly. There is no sense of reality but we are aware of its delicate inner life as if it were self-perpetuating. It begins in a haze of yellow smoke, suggestive of fire. Not a burning, consuming fire, but one which is warm and close. Then it changes to a haze of blues and greens which are like dark enveloping water. The interplay of the three elements least connected with reality, air, fire and water, all reinforce the sense of a fantasy unfolding. And there are only two participants, the lovers and their world. Minnelli's brilliant use of his set gives the lovers an infinite space in which to dance, and the various forms are like shadows of the dancers, reflecting and shadowing their poses. Also, his camera is never intrusive, nor does it invade their private world. It watches as we watch, quietly and unobserved, careful not to disturb the perfect harmony.

Gershwin's score changes here. Although hesitant at first, a

new sound is introduced, that of the saxophone, vital to the sound and feeling of American Jazz. Immediately we are aware that Kelly is in his element and Lise must adapt to his style. The piece is a slow, rousing melody which is encoded with a strong Jazz idiom. Timing is of the essence, for it allows a note to be held until the last possible moment, building in intensity and falling away, followed by a haunting, grinding melodic phrase. It's syncopated rhythm makes it strange and disquieting listening as it only seems to fulfil its formal obligations at the very end.

The lover's dance is one of discovery, physical, emotional and sexual. In this stylised sequence they are able to openly express themselves. And as is conventional in the genre, the truest reality is found in fantasy. Paradoxically, the theatrical setting allows the lovers to indulge their deepest, innermost fantasies and explore things that they would not normally be aware of, events far removed from normal everyday human experience. As Lise and Gerry dance one thing becomes apparent, which is that this is their most important revelation, one to the other. They dance using their imaginations, acutely aware of one another. Until now they have danced to impress their partner and display themselves, not to share deeply and strongly. For the first time, Lise steps out of her environment, giving up her Frenchness and thus her naivity and coquettishness, allowing herself to become totally absorbed by the event of dancing. Under Gerry's guidance she becomes a woman capable of feeling strong emotions and desires.

Their dance is overtly sexual and is a metaphor for lovemaking. The tenderness of their loving and the ease with which Kelly masters his love, reinforce the conventional roles of the male partner as the aggressor and the female as passive. Gershwin's score also underlines the sexual significance of the dance, by leading up to a series of crescendoes, simultaneously caressing and arousing. Yet the coupling of the lovers must be seen in

terms of their entire union. As well as being physical it is also spiritual and emotional. Their interpretation of the music, leads them to the mutual expression of their inner beings, which in turn leads to greater self-awareness and understanding of each other. Amidst this fantasy setting, their reality becomes ever more apparent to them. They leave each other not only fulfilled, but knowing that they have given of their deepest selves. If Lise has transformed to become a woman, then Gerry too has grown as a man, and has learned the most valuable thing, in terms of the meaning of his life. True awareness, whether of self or art, only comes through exploration and sacrifice. One has to be prepared to give of one's self to achieve success. Art cannot be rationalised, not can talent be bought, it is the articulation in a concrete form, of the inspiration which fills a receptive mind. Talent is like light, and as Cezanne so aptly perceived, it cannot be imposed upon a work, it will reveal itself through that work.

This second section of Minnelli's ballet, is the embodiment of what the musical is capable of showing as an expressive medium. Its intense theatricality sets it apart from the rest of the film. Yet despite its being so strongly staged and obviously foregrounded visually and musically, the revelation of true emotions and imagination mark it as vitally 'real'. The choreography shows Minnelli's close attention to detail, and in every aspect of the cinematography, lighting, colour, camera angle and iconography this precision is clearly in evidence. The result, this ballet, is one of the finest achievements in cinematic harmony.

Section three of the American in Paris Ballet, is without doubt the most difficult one to decode, and in it, we see how Gerry loses Lise amidst a turmoil of people dancing in strange outlandish costumes and constantly changing scenery. While he becomes involved with these illusory characters in this expressionistic setting, Lise is lost and slips out of his grasp. Clearly, this is symbolic of his infatuation with the

French painters, and shows his courtship with expressionism and other artistic movements. Strange characters, like the caricatures of Toulouse-Lautrec, fill the setting, dancing a deformed pattern of decadence and illusion. They are never quite real, but in their costumes of fiery reds and oranges are constantly explosive and threatening. It is as if Gerry is surrounded by alien forces which attempt to engulf and consume him, destroying all sense of perspective. His involvement with art, and particularly art of this nature, is directly related to his loss of Lise, and his sense of bereavement. The characters are representative of the mental anguish which he feels. Minnelli presents Gerry's dilemma in a striking, visual way, through the employment of figures from classical Greek theatre, the Furies. These imaginary characters, inflict mental torture upon their victim and function visually as a sign of suffering. Using this device is particularly effective within a filmic context, especially as communication must be represented either visually or aurally. Gerry's mental state is revealed through the iconic representation of a non-physical concept.

Gershwin, likewise, introduces a discordant melodic line into the score, and all sense of calm and conventional harmony falls away. The music takes a threatening turn and becomes loud, harsh and uneasy. Not only are we disturbed visually, but musically as well. The characters appear to be at odds with the sound, and the sequence is as uncomfortable for them as it is for the audience. Gershwin's use of string instruments to dominate the tonal quality of the sound, results in an eerie, discordant music. Percussion instruments, added at random also create the effect of continual cyclic motion. Where the melodic line of the first sequence was linear, brisk and characterised by short phrases, and the second likewise was linear, but strong and climactic, the third revolves and circles upon itself rather like the scenery, its frenzied characters and Gerry himself who is hounded and pursued by his own torment.

Finally, amidst the turmoil and confusion of the dance, Gerry

and Lise find one another and escape the crowds who clamour around them. It is their final rejection of the 'real' world and the pseudo-aestheticism of art. They return again to the scene of their love-dance and Lise vanishes leaving Kelly alone on the bare stage. All around him the place is deserted and only the haunting strains of Gershwin's music can be heard. Thus by this complete break in the action, the disappearance of Lise and the other characters, Minnelli effectively places the whole ballet into Gerry's imagination, where it is lodged as intrinsic truth and realism.

In the reconciliation, Kelly searches for Lise, while Gershwin echoes his frantic movements by allowing the music to rise in anticipation before falling away, mirroring his disappointment. In the final shot he rushes into frame, confronts the audience, and then turns to find a backdrop of a black and white Parisian street scene. This black and white sketch emphasizes that it is still an illusion, and when Kelly once again turns to face the camera he notices a red rose left at his feet. He bends to pick it up and holds it completely still while the camera slowly tracks in to a close-up, and the lighting fades inwards until only the rose is visible. Our lasting impression is of its simple perfection, and Gershwin's repetition of the love phrase from the second section of the ballet provides the final musical climax. The rose with its symbolic perfection conveys the unity of the lovers, which is marked by its harmony, beauty and deepest realism. As a love symbol the rose evokes all the connotations of truth and idealism, and Minnelli foregrounds its iconic significance by using it as the only splash of colour in an otherwise monochrome setting. This symbol which has been effectively used by countless poets and novelists is brilliantly transferred to the film medium and makes a strong visual impact. It needs no explanation, no verbal reinforcement, but with its single image, the film has a memorable and complete ending.

The final impression is not of Gerry the painter, or Gerry, Lise's lover, but Gene Kelly, the persona who steps out of the

confines of character and presents us with all that he means, the idealistic, energetic American. His movements are all choreographed and filmed for maximum impact and he appears with outstretched limbs, displaying that unmistakable athleticism and restrained energy which is so familiar. The sense of expectation that he evokes is ultimately fulfilled in the discovery of the rose.

In this remarkable ballet, Minnelli successfully unites all the elements of film and the structuralist conventions of the genre, to create a work which is both complex and strikingly beautiful. Its complexity is founded on the fact that genre films and especially the musical, have the ability to communicate on so many different levels simultaneously. To decode a work like this requires minute attention to each detail, but to create it requires enormous respect for the conventions of genre as well as a personal vision which is not only inspired but strongly articulated. Minnelli's final image of the rose creates a perfect sense of closure, incorporating each of the films major themes and reconciling all of its central oppositions. America and France are united in the relationship of Gerry and Lise. Art and talent are celebrated if they are manifested from within the artist. Stylisation is contrasted with naturalism, and Minnelli shows that the strongest reality can be discovered by exploring one's fantasies and indulging one's imagination. The two contrasting styles of expression can exist side by side in the same film, each exhibiting its own significance. Dance, although an explicitly formal mode of presentation reveals the most 'natural' emotions, love sincerity and caring. So within the limitations and constraints of the genre form, Minnelli has expanded imagination to the fullest. For although the musical film is governed by conventions and definite formulae, fantasy has no limits. Here dance can be used expressively and visual artistry can be indulged to the fullest extent. There is no necessity for 'realism' if the setting is somewhere in a character's imagination.

<u>An American in Paris</u>, is probably Minnelli's most complex film, by virtue of its final ballet. His use of film symbolism is masterful and expressly visual. As an artist he is acutely aware of the capabilities and potential of his medium, and uses it to create a harmonious, balanced entity. And he not only respects his medium and his performers, he respects the structure of genre and the status of popular culture.

CHAPTER 6

SINGING IN THE RAIN: REALITY AND ILLUSION

Stanley Donen's *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) is both a simple and a complex genre film. Simple, because it uses the common plot formula of boy meeting girl, losing girl and singing song to get girl, and complex as a result of the density of signification which Donen affords the narrative. While presenting a very familiar tale, he examines the Hollywood motion picture industry and uncovers many important truths about the nature of reality. He shows how illusions are created, naturalised and transmitted through society as myths. Furthermore, he manipulates the plot to reveal how people create their own personal myths as a justification for their behaviour and lifestyles. *Singin' in the Rain* is an archetype of the musical genre as Donen shows enormous respect for and adherence to its structural formulae and generic plot entertainment. The narrative, the plot is well-known, the characters are generic types and the singing and dancing is part of an easily-recognisable narrative code, the film never exhausts interest or resorts to a presentation of shallow sentiment. It is always visually exciting, revealing a wealth of encoded material contained in the intricate subtext.

The opposition between reality and fantasy is one of the most important thematic elements in the musical genre. It recurs in some form in all musicals, thus functioning as one of the definitive generic principles. When reality and fantasy are presented in a musical film we witness an inversion of their meanings when they are expressed in a different medium, so in music, fantasy becomes reality. The binary opposition model discussed in Chapter 3 shows the stages through which this inversion takes place, and in *Singing in the Rain* the theme of opposition is vitally important to the film's structure. Because *Singin' in the Rain* is about reality and illusion, it

[illegible] model as the framework for discussion. This analysis [illegible] consider the two contexts in which Donen uses the reality/fantasy opposition, in the [illegible] picture industry and in the relationship between the lovers.

Hollywood is notorious for its commercialism and exploitation of society's whims and desires. But these are only cultivated and generated in response to what the industry perceives is a real need in that society. So the film moguls promote the image of a 'desirable' lifestyle which is decadent, glamorous and expensive in order to [illegible]. The 'star' system is really a result of this two-way communication act, 'stars' are manufactured according to society's tastes and are idealised and idolised by their audiences. But audiences only see the myth, never the reality and Donen exposes the truth in a way that is more kind than cruel, and humorous rather than cynical. He analyses the value system that allows a decadent lifestyle to be synonymous with an ideal one and unearths the industry's overriding commercialism. He shows that the public willingly support the myths they are fed and desire to believe that 'stars' are [illegible]. They want and need these screen idols. Hollywood and its public are mutually dependent.

Donen [illegible] the [illegible] of a 'star'-lifestyle in his [illegible] sequence, [illegible]. Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly) is cast as the archetypal movie hero, by the industry and the public, and appears with his sultry screen partner, the glamorous Lina Lamont (Jean Hagen) draped on his arm. [illegible] stereotype, an ideally suited couple, [illegible] in white. While he is good-looking, confident, [illegible] in short 'the perfect man', she is stunning, blonde and silent, his perfect opposite. Don narrates his life story, telling the audience that it was a career marked by his driving ambition and inherent dignity. He is the personification of the American Dream, a young man who succeeds without ever becoming corrupted or tainted with

impure motives. It expresses a simple ideology, that success is a just reward for the deserving. However, in contrast to Don's story, Dohen shows us scenes from Don's early life which are anything but dignified. He relates how his parents' friends made a fuss of him and how they all went to the theatre to watch Shaw and Moliere's plays. The reality is somewhat different as we watch Don being thrown out of the pool room by his father, and see him queueing to see "The Dangers of Dracula" at the cinema. About his early career in showbusiness he is equally inaccurate calling a bar room the Conservatory of Fine Arts, his role in 'amateur night' slapstick, experience at an exclusive drama academy and dance hall performances with his partner Dora Bryan. A three concert tour. He claims that audience adored them while we see him and Cosmo at the unemployment office, and his initiation into the film industry was as a stuntman. At all times he says he was sophisticated and sauve, and his motto was "dignity always dignity". The reality contrasts with the illusion that Don and his managers are creating for their public and they lose credibility still more when we are shown the true nature of Don's relationship with Lina. He professes to the public that she has always been warm and helpful toward him, but in truth she viciously kicked his behind when he refused her first advances, and she jealously demands his undivided attention and his love. As soon as they are out of the public eye they bicker and squabble.

Singing in the Rain is set in about 1927, the period when sound had just come to the cinema. With the advent of this new innovation many important issues are raised. The producers are concerned about whether the public will accept a soundtrack and Don is justifiably worried about the effect it could have upon his career. Lina by comparison, is unconcerned, naively assuming that nothing as trivial as sound could interfere with her adulation from an adoring public. Unlike Don, she is blissfully unaware that she is a creation of the film industry, made to satisfy a public need, and could be quickly destroyed if she

failed in the smallest way. She is part of the stuff of which Hollywood illusions are manufactured and as a 'star' her position is tenuous. Don is more aware and sensitive to this fad and realises that he is a mythicised person who needs to be constantly reinforced by the Hollywood system in order to survive.

When we meet Don outside of the studio, away from Hollywood, he is portrayed as an extremely likeable person even though he has grown to believe in his own 'star' persona. It comes as a great surprise to him to realise that Cathy (Debbie Reynolds) doesn't recognise him as the screen hero, when they first meet. When he asks her if she goes to the movies she replies that she doesn't because 'once you've seen one, you've seen them all'. She adds that she is an actress and maintains that her craft is superior to his because she works in theatre. Her cultural prejudice is typical of those who have no understanding of the film medium and she makes inane judgements upon it. Theatre, she says, has a tradition and a history, while film only caters for a mass audience. It is interesting that these are the exact kind of criticisms levelled at genre film by the orthodox high art, film culture establishment. Donen is cleverly grinding his own critical axe and inviting the cynics to look closer at this popular culture medium. Much to Cathy's embarrassment and distress Don discovers her dancing in a burlesque chorus line, in a vaguely seamy nightclub/music hall establishment. Thus they both suffer the humiliation of a shattered ego when their self-perpetuated illusions are stripped away for the other to see. Now Don and Cathy are equals and neither needs to be protected by a shell of fantasy.

In the following sequences, Don teaches Cathy about the film industry, its limitations, its capabilities and its capacity as an artistic medium. He demonstrates its power to suspend reality and evoke mood and atmosphere in the charming sequence "You were meant for me". Here Donen uses the film medium to explore its capabilities as an artistic mode. Don transforms a bare stage, using evocative lighting and a few simple proper-

ties, the wind machine and a step ladder, into a perfect setting for a dance. We are effectively shown that film can be as theatrical as the theatre, and it can transform what is real into something fantastical. Despite the ontology of the photographed image, film can depict fantasy in a way that makes it almost tangible. In the setting which he has created, Don is able to reveal his feelings for Cathy. She is taught to recognise that true awareness can be found by indulging in fantasy. Although he uses a stylised mode of presentation, Don is expressing true emotions and Cathy can see the value of dance as an exploratory medium. We become acutely aware of the stylistic elements of song and dance, which are foregrounded to reinforce the narrative content. Cathy's only experience of dance has been of the brash, vulgar music hall type and consequently she finds it difficult to dance with Don at first. She 'practices' on her own and copies Don until she feels confident enough to join him. As a teacher/svengali, he is patient and allows her to follow her instincts not wishing to destroy her individuality. When they finally dance together after a period of 'testing' Don unleashes new emotions in her and supports her as she experiences alien feelings. What he cannot tell her yet, Don sings:

"I can see the angels must have sent you and
they meant you just for me".

and although premature, these feelings are sincere. This scene marks the beginning of their growing awareness and love for each other. Bonen reveals the harmony implicit in this relationship by the way in which the lovers dance. It is a visual metaphor implying that a lovers discourse is song and dance. Visually i.e. in the dance, they are mutually dependent, supportive and loving. Comparing Don and Cathy's relationship with the one Don has with Lina reveals an interesting point. Don and Lina were presented in a 'real' setting and their relationship is clouded with misunderstanding and illusions. Don and Cathy have no such illusions even though their means of expression is stylised and 'unnatural'. Although they are still unsure of themselves, the scene is

marked by its simplicity and engaging honesty.

One of the basic narrative elements of the musical genre is the incidence of musical talent as a criterion for assessing character. Consequently characters usually fall into two categories, those with talent and those lacking talent. Predictably, the talented are by implication sensitive, strong and self-aware while the untalented are shallow, vain and deluded. In Singing in the Rain Don, Cosmo and now Cathy, reveal true talent and depth of character while Lina Lamont is an incarnation of all that is bad about the motion picture industry. She is frivolous, insensitive and arrogant, and her innocuous attempts to obtain talent, and her belief that it can be learned, only serve to amplify what in the others is ingrained.

The character of Cosmo Brown provides an interesting example of how a generic stereotype can be used imaginatively, to afford it greater complexity and value. Generic convention often demands that the hero have a best friend, companion or mentor who prevents the hero making rash decisions and offers him valuable advice and company when he needs it. In Cosmo Brown, Donen and Donald O'Connor present us with a fully-realised, talented character in his own right. Cosmo is a successful actor who has no illusions about himself or the film industry. He deliberately puts himself in the ironic mode and allows us to laugh at him. Like the medieval court jester Cosmo can ridicule the world around him and be assured that no one will take offence. In a hilarious routine entitled 'Make 'em Laugh' Cosmo energetically debunks himself and the concept of personal dignity which is held in such high esteem by the film industry. He ridicules the notion and invites us to laugh at him, as in so doing, we will then be able to laugh at ourselves and do away with our illusions and protective myths. This comic athletic display echoes the industry's belief that the primary function of films is to entertain and provide escapism. It should:

"Make em laugh make em laugh
all the world wants to do is laugh".

He is repeatedly interupted by what is happening in the studio, workers are busily involved in the manufacturing of a film, they are "making" entertainment while Cosmo attempts to tell us how vital this is. The subtle irony is that Cosmo is providing entertainment without the studio or himself being aware of it. He is a human embodiment of the word, he is entertainment without being self-consciously so. Cosmo's performance is hilarious and he 'makes us laugh' by subjecting himself to a variety of accidents like being repeatedly hit by wooden planks and then using them as properties to make his routine even more effective. While telling us that we should all laugh he walks straight into a brick wall believing it to be an open door and has to 'rearrange' his face in order to continue the song. Perhaps the most exciting part of this routine occurs when Cosmo transforms a dressmaker's dummy into a partner by flirting with it and carrying on all the usual motions of male preening. When 'she' returns his compliment he feigns embarrassment and adopts the stock gestures of coyness, hiding his face and pulling his hat over his ears to unusually comic effect. Cosmo manages to give even the most clichéd gestures a new lease of life. Finally, the dummy/woman seduces him and pulls him behind the [illegible] he struggles to free himself. The whole sequence ends with Cosmo running up the walls and somersaulting backwards to emphasize his point - make em laugh. On the third repeat of this action he falls through a constructed flat once again emphasizing the illusion of film and crawling to his feet sings "make em laugh" three times and collapses. Cosmo has given everything he possibly could to try and reach his audience. In teaching us about laughter and entertainment, he gives us something to laugh about. The studio contrives to make things funny, while Cosmo does not even have to try. Donen is saying that true talent is inherent in a character and will manifest itself in every area of that person's life. It is a measure of a character's self-awareness and conviction.

The juxtaposing scenes in which Don and Lina have elocution lessons reveal once more the difference between a character

who has a musical talent and one who has not. In the interests of Don's and Lina's careers, the studio executives have advised that both of them take speech classes as a precaution against losing popularity with their audiences like so many other silent stars. Their concern regarding Lina is entirely justified, her voice is an abrasive squeak and although she resents criticism it must be given. But Lina's inflated opinion of herself renders her deaf to her own faults. She has been led so far from the truth and believes in her star persona so unequivocally that it has become her reality. The distinction between reality and illusion has blurred in her mind and undergone a complete inversion. Truth is synonymous with her own illusions, and consequently she is unwilling to learn articulation because she does not see the necessity for it. Her teacher is patient but Lina regards the exercise as a trial which she must suffer and fulfils the requirements of the class only inasmuch as she repeats sounds in a parrot-like way. Logically, Lina cannot be expected to improve because in her own mind she believes that there is no room for improvement. One of the basic requirements for learning is a recognition by the pupil that knowledge can be gained through active participation in the education process.

Don's teacher is equally unsuccessful but in a different way. The scene begins with him reading tongue twisters from an [illegible] pupil Don is willing to learn and passively accepts that the teacher has superior knowledge, but he is restless and needs additional stimulation. Cosmo enters the classroom and immediately sees that the lesson is being carried out in a dry, uninteresting way. He mocks the teacher's grim seriousness by imitating him behind his back, in a typical schoolboy gesture. Clearly the teacher's methods are too staid and boring to be of any value to Don and the class is unsuccessful because of the tutor's narrow-minded approach to the teaching and practice of speaking. With this in mind, Cosmo triggers the anarchic 'moses supposes his toeses are roses' routine

which properly deflates cultural pretension. He provokes Don to join him in an exuberant, uninhibited dance which celebrates rhythm, rhyme and sound in a way which is completely unfamiliar to the teacher. His use of speech is pedantic, and his demand that it should always be precise and articulate destroys the beauty of language and the sheer enjoyment which can be got from it. In their dance, Don and Cosmo release a stream of pent-up emotions as a mock protest against the teacher and his methods. Their exuberance and conviction contrast sharply with his shocked silence. He can only sit and watch in bewilderment as they dance abandoning all constraint. They leap on chairs and tables and show each other the possibilities of the simple phrase, speaking it, singing it, dancing it, improvising upon its rhythms and meanings, it is injected with life and feeling. The power of the imagination is emphasized here and like the teacher, Donen's camera is only able to watch mesmerised by the power of two minds exploring. In an imitation of Moses they drape themselves with the curtains and force the scene into another era. Finally they drag the teacher to his feet and try to make him dance and understand them. But his wooden attempts to copy them only emphasizes his lack of talent. As the ultimate expression of their rejection of his teaching methods, Don and Cosmo seat him and heap his diagrams, books and paraphernalia on his head. They have succeeded in injecting a simple phrase with life and meaning. Because they are so imaginative they can detect the inherent rhythms and poetry in common speech forms, while the teacher, a superior man of learning and experience has only ever used them as aids to improving articulation and overcoming speech defects. They have become like his diagrams and pictures, two-dimensional representations of real objects. He has made the mistake of confusing an icon with the thing itself. Sound is not a picture of a mouth forming the vowell. Like too many other people, he has forgotten the simple pleasure of hearing new sounds. Don and Cosmo are still able to do this and refuse to limit speech to a diagram and hang it on a wall.

A great deal can be learned from this scene about the nature and function of poetry. An insensitive reader will regard it as a structure which must be analysed according to a specific procedure, called critical analysis. In other words the act of criticism is more important than the work itself. The function of critical endeavour is being confused here, it is not an end in itself but a means to achieving greater understanding and promoting valuable discourse about a work. Don and Cosmo have a method which does the latter, albeit unconventional. They become absorbed by the text, improvise and participat. in its structures and discover the real meanings which are inherent in the work. By being sensitive and aware, they reveal the poetry of sound and the latent beauty in speech. Poetic devices like meter assonance and rhythm are real and understandable because they understand why they are used. The phrase "Moses supposes his toeses are roses" is nonsensical until one becomes involved in it. Don's and Cosmo's rejection of the teacher is borne out of a greater understanding, knowledge and appreciation of speech as it should be used, while Lina's rejection of her teacher is a result of her own ignorance and stubbornness. The message of these two sequences is clear, and can be of benefit to any pupil studying literature or film. Literary and film concepts are not artefacts valuable for their own sakes, but aids to the poet or filmmaker who can use them where he feels they will be effective, meaningful and appropriate. True understanding of an artistic work is a result of active participation and enjoyment of it. Art should not be objectified or mystified, but absorbed and loved.

The film's framing device of a film within a film is effective as a method of foregrounding the subject. Donen's discussion of the film industry aptly shows the industry as it was twenty five years before Singing in the Rain was released, and we note the studios clumsy handling of the new audition to film technology. Having the advantage of hindsight we are able to chuckle at the actors huddled around strategically placed potplants concealing

microphones, speaking directly to the foliage and being afraid to move out of range. It is easy to see how this new innovation could have met with such resistance from the studio personnel because it undoubtedly restricted movement and action, yet Donen admits that we owe them thanks for persevering with it, and allowing future film crews and audiences to reap the benefits of all their successes and failures. Don is one of those who refuses to be depressed by the daunting prospect of sound in the cinema and embraces it readily, thinking about the possibilities it could have for bringing music to the movies.

In the "Broadway Rhythm Ballet" Don shows the studio what effects would be possible if they used sound to its full capabilities. The sequence begins with Don dressed as a hopeful young actor, attempting to find work on Broadway at various theatres. He arrives suitcase in hand, knocks on the theatre door and does a short tap dance routine when the manager appears. Inevitably the door slams in his face but he goes on to the next one unperturbed. The effect of this scene is heightened by its theatricality, Don uses mime and dance as his means of expression and is answered in the same mode. Each theatre is a two-dimensional structure representing the real establishment, and the prominent feature of everyone is its stage door. This is a fine example of cinematic metonymy in which the part is representative and suggestive of the whole. Donen has successfully translated a literary concept into the visual mode. By implication and convention, finding work on Broadway is a case of "knocking on doors". Creating a non-realistic setting means that the action is alienated from the audience but reinforced at the same time to maximise its effect.

Despite his repeated rejection from the theatre managements, Don maintains a cheerful disposition and perseveres in his search, showing his inherent belief in his own abilities even though he faces disappointment. There is no trace of bitterness or resignation in his movements only an overriding

optimism and desire to succeed. In any other genre this attitude might be misconstrued as a foolish and naive hope, but in the musical, generic convention demands that the Kelly persona continued to strive for what he wants. To maintain our respect he must not hesitate in his convictions or lose his confidence. A musical character is motivated by the instinct to do well and the desire to grow by constantly reinventing his reality.

Once again, Donen debunks the notion that the theatre is a superior art form to film, and deconstructs the myth that a tradition and history are necessary pre-requisites for a valid artistic medium. While he admits that the theatre is an older, more established mode of entertainment than film is, he questions whether this fact alone makes it worthy of our respect. Cathy's earlier remark that 'once you've seen one you've seen them all' could just as easily be applied to the theatre as it is to film. Theatre is often repetetive in the type of plays which are staged and one theatre institution is very much like the next. Cathy's 'reality' has already been exposed and now Broadway is examined for the same purpose. Each theatre building and each manager is similar, the former in aspect and the latter in appearance and attitude. Both film (Hollywood) and theatre (Broadway) are concerned with the commercial aspects of the entertainment business and the marketability of the products to society. Neither can escape the fact that they rely on success at the box office for their survival. While stripping away the illusions and myths perpetuated and generated under the guise of culture and art, Donen refuses to spare theatre or film from his incisive criticism.

After completing his visits to theatre managers and discovering that none of them consider him viable box office material (a subtle irony considering Gene Kelly's brilliance as a dancer) Don is shown in the familiar scenario of "falling into bad company". At this point Donen draws upon formulae and conventions which are part of the gangster genre. Don

finds himself in the alien environment of the gangster locale, typified by a sleazy nightclub whose patrons are shady characters of the underworld. We presume that as a decent young American he has had no prior experience of this type of situation and his dress, striped jacket, light trousers, boater and tap dancing shoes is oddly out of place among the pin striped suits and two-tone spats, which reinforce the view that he is uncomfortable here. The nightclub 'vamp' (Cyd Charisse) summons him to dance with her and 'ravishes' him in an overtly physical way. As the 'vamp' she is representative of a generic character type which is found both in gangster films as 'the moll', and in the musical. She is indexical of the evil and materialism which have infiltrated the Broadway lifestyle, and although intensely alluring and cunning, Don's attraction for her is only sexual. Their dance is explicitly erotic with the woman in the role of sexual aggressor. He is forced into submission and when she is completely satisfied she abandons him to join wealthier, more powerful men. In this scene dance is used as a visual metaphor for sexual experience. It is Don's first encounter with a woman of this type and her cunning seduction leaves him bewildered. Wealthy men are signified by their casual exhibition of money, they flip coins to attract the woman's attention, appealing to her greed and lust for power. The tossing coin is a typical gangster genre icon, used to signal a gambler. Don's adventure ends with two gangsters holding him upside down to shake money out of his pockets. He has been 'taken', both physically and financially. This section of the ballet is a strong index of the Broadway way of life, exhibiting warped values and corrupt characters. Here, the rich and the powerful prey upon innocent citizens. Don, in his boyish naivety, has been overwhelmed by the underworld and yet he manages to escape relatively unscathed. His natural capacity for interpreting and reflecting upon life as he finds it, allows him to realise that this world is just an illusion created by the powerful who seek to manipulate the people it attracts. The woman and the gangsters are all victims of a warped society in which money is all-powerful

and violence is an acceptable expression. Don understands that money and power cannot bring true satisfaction and self-fulfilment only the illusion of it. They evoke greed and envy which is temporarily quelled by each successive material gain. Power and wealth are addictive desires which result in the destruction of purity and honesty.

In the scene which follows, Don fantasises about the woman and removes her from the evil lifestyle of which she is a part. He imagines her dressed in a flowing white robe with her hair loose and her feet bare. She is submissive and passive when they dance and although he is the dominant partner he is a gentle and sensitive one. He respects her purity and does not violate her innocence as she did his. Donen uses a pale blue and white abstract setting with a white staircase providing the only definition. The scene is shot in soft focus to reinforce the impression of fantasy and impart a gentle transience to it. Although it is four times removed from reality, a dance within a fantasy within a fantasy within a film, Don/Kelly reveals the 'truth' of his character, self-aware, sensitive and unrestricted. We recall to mind his earlier dance with Cathy and find that once again he takes the role of Svengali and creates a fantasy setting in which to reveal the truth about his partner's character. Dance is highlighted as an exploratory medium in which imagination and emotion can be realised. This dance, which incorporates traditional ballet movements, exhibits a depth of understanding which contrasts with the shallow eroticism of what went before. Kelly releases the woman from Broadway and its web of false values before he places her back in her context, enriched by the intensity of their dance.

At the close of the sequence, Don is a changed man, wiser for all his experiences. He has travelled through Broadway, been used and rejected by it, and in his turn learned to recognise it's false values so that he finally can reject it. The music man is triumphant because on his journey he has

gained true experience and knowledge of an alien environment. What he gains merely by passing through this world, far outweighs what the others know as inhabitants of it. He expands as a character through processes of perception, interpretation and growth, while Broadway's characters rationalise their existence, compromise and stagnate in the web of materialism and self perpetuating greed. The structure of the music man's 'reality' is always subject to change, incorporating all his new experiences and gained knowledge.

Personal growth is a trait which defines the musically talented character, and it is reflected in Kelly's solo rendition of the title song Singing in the Rain. As a sequence it has become a familiar generic icon, signifying the totality of Kelly's persona and the technical brilliance of his artistry. Apart from being superbly executed and masterfully filmed it gives a full account of the meaning of being a fully-realised musical character. Following in the Fred Astaire tradition, music allows Kelly/Don to reach beyond the limitations of the common-place world and discover the inherent rhythm and harmony in his surroundings. And whether in An American in Paris, Singing in the Rain, On the Town or any other of his films the persona remains familiar to his audience. This sequence opens with Don leaving Cathy's apartment, and finding that it is raining. But instead of allowing it to dampen his exalted feelings he uses it to mirror his inner self. He is childlike in his abandon, and loses all sense of adult responsibility. Caught up in the momentary thrill of beginning a new experience he begins 'singing in the rain' and the natural progression of this is to dance in the rain. He begins fairly quietly, a mere hum and the suggestion of a bounce in his step. However, Kelly cannot restrain himself for long and quickly casts care aside, launching into an exhilarating, uninhibited routine. The potential enjoyment is too good to ignore and he allows himself to become soaking wet while he uses his umbrella as an aid to dance, and extension of his person, thus transforming

it from a functional object of protection to an aesthetic object which complements him. The effect of this sequence multiplies in strength as Kelly proceeds to splash about in gay abandon, thrilling himself and his audience by continually doing the unexpected, and singing out his joy in life:

"I'm singing in the rain, just singing in the rain
what a glorious feeling I'm happy again
I'll walk down the lane with a happy refrain
cos I'm singing just singing in the rain...
the sun's in my eyes and I'm ready for love.
Let the stormy clouds chase, everyone from the place
come on with the rain I've a smile on my face
I'll walk down the lane with a happy refrain
cos I'm singing and dancing in the rain."

It seems odd perhaps, that he should remark "the sun's in my eyes" but metaphorically this is true. Don is as happy in the rain as others are in the sunshine. To him it is as if the sun were shining, because in his life, in his heart, it does. With engaging simplicity and without sentimentality the musical genre shows that love is the means to true happiness and self-fulfilment. Quite simply, the sun shines in Don's world because he is in love. He can accept anything the world throws at him and invites the rain to 'come on' while he prepares to receive it full in the face. At the height of his enjoyment, a policeman arrives to witness and censor this strange performance and Don unwittingly turns and splashes him. Not even attempting to excuse his behaviour, he merely turns and sings "I'm singing and dancing in the rain" as if this were explanation enough. He wanders off leaving the policeman confused and bewildered, and in a final gesture of kindness gives his now unneeded umbrella to an elderly couple. Donen makes a strong comparison between society, represented by the policeman who is indexical of order, rationality and conventional behaviour and Kelly who transgresses the boundaries of acceptable conduct. The policeman's automatic suspicion of an adult apparently indulging in childish practices, is typical of public reaction, resulting from their ignorance and prejudice. What they do not understand they condemn. Kelly's dance in the rain has been a vital exciting experience, which

we the audience have been lucky to share in.

Singing in the Rain is Donen's attempt to deconstruct and discuss the concepts of reality and illusion. He follows the structuralists' patterns of thinking and shows how reality is a constructed code which is naturalised in order to make it readily acceptable to society. This code is generally structured around myths, generated and transmitted through society as truths. Donen shows the true nature of Hollywood and the film industry and in its place he upholds the values which Don and Cathy reflect, sincerity and conviction. Cathy is destined to become a successful actress in her own right, not simply Lina's voice. And Lina is revealed as what she really is, a vain, shallow woman with only her looks to recommend her, and a heap of shattered illusions to contend with.

CHAPTER 7

MY FAIR LADY : [illegible]

Too often, the comment is passed of My Fair Lady that it is a musical version of George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion. And while Shaw's undoubtedly superb drama has achieved the status of a classic, Lerner and Loewe's musical film is condemned as inferior culture. Even so, this highlights the prejudice and dogma of 'high art' aestheticism which dominates serious film theory and criticism, and passes judgement upon all popular culture modes as entertainment orientated and escapist. It is also typical of critical attitudes towards films which have their roots in successful novels and dramatic works. Literature as the older narrative form, is believed to have the greater claim as a legitimate art medium. Owing to the constraints of the commercial film industry, film, and especially genre film has been neglected as a subject for critical analysis.

However, comparisons between films and novels and plays and films are self defeating if they do not take into consideration the autonomous characteristics of each particular narrative form. An individual medium is encoded and communicated according to its specific form, and perceived in different situations subject to different conditions by their respective audiences. The play Pygmalion and the film My Fair Lady, share only one common denominator, their plot, and even this differs in the translation from one form to another.

The development and practical application of a critical methodology, should be determined by the nature of the discipline it seeks to analyse. In the past, it has been common practice to use conventional literary criticism methods for discussion purposes. The absence of a suitable theoretical method for analysing the film medium, and in particular genre

film, has led to a great deal of prejudice and confusion. Films which share the same root source as a successful novel or dramatic work, tend to suffer most as a result of this cross-pollinatory criticism, and most are judged inferior to their literary counterparts.

My Fair Lady, has had the unfortunate problem of being both intrinsically connected to Shaw's Pygmalion, by virtue of their common plot, and falling within the category of genre film. Serious critical analysis of this film has therefore been overlooked, and any discussion has led to the same conclusion, which is that as popular culture it is by implication inferior to the 'original' work. But for any analysis of My Fair Lady to be meaningful, it must be accepted as an autonomous film text and should be discussed as part of a larger generic structure. Consequently, this examination will focus upon the film as one of a genre and it will be deconstructed to reveal the central oppositions at its core.

A structuralist analysis, is both interesting and revealing in this particular case, as it shows the adherence of My Fair Lady to the essential generic structure. Two themes are manipulated very strongly, those of love and class distinctions. The latter is dealt with in great detail and contributes to the overall points which the genre makes about class as a whole. In its presentation of the love theme, the film exhibits the conventional plot determinants, boy meets girl, boy loses girl boy sings song and gets girl. Interestingly, it is the female partner who brings self-awareness and releases the potential to love in the other partner. It is significant though, that Higgins, as Eliza's mentor, always remains the dominator and she the dominated.

In its presentation of the theme of class, there are two structural oppositions which occur side by side. Firstly the working classes are juxtaposed with the upper classes and secondly, the individual is juxtaposed with the community. As an individual, Eliza is free from social restriction, her

talent and self-awareness afford her a definite sense of identity and she needs no social ordering to confirm her own being. In the opening montage sequence of the film, Cukor subtly encodes the difference between the working and upper classes into the visual narrative by using flowers to function as icons. He shows a host of beautiful conservatory grown blooms, all in various shades of pink and apricot. The emphasis is upon the delicacy and subtle beauty of their form, and they represent the society ladies, cultured, cultivated and educated to take their place among others like them. It is interesting and indeed ironic that our first insight into the upper class woman should be the petulant Clara and her mother, who are hounding Freddy into finding them a taxi. Society ladies, like society flowers are often nothing more than their beautiful exteriors. For while they are well-bred and carefully cultivated, they need continual nurturing and cossetting to keep them alive. Cukor contrasts the image of Clara and Mrs Ainsford-Hill with the abrasive Eliza, who is discovered on a street corner selling bunches of bedraggled violets. Like the working classes, her flowers need nothing more than food and sunlight to keep them alive and flourishing. [illegible] can even be trodden into the mud, by an overzealous [illegible], and survive after a minor cleaning. Eliza's violet [illegible] indicative of her character, delicate and inherently vulnerable, but strong enough to withstand all of life's difficulties.

The theme of class as a necessary but somewhat distasteful fact of life, is expanded in the first of many sequences which diametrically oppose the upper and working classes, "Why can't the English". Henry Higgins, professor of language and linguistics, upon hearing Eliza's wailing and caterwauling, implores:

> "Why can't the English teach their children how to speak this <u>verbal class distinction</u> by now should be antique... why if you spoke as she does sir instead of the way you do why you might be selling flowers too...
> An Englishman's way of speaking <u>absolutely classifies him</u> the minute he talks he makes some other Englishman despise him...

> one common language I'm afraid I'll never get
> oh why can't the English learn to set a good example..."
> (my underlinings)

This delightful sequence reveals an important concept, that class is defined by the use which a community makes of language. Higgins maintains that people place themselves into a certain class group by the way that they speak, and they are bound to that group as long as they adhere to its speech patterns. Poor speech, he says defines the working classes and ensures that they will never rise above their station:

> "It's 'eh' and 'garn' that keeps her in her place,
> not her wretched clothes and dirty face."

Higgins believes fundamentally in the 'verbal class distinction' and expresses a hope for 'one common language', although his characteristic pessimism leads him to mourn that this can only be a dream. Cukor presents Higgins as a frustrated idealist on the one hand, and a victim of his own prejudice on the other. His treatment of Eliza is both insensitive and inhuman. He shows no concern for her feelings, labels her a 'silly girl', a 'baggage', a 'wailing cat' and says her voice is like the squeal of a 'unlawen bandling in a barn'.

Eliza's vision of the upper classes, and how it would be if she were a lady is shown in the sequence "wouldn't it be Loverly". Contrasted with Higgins' analytic, cold-blooded look at the working classes, Eliza's wishful-thinking is both sensitive and optimistic. She adopts all the mannerisms which she believes are characteristic of an upper-class lady without being bitter or cynical, and reclines in her 'carriage', a dust cart fanning herself vigorously. All her actions are alien to her working class character and she exaggerates each pose as if by doing so she will assure the person she is performing. Interestingly, her beliefs about the upper classes show a concern that they have what she lacks. Her motivations and priorities are specifically working class in orientation and define her as belonging to that background. Moving into a higher station would enable her to always be warm, comfortable and well-fed, things a member of the upper class takes for

granted. All Eliza wants she sings:

"... is a room somewhere
far away from the cold night air
with one enormous chair
Aw wouldn't it be luverly
Lots of chocolates for me to eat
Lots of coal makin', lots of 'eat
warm face, warm 'ands warm feet
Aw wouldn't it be luverly..."

Amongst the working classes an easy chair is a special luxury usually reserved for the man of the house, and Eliza imagines that she will have one for herself, in which to recline and eat chocolate. In Eliza's dream there is no mention of money, just a desire for comfort and someone to protect her.

Cukor's presentation of working class London is visually rich and cinematically striking. His sequence of the early morning is particularly effective, and shows how the people go about starting their day's activities. Their dominant colours are drab greys and browns. As they move towards their various destinations, Cukor employs an interesting device which immediately foregrounds itself in the context of the film. He freezes frame for a few seconds and then allows the action to continue. The purpose of this series of freeze-frames is to reinforce the working class pictorial image. We are forced to watch them closely and see what they are doing. Cukor invites us to examine their daily lives and realise the importance of each member of a society to its overall structure. Each one is part of a never-ending process of working class living, which Cukor shows us is perfectly balanced. In every freeze frame past action and future action are poised in equilibrium. He has caught each action, as it were, at the decisive moment. Within the musical genre, which uses stylisation of the narrative content as an acceptable convention, these images are completely appropriate. Cukor's presentation of the working classes leans towards the sentimental however, and they are portrayed as a large happy family which constitutes the backbone of the backbone of the English nation and is responsible for keeping its industry and economy solvent. The

repeated reference to Eliza as a 'noble daughter' is especially cloying. The film omits making any real probe into the conditions of working class life, but this is in keeping with the genre in general, and its function as popular culture in society. It reflects what the society wants to believe about itself.

As a direct contrast to this picture of the working classes, Cukor presents Cecil Beaton's magnificently designed black and white "Ascot Gavotte" sequence. In this brilliant visualisation of the upper classes and the aristocracy, the sense of event is paramount, along with the theatricality and stylisation with which it is brought to the screen. Cukor has effectively taken the most vital elements of the Ascot event and foregrounded them for the maximum impact. We are shown society at their most aloof, when each member seeks to impress and outshine the others. All of the women wear a black and white ensemble, and each is a masterpiece of design and co-ordination. The hats are decorated with all manner of flowers and feathers to assume vast and even absurd proportions. But Beaton cleverly shows one that although they strive to be different, they share a common taste, and create a community style which is both definitive and identifiable. It is Cukor's belief that the upper class is the most rigidly controlled and organised social institution. Any dissension or transgression of accepted behavioural codes results in immediate and complete ostracision. Although they want to appear progressive and 'liberated', and insist on following new fashions and fads of conduct, these fashions are accepted and followed by the whole community, or at least they have the tacit approval of that community. Ascot is not as much an occasion for horse-racing, as an excuse for reinforcing the group identity of the upper classes. It demands adherence to the unwritten but widely known codes of social etiquette, and proves that Higgins' belief that class is defined by speech is a fallacy. Class institutions are created and recreated by the people who belong to them, there are numerous behavioural norms which only those born into a

[illegible] and understand. In the "Ascot Gavotte" Cukor displays the collective strength of the upper class visually, by presenting them in a series of still shots [illegible] aspects in turn, their [illegible], [illegible], [illegible] lips, [illegible] posturing and uniformed men in grey morning [illegible]. [illegible] In a monoting [illegible] collective force they sing:

"Everyone who should've been here is here
What a smashing positively dashing
[illegible] at the Ascot homing race..."

and each admits:

"[illegible] up..."

[illegible] any real depth of emotion and excite- [illegible] here. It is fashionable and desir- [illegible] each other, [illegible] careful to always react in an appropriate way.

[illegible] upper class [illegible] and theatricality, [illegible] decidedly working class Eliza, adorned [illegible] her newly acquired speech. [illegible] in the excitement of the occasion, she forgets who she is pretending to be and chatters about her aunt who drank too much gin, and came to a sad ending when she swallowed a [illegible] unscrupulous pela- [illegible] Eliza maintained, "done her in". [illegible], who also defies convention by wearing an old brown suit, believes that Eliza [illegible] failed him, although she wins the affections of Freddy Hinsford-Hill, a young society bachelor. Freddy finds her peculiar manners attractive and believes they must be fashionable. But while [illegible] breach of convention is as visible as Eliza's, his is seen as eccentricity while hers is taken as a sign of bad breeding. Only those who truly belong to a certain society may transgress its rules. The

"Ascot Gavotte" sequence displays a maximum use of the foregrounding technique, in order to afford the message maximum impact. Its extreme stylisation of the visual elements result in a complex iconography into which the upper-class values and attitudes have been encoded. The dress and appearance of each member of the community reinforce their sense of community and restriction and manifest a whole cultural identity. Class is not as Higgins believes merely a 'verbal distinction' it is an attitude of mind and a state of existence which defines the individual person in terms of his relationship to the group. Each class has its own priorities and views of the world and adopting one characteristic, speech, is not enough to bridge the gap between two different worlds of experience.

Higgins' laboratory, where he conducts his linguistic experiments is both reflective of his personality and indicative of his status among the upper classes. He believes that he is outside the constraints of class behaviour, but his personal surroundings tell us otherwise. The iconography of ten Wimpole Street is clearly a visual definition of the man Higgins. He has a preference for furnishings which reinforce his masculinity, brown leather, bronze busts, a vast library and spare upholstery. Higgins' sanctuary bears the stamp of his own character and brands him as an upper-class, middle-aged, bachelor intellectual.

Eliza's working-class upbringing is uniquely displayed in her arrival at Higgins' house, where she hopes to purchase elocution lessons in the hope of becoming a Lady. Higgins has convinced her that correct speech will improve her station, while her appearance proves otherwise. She has unfortunately donned what she believes to be the correct attire, a handbag with which she is ill at ease and a large hat decorated with all manner of brightly coloured, vulgar flowers. Speech will not change Eliza, she needs a total transformation of attitude and outlook, she must begin to think like a lady, not just speak like one. Higgins' teaching methods are insensitive and

callous, he educates through fear. Comparing these scenes with those in the earlier film Singing in the Rain, in which Don and Lina take elocution lessons, is interesting. Like Don's and Lina's teachers, Higgins believes that good speech consists of precise articulation and correct grammar, but beyond this he also maintains that speech is responsible for Britains class distinctions. Speech somehow is reflective of one's character, therefore lazy, imprecise speech indicates a slovenly nature. The working classes are responsible for their own situation and are in it by choice, not through the force of economic or social conditions. Higgins' prejudice shows a lack of understanding about how class distinctions come about and allies him in principle with his own class, who see the working classes as lazy and uncouth.

Eliza begins her lessons rather like Lina, unaware and unwilling to hear her mistakes. She repeats sounds mechanically not analytically, while Higgins allows her to spend hours going on in this fashion without explaining what is wrong. True learning can only come about as a result of fault recognition and genuine perseverence. Eliza does not hear her faults, and Higgins is too insensitive to help and guide her, so they carry on in a completely unsatisfactory way. Higgins grows more impatient, while Eliza becomes more frustrated with her lack of progress. Finally, in her anger and humiliation she sings "Just you wait 'enry 'iggins" and imagines the revenge she will have when she becomes a lady and is powerful enough to effect his demise. She will leave him drowning while they swim, leave him to die when he falls ill or have him beheaded by royal decree. But her revenge is short-lived as Higgins discovers her truancy and sends her back to the voice machine.

The different attitudes of working class and upper class men towards women, can be revealed by comparing the two songs, "I Shall Never Let a Woman in my Life" and "with a Little Bit of Luck". Although they are from different social backgrounds Higgins and Doolittle share similar feelings about the opposite sex, but react in different ways in their relationships with

them. Higgins feels that they are scheming creatures who do their utmost to disrupt and destroy a man's carefully constructed lifestyle. A woman's influence, he explains, is devastating to his equilibrium and affects his better nature. They should be kept out of one's life at all costs, because, he sings:

> "Let a woman in your life and patience hasn't got a chance
> She will ask you for advice, your reply will be concise
> then she'll listen very nicely and go out and do precisely
> what she likes...
> Let a woman in your life and your serenity is through
> in a line that never ends come an army of her friends
> come to natter and to chatter and to tell her what
> the matter is with you!"

and without a woman Higgins likes to feel that he is:

> "... an ordinary man
> who prefers to spend the evening in the quietness of his room
> who likes an atmosphere as quiet as an undiscovered tomb
> an average man am I
> of no eccentric whim
> who likes to live his life, free of strife
> doing whatever he thinks is best of him
> just an ordinary man."

Contrary to his ideas, Higgins is eccentric, selfish, egotistical and insensitive. His views are all based upon prejudice and preconceptions. He is not prepared to compromise at all and cannot understand that possibly a woman might find him just as trying as he finds a woman.

Doolittle is no more sensitive than Higgins in his relationships with women, as he shown by his treatment of Eliza's mother, whom he expects to cook and keep house for him while he goes philandering and shirks all responsibility as a husband and father. In "With a Little Bit of Luck" he expresses a common working-class attitude when he sings:

> "Oh it's a crime for man to go philandering
> to fill his wife's poor heart with fear and doubt
> Oh it's a crime for man to go philandering
> But with a little bit of luck, with a little bit of luck
> you can see the bloodhound don't find out."

Doolittle, like Higgins is selfish and insensitive, and while Higgins can afford to 'play' his linguistic games and dabble in philosophy, Doolittle disregards responsibilities altogether. As an archetypal working class man, he loathes work and loves

drinking, but he is essentially honest, confessing to his weaknesses and admitting his thrifty nature:

> "The Lord above gave man an arm of iron so he could
> do his work and never shirk...
> but with a little bit of luck...
> someone else'll do the blinking work.
> The Lord above made liquor for temptation, to see if
> man could turn away from sin...
> but with a little bit of luck...
> when temptation comes you'll give right in."

Doolittle feels no obligation to change, and feels no shame or remorse for his behaviour. It is acceptable within his code of working class morality. His motives, and those of others like him, are purely selfish and he knows and accepts them. In an attempt to procure a little extra drinking money he sells Liza to Higgins for five pounds. He prostitutes her as if she were an object to be bought and sold at random, but Higgins is a willing party to the transaction. They share the same moral codes and Doolittle strikes a chord of sympathy in Higgins when he bemoans the fact that his daughter is a shrew and her mother a constant trial to him. He refers to himself as one of the "undeserving poor" who is happy with his lot and not prepared to conform to 'middle class' morality. Cukor shows how two men, although they are from different social strata, and intrinsically bound to the prevalent attitudes which abound in their individual situations, can share ideas and opinions. Their allegiance to the male sex as a group draws them together and reinforces their masculine identities.

In the sequence of "The Rain in Spain Stays Mainly in the Plain", Eliza climbs from the ranks of the working classes and rids herself of all class connections. Her learning to speak has afforded her far greater awareness than Higgins and Pickering are able to understand. For she does not leave one class institution to join another, she effectively destroys the necessity to belong to a group. As a truly talented person within the generic structure, she does not need institutions to define her reality. Reality is inherent in her own person. Eliza has learned from her experiences because she has always been sensitive. Unlike Higgins who remains a prisoner of his

own self-created prejudice, Eliza has no prejudice. She will not judge and classify people as Higgins does whether according to criteria of speech or social background. Eliza sees individual people, Higgins sees communities. Her talent indicates her kindness and compassion, which we sense a lack of in Higgins.

Eliza's new-found self-awareness brings her to realise that she has fallen in love with Higgins, and she is radiant with the strength of this love. She openly flaunts convention by singing "I Could've Danced All Night", and refusing to be quiet and go to bed. Her transformation has been twofold, from a flower girl to a lady and concurrent with generic formulae, from a girl to a woman.

The characters of My Fair Lady conform to the conventions of the genre, and are familiar types grown out of accepted recurrent formulae. In Eliza Doolittle we have the truly musical heroine who is talented musically, and therefore by implication sincere, generous and capable of deep emotions. She expresses herself best in music, revealing her dreams ("A Wouldn't it be Loverly"), her passions ("Just You Wait 'enry 'iggins") and her love ("I Could've Danced All Night"). This awareness of the true depth of her feelings finally leads to her becoming a woman, and it is this rather than the ability to speak properly which enables her to transcend the restrictions of class and experience individual freedom. She has no real affiliation to a certain class and cannot 'belong' anywhere. Eliza has elements of the working classes and the upper classes within her, and this knowledge of self and society mark her as a true lady. The greatest prize which she has gained through living with, learning from and loving Higgins is her womanhood.

Higgins' character also undergoes a subtle, slow transformation as he gradually allows Eliza to enter his life. He begins as a prejudiced, dominating man whose arrogance and insensitivity are distinctly non-musical. Where Eliza is

impulsive and irrational, Higgins is reasonable and his life organised. He finds her behaviour strange, but it confirms all his prior beliefs about women in general. She destroys his equilibrium, upsets his carefully arranged lifestyle and slowly becomes an integral part of his existence until he finds that he cannot do without her. But contrary to his expectations Eliza does not "natter and chatter", nor does she grasp and scheme, she is always honest and intelligent. In the soliloquy/song "I've Grown Accustomed to her Face" Higgins admits how dependent he has become upon Eliza:

> "... she almost makes the day begin
> I've grown accustomed to the tune
> she whistles night and noon
> Her smiles her frowns her ups her downs
> are second nature to me now
> Like breathing out and breathing in
> I was supremely independent and content before we met
> surely I can always be that way again, and yet,
> I've grown accustomed to her smile
> her something in the air
> accustomed to her face."

Eliza's face is used as a metonymic replacement for her whole person, which has made such an impact in Higgins' life. He becomes angry at the thought that she could leave him and curses her ingratitude, failing to see that he could have caused her defection. His love has awakened alien emotions which will ultimately prevent him from reverting to being a "confirmed old bachelor", just as Eliza could never be a flower seller again. Their mutual growth and development as a result of their love, has led to a strong respect for each other. Individual freedom has replaced class distinctions and Eliza and Higgins are equals. Cukor reemphasizes one of the strongest recurrent generic themes, that class is more an attitude of mind than a socio-economic or verbal distinction. People create their own barriers which they continually reaffirm as natural, real and right.

The character of Freddy is an unfortunate one in the context of the film, and an acceptable, familiar one within the genre. He is clearly identifiable as the heroine's desperate suitor.

Our first impression of Freddy is of his weakness, and we see him hounded by his domineering mother and his petulant sister. Freddy is ineffectual and reflective of the upper class male, he does n t work and he spends all of his time with society people. He, like all of the genre's conventional suitors, enjoys being in love and suffering rejection, and he proves his ardour by waiting outside Eliza's door day and night until s e appears. "On the Street where You Live" is a magnificent rendition of insincere and shallow emotions. Freddy's performance is remarkable in its po.er, but his ineffective character renders the sentiments expressed hollow and meaningless. He declares to all within earshot:

> "I have often walked down this street before
> but the pavement always stayed beneath my feet before
> All at once am I, several storeys high
> knowing I'm on the street where you live."

and denies all sense of responsibility by exclaiming:

> "Let the time roll by I won't care if I
> can be here on the street where you live."

Freddy uses the form of music without its greater implications of sincerity and conviction which mark the truly talented character. Freddy's next song transcends all rules of discretion and moves into extreme sentimentality. He has waited days for a glimpse of Eliza and when he is finally rewarded for his patience his emotions grow to the point of all-consuming ardour. He burst into song with:

> "Speak and the world is full of singing
> the heavens ringing higher than the clouds.
> Touch and my heart begins to tremble
> the heavens tumble darling..."

and Eliza, who is outraged at his indulgence silences him. So although Eliza's suitors appear to be at opposite extremes; Higgins uses words coldly and mechanically and Freddy charges his with an excess of emotion which leaves them devoid of all real meaning, they are both incapable of caring for her genuinely.

Higgins' colleague and partner in the transformation of Eliza, Colonel Pickering, is a gentle, sensitive person who is both a friend to Eliza, and a surrogate father in the absense of

Doolittle. To Eliza, he represents what a true gentleman should be, considerate of all people no matter what their station, generous and kindhearted. In her words:

> "He treats a flower girl as if she were a lady... I shall always be a lady to Colonel Pickering because he always treats me as one."

Pickering, although belonging to the upper classes, sees no real distinctions between people and is essentially free of prejudice and social restriction.

We can only surmise that Higgins' opinions about women are based upon prejudice and hearsay, from the evidence of the other two important women in his life. His mother and Mrs Pierce are both friends and allies to Eliza while she is living with Higgins. Neither are difficult or inconsistent in their characters, so Higgins' problems in his relationships with the opposite sex are clearly of his own making. He believes that women are irrational and refuses to contemplate that he could be inadequate in some way. Of Eliza's defection he assumes that she is ungrateful, selfish, and absurd. If he had been:

> "hailed as a Prince by one and by all...",

he asks:

> "Would I start weeping like a bathtub overflowing?
> And carry on as if my home were in a tree?
> would I run off and never tell me where I'm going?"

The scenes before and after the ball at which Eliza proves she can behave as a lady show Higgins at his most obnoxious. When he takes her arm to lead her to the ball he symbolically accepts her as his equal both in station and as a partner in life. But in the excitement of succeeding in his experiment, he forgets Eliza as a person and regards her only as an object which he has created. He gives her no credit for the achievement and fails to realise that he has made her homeless, jobless and without a place in society. She no longer belongs in a working class environment and has no financial means to settle among the upper classes. Eliza is free of social restriction but logically no one can exist without belonging to an institution of some sort.

Doolittle's rapid rise in station to join the middle classes is both difficult and uncomfortable for him. Cukor reveals the effects of a sudden and forced change in circumstances. Since Doolittle has become respected and renowned for his honest morality, he has been forced to adapt to 'middle class' standards, and one of these results was the early Eliza's mother. In "Get Me to the Church on Time" he bids a final, mournful farewell to his bachelor days and prepares himself for a life of matrimonial isolation. For Doolittle, marriage is similar to death, and while he needs a woman as a sexual companion and housekeeper he relishes in male freedom. Giving a woman security, by marrying her, allows her to become domineering and demanding. He wants the pleasures and comforts, without the responsibilities of marriage. "Get me to the Church on Time" is another sequence in which Cukor presents a vivid picture of working class life eating, drinking and physical contact. Its women are of ample proportions, well-endowed, with a healthy appetite for sex and uninhibited in their zest for living. Unlike Eliza they personify the working class honesty and coarseness. Upper class women are characteristically thin and delicate, and are typically petulant, inhibited and class-conscious. Working class people are depicted as happy and contented with their situation, but as class-conscious and restricted as their upper class counterparts. They too, have their codes of behaviour and are suspicious of outsiders.

Doolittle's forced change in circumstances has caused him considerable misery and anguish, which Cukor shows comically but not without a serious message. My Fair Lady reinforces the class boundaries and shows us that one cannot move outside of one's group distinction without adopting different attitudes to the ones one already holds. It is not enough just to assume the trappings of another social institution, its dress, its speech patterns or its particular mannerisms. One must learn and accept the governing ideology. Eliza, as a fully-realised musical character outgrows the necessity to belong to a class of people and her identity is not defined by

a social allegiance. She is neither working class, nor upper class, but an assured, elegant woman who responds to her own needs, understands her necessity to love and freely accepts her individual responsibilities without submerging them into a collective group persona. By contrast, Doolittle is an essentially working class man who is comfortable to remain so, and shares the prevailing attitudes of his fellows. Eliza and her father are both talented and express themselves using song and dance, and both use song as a means to achieving true self-awareness. In Eliza's case it leads her beyond social restriction and in Doolittle's it reinforces his sense of belonging to the group. People like Doolittle define the group and provide the reason for its existence. He wants the protection and restriction of working class morality because he believes in it. Doolittle is ultimately a free man who is forced by circumstance to conform to something he loathes, the middle classes and middle class morality.

Predictably, the film ends happily when Eliza returns to a changed Higgins who accepts that she is necessary and indispensable in his life. He has learned to respect and love her and she only goes back to him when she is confident that he will be sensitive and caring. Higgins' experience of the musical character has released him from his upper class background and his individual prejudice, proving that shared attitudes transcend social barriers.

In My Fair Lady, Cukor uses the visual elements of film to expose the thematic structure of the narrative. His incorporation of flowers as icons serves to reinforce the opposition between working class women and society ladies. Similarly, Cecil Beaton's distinctive design concept further highlights their differences, and reveals how both exhibit a specific visual style. The working class at work is drab and muted while at play it is colourful and brash. In contrast the upper class is always flamboyant in style, but conventional in its colour choices. The black and white "Ascot Gavotte"

magnificently displays how in their quest to be different, the upper classes create a definite style. Visually, colour has a strong impact because it is usually significant. The upper classes show a preference for pastel shades, Mrs Higgins resides in a townhouse which is decorated in pale pink shades, and appropriately mirrors an elegant lifestyle and her refined personality.

My Fair Lady fulfils many of the genre's narrative formulae even the simplest plot determinant, boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy sings song and gets girl. Its characters are true to generic types, the hero, the heroine, the hero's best friend, the ardent suitor and the heroine's surrogate mother. And its sub-plots are recognisable within the structure of the musical genre, the heroine is transformed from a girl to a woman and rises in station from a flower girl to a lady. Higgins' and Eliza's relationship is clouded by the inevitable conflict, suspicion and mistrust which is only resolved as they become more aware of each other's true characters.

The most important opposition which My Fair Lady illustrates is between individual freedom and social restriction. Working classes and upper classes are really subject to the same structuring procedures and create their own group identities to which their members tacitly pledge allegiance. So although they are on opposite ends of the social spectrum they share a common purpose, which is to rationalise the existence of each individual. True musical characters are free from social constraints and what Cukor is ultimately telling us, is that people are either class bound or they are not. This is one of the fundamental statements which the musical film makes, whether it is expressed by Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor or Eliza Doolittle.

CONCLUSION

The structuralist model of binary oppositions in the musical genre is valuable as a tool for critical analysis. It provides a grid of possibilities against which the narrative content of an individual film text can be mapped. What makes it workable, is its specificity to a certain class of texts, the film musical. It has been devised bearing in mind the particular content of this genre and focuses upon its structural relationships.

The purpose of this work has been to show how a certain category of film, the genre musical, can be studied and taught, and in attempting to do this various points have come to light. Firstly, it is necessary to accept that there are certain fundamental differences between literary and film media. Secondly, a popular culture medium needs special attention and any analysis which aims to promote discourse about it, must understand the forces and constraints which operate upon a mass appeal artform. And thirdly, genre film and especially the musical is highly formulaic and adheres to an overall structure which is continually inventing and reinventing itself.

Popular culture fulfils a certain role in society, which only recently, has come to be regarded as important. Analysing a society's popular culture leads one to have a greater insight into how that particular community sees itself. Popular culture modes are ideological carriers i.e. they carry messages about the society which they serve, and confirm a specific attitude about the world as being natural and 'true to life'. Audiences want to believe that the world they see presented in genre films is reflective of reality, and the film industry's producers and directors pander to this desire by feeding them a so-called 'natural' view of life. Popular culture portrays a distorted sense of reality, but never seeks to hide anything. In the musical genre, class distinctions are shown as a fact of life, and no-one pretends that they do

not exist. On the contrary, they are accepted as natural and even desirable because they provide the individual with security and a sense of community identity.

But popular culture is really only socially relevant to the society which it reflects. It is necessary because it entrenches the dominant ideology, and provides a window into the nature of a certain community. Beyond this, we must consider the individual films themselves, not just as popular culture but as belonging to a definite category of film which can be serious and can be considered art. In recent years numerous film critics like Stanley Solomon, Jim Kitzes, Stephen Neale, Thomas Schatz and Colin McArthur have attempted to create an intellectual basis for the concept of genre criticism, and it has now achieved the serious acceptance it deserves. Because although genre films were provided in response to a need in society, they are often complex, stylised works which communicate simultaneously on many levels, literal, indexical and metaphoric. When we view them today, they are dislocated from the society to which they were most relevant but still have a strong visual and narrative impact. Our interest is one of nostalgic curiosity, leading to a concern to understand a form which foregrounds itself so obviously. An analysis of genre film categories must consider their function as popular culture, but must also go 'beyond formula'. Kitzes' structuralist model of binary oppositions in the western genre was the first serious attempt to do this and revealed a film category which was both complex and thematically dense. The structuralist model of binary oppositions in the musical genre, is likewise a serious attempt to provide a critical framework within which to analyse an important group of films. I hope that it will prove valuable to students, who can use it to promote discourse about a hitherto misunderstood, neglected genre.

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1933	Flying Down to Rio	Warner Bros
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	Footlight Parade	Warner Bros
	Golddiggers of 1933	R.K.O.
1934	The Gay Divorcee	Paramount
	The Merry Widow	Warner Bros
	Fashions of 1934	R.K.O.
1935	Top Hat	M.G.M.
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	Golddiggers of 1935	R.K.O.
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	Follow the Fleet	M. .M.
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	Maytime	R.K.O.
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		Warner Bros
1967	Camelot	Twentieth Century Fox
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1972	Cabaret	United Artists
1983	Flashdance	

Dates indicate the year of release.

Author Hiltermann T V
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