

A classic film still from 'Singin' in the Rain' showing Gene Kelly in a blue suit and fedora, singing and dancing in the rain with his arms outstretched. A woman in a dark dress is visible in the background to the left.

SINGIN' IN THE RAIN

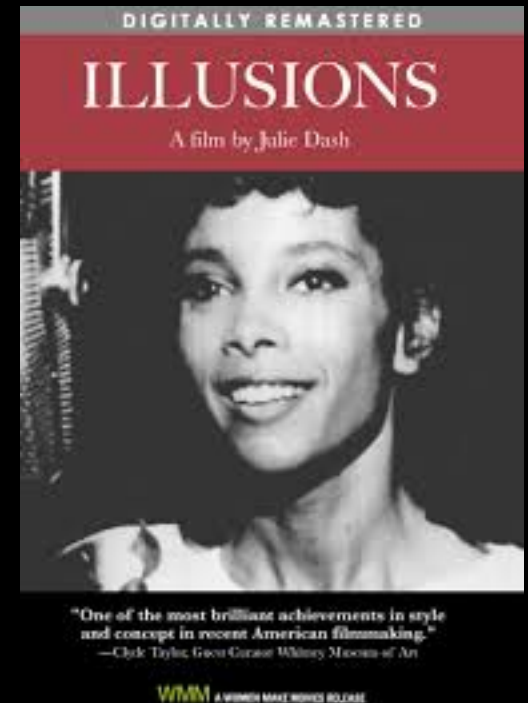
Media 100
Semester 2, 2020
Jenny Stümer

Reminder Assignment 1

- Due Friday 28 August 4pm
- Word limit: 800 (+/- 10%)
 - develop your ability to closely 'read' a film text.
 - develop your use and understanding of technical film language.
 - demonstrate your understanding of narrative, editing and sound techniques.
 - develop your ability to write concise observations about technical aspects of filmmaking.
 - develop your ability to turn such observations into a coherent, well structured essay.
 - Check out scene analysis sample clips on Canvas



Today



Dancing at the Movies

Why Study the Musical?

- Musicals specifically developed to show off new sound technologies
- Sound technologies influence film language
- Musicals manifest a particular spectator-film relation
- Musicals are a significant part of film history
- First synchronized sound



Singin' in the Rain

- 1952, dir. Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen
- Musical
- Self-reflexivity
- *Singin' in the Rain* looks back at the introduction of sound in cinema



The Jazz singer

- 1927
- Directed by Alan Crosland
- Starring Al Jolson
- credited as the first 'talkie'



The Jazz Singer (1927)

Introducing sound to Hollywood

The Jazz Singer (1927)



Don Juan (1926)

Talking picture – Singin' in the Rain



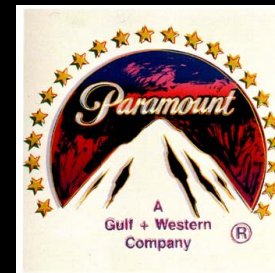
Introducing Sound – Singin' in the Rain



- the adoption of synch-sound technology also brought problems:

The Hollywood Studio System

- Vertical Integration
 - Production, distribution, exhibition
- Horizontal integration
 - Broadway
 - Music publishing
 - Radio
 - Recording companies



Exhibition transition to 'talkies'

United States

1929

800 theatres were wired for sound

22,544 were silent

1931

12,615 theatres were wired for sound

1521 were silent



Source: *The 1953 Film Daily Yearbook of Motion Pictures*, 129

Studio Manufacture

- Exclusive contracts
- Specialized labour (MGM Freed Unit)
- Unified production values & consistent filmic style
- Repeated presence of certain stars
- Generic specialization (e.g. MGM in musicals)



Musicals

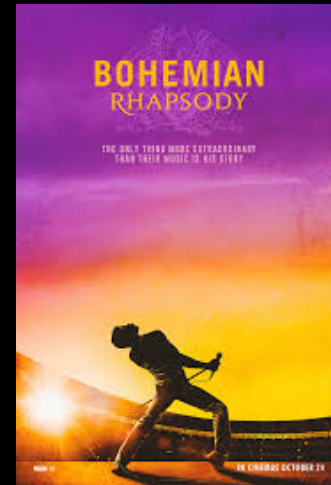
- Studio staple
- Innovation in staging musical numbers
- Highly consistent generic format
- Plots tend to be secondary and often recycled



The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)

Musicals

- Common plotlines:
 - Biopics
 - Backstage Musicals
 - Catalogue Musicals



Stars

- Musicals were made to reiterate the star's persona not only through character but through the musical numbers
- Stars and genre



Babes on Broadway (1941)



Integrated and Aggregated

Integrated: where song, dance and story blend to produce a combined effect. – songs ‘advance’ the narrative

Aggregate: song and dance numbers are self-contained – songs ‘interrupt’ the narrative

Diegetic and Non-diegetic

- Diegetic: sound heard in the 'world' of the film (both us and the characters can hear it)
- Non-Diegetic: sound not heard in the film world (e.g., background music)



Parallel and Contrapuntal

- Parallel: sound whose meaning matches the image
- Contrapuntal: sound whose meaning does not match the image



Synchronous and Asynchronous

- Synchronous: sound matched with movements occurring in the images
- Asynchronous: sound not matched with movements in the images



Asynchronous sound



Asynchronous sound



Self-reflexivity



Singin' in the Rain: Hollywood musical about the making of a Hollywood musical.

Jane Feuer: Demystification and Remythification

Demystification

- Backstage musicals appear to reveal the production of entertainment



Remythification

- But musicals end up perpetuating rather than deconstructing the code of the genre.



Demystification/ Remythification



Myth of Spontaneity

- Spontaneous talent
- Character and talent go hand in hand



Myth of Spontaneity: Moses Supposes



Credit Where Credit is Due

Singin' in the Rain is about getting credit for one's talent and performance.

But there are multiple contradictions in the actual production of the film.



Credit where credit is due



Erasing Black Culture

- What about the contribution of African American talent and its erasure in the proliferation of the Hollywood musical?



Bojangles Robinson



Al Jolson in blackface in the Jazzsinger

Credit where credit is due

- Alludes to uncredited repertoire of African American song and dance
- Minstrel shows



Nicholas Brothers



The Nicholas Brothers



Small but significant scenes



Illusions (1983)

- Directed by African-American independent filmmaker, Julie Dash
- About Mignon, an African-American woman who is 'passing' as white in the Hollywood industry in the early 1940s (emphasis on war years)
- Also about 'credit where credit is due', but with recognition of role of *race* in Hollywood's appropriations

Illusions (1983)



The White male gaze

See you next week

Let us know if you have questions and talk to us during Q and A Sessions on Zoom!

