

The Representation of Women in Hollywood Film Musicals: a Qualitative, Critical and  
Visual Analysis of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Nine*.

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## **Disclaimer**

### Declaration

I hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge, this is my own work and that all sources have been properly acknowledged. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree at any other university in order to obtain an academic qualification.

### Signature

*V. Hohls*

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Vyonne Hohls  
Pietermaritzburg  
June 2017

This thesis is ready for examination.

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## **Abstract**

Dance, musical theatre, and drama have always been such a passion for me. The magical worlds that these art forms create allow for escapism that we as humans crave, and show us. Being a feminist myself, and a woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I have had a growing interest in the field of feminism and women's rights, and feel that there is always something new to learn, and there are always different ways of looking at the ways of the world and representations of women that are given to us through the media.

This study looks at how women have been, and are still represented in Hollywood film musicals. Specific examples of popular film musicals and their dance sequences are explored, and I look at the way women are generally represented, and the negative as well as the positive implications and opportunities these representations offer. Based on the textual analysis of my chosen films, as well as examples from other musicals, I look at the concept of the male voyeur, and how women primarily serve as the objects of consumption within these films. I go on to look at whether this representation can at all be empowering for women.

My study also provides options for further research into this topic.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

For me, the stage is like the best place in the world, because when I'm performing, it feels like nothing else is happening: it's just me in that moment.

I have a great passion for dance and its ability to be like a language on its own. Having danced, myself, from when I was in high school, I fell in love with the magical element it has, and how the combination of music and dance can create an entire new reality, transporting you into a different world. This makes the musical genre so exciting to me.

Ballet has always been my favourite form of dance: it is so elegant, flawless and captivating, and requires so much attention to detail. Ultimately, it embodies perfection.

In high school, after having danced contemporary dance, I knew immediately that I wanted to go on to study the arts: drama, dance and musical theatre. I wanted to pursue a career in this field because I was so passionate about the arts, and I knew there was so much to learn, and so many forms of dance to still discover.

I embarked on a Diploma in Performing Arts at the Waterfront Theatre School in Cape Town. Gaining this experience and honing my skills in these disciplines only 'fed' and fuelled my passion for the performing arts. However, while I absolutely loved the practical work, and learnt which dance styles I was talented in, I craved some theory, and learning the history and theoretical background of these arts.

I completed my Diploma and decided to do my Undergraduate and Honours Degree in Media and Drama at UKZN Pietermaritzburg, with my Honours project being on the transgression of the representation of women in the media with reference to three film

musicals, from the Classic Hollywood era, through to the postmodern era. Feminist issues, discussions, and progression in society have always been very interesting to me, particularly how the media deals with the subject, and I wanted to explore how they tackle feminist issues in the material that is presented to audiences in musical films.

My Honours project exposed me to a whole world of feminist theory and criticism which I had never come across before, and I found the material to be fascinating and relevant, especially in the field of Hollywood film musicals. When I completed my project, I knew that someday I would want to come back to the subject, and take on a Masters dissertation, looking further into feminist critique, and what Hollywood has made available for us in film musicals, as I felt that there was so much more to still learn and uncover. Being a feminist myself, I wanted to explore how female characters are created for us in film musicals, what social systems and institutions are evident in the characters and stories, and what we as the viewers have come to accept as normal representations.

Because of my love for dance, I definitely wanted to include this aspect in this research dissertation, and I then decided to look into how dance helps to create meaning, and shape representations of women for us within film musicals.

I have chosen two musicals in order to take on this project. The first one is *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, a Classic Hollywood Musical released in 1953, I have chosen *Nine* (2009) as my second text for analysis. I chose these two musicals, because firstly, they are two of my favourite musicals, and I knew that these two films have enough examples of unique, rich female characters to analyse.

Musical theatre is a form of theatre which combines music, songs, spoken dialogue and dance. Vaudeville and Burlesque are two of the forms which are the ancestors of the modern musical. Vaudeville, known as 'the heart of American show business' was a theatrical genre of variety entertainment in the US and Canada from the early 1880s to the early 1930s. Each performance was composed of a series of acts which included musicians, dancers, comedians, impersonators, amongst others. Burlesque, which emerged around the same time as Vaudeville, is a dramatic or musical work intended to evoke laughter through satire. Later use refers to shows which took on a variety show format, which included musical performances, sketch comedy, magic, acrobatics, ventriloquism and sometimes juggling. Since the early 20th century, musical theatre stage creations have simply been called musicals.

*The Black Crook* (1866) introduced some of the rituals which identify American musical comedy and are still evident in many musicals today: "chorus girls, ornate production numbers, elaborate costuming, songs provocative with sexual innuendos, large numbers, amongst others" (Lubbock, 1962: 753). I am going to use this quote, amongst others, to explore how Hollywood musicals represent women and how the components of the musical contribute to creating a particular image of women.

"A typical characteristic of movie musical genre is that there are two leads, a man and a woman, who sing and dance together, and eventually become romantically involved; that they sing and dance so fluidly together is a metaphor for the perfection of their relationship" (Cohan, 2002: 83). Wollen states that: "in the early 1940s the operetta and the musical comedy developed a new vision, whereby dances were integrated into the drama as expressions of characters' moods and feelings, rather than slotted in simply as opportunities for spectacular dancing" (Wollen, 1992:12). This is an



important focus of my study, as I aim to look into how women are represented for us within dance sequences.

My project will take the form of a qualitative textual and critical analysis of my two chosen films. As I shall be analysing films, I will be using the formal method developed by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2008) and Robert Kolker (2000) using terms that are key to film studies, such as *mise-en-scène*, editing, camera angles, cinematography, and the shot and the cut.

As Robert Kolker puts it: “analysis of the form of the cinematic text concentrates on the two basic building blocks of film, the shot and the cut, and on the structure which comes into being when the film is assembled, the combination of the shot and the cut which is the finished film... this ...completed structure of image and editing...communicates the narrative” (Kolker, 2000:13). I will be looking at how the representation of women is constructed in each film, specifically in the dance sequences.

Laura Mulvey argues that “in cinema, objects, gestures, looks, *mise-en-scène*, lighting, framing, and all the accoutrements of the filming apparatus materialize into a kind of language before of even beyond words” (Mulvey, 1995: 19). This ‘language’ shall be discussed with reference to film components according to Bordwell and Thompson (2008).

The Musical Genre, as mentioned, will also be discussed. Genre is important in film studies because genre films are a key element of mass culture, and if a form of art speaks powerfully to a mass audience it is important to look at what it is saying. The musical film is a film genre in which songs sung by the characters are interwoven into the narrative. Songs are used to further the plot or develop the film’s characters. The

1930s, 1940s, and 1950s are considered to be the golden age of the musical film, when the genre was at its most popular in the western world. Vaudeville and Burlesque are two art forms which are ancestors of the modern musical. These art forms will be discussed further in my Literature Review chapter.

Musicals are often seen as a women-oriented form of entertainment. As Cohan has stated: “whereas Hollywood films typically associate masculinity with seeing, in command of an active, voyeuristic look, they just as typically represent femininity as lacking and passive, put on exhibition and looked at” (Cohan, 2002: 62). This is very evident through what I will argue to be the stereotypical representations of women in both my chosen films, and this notion of the voyeuristic look is a principal concern of my study. Brown’s idea of the ‘ideal body’ will also be discussed with reference to both films (Brown, 2005). I shall aim to discover whether “the [musical] genre simply reproduces without problematizing a patriarchal ideology which subordinates the female body to the gaze of the male voyeur” (Cohan, 2002: 63).

The traditional element of the musical, spectacle, will be discussed, including what its role is in musicals, with particular reference to its part in the construction of the female characters and the creation of the ideal body which, according to Cohan, encourages the “spectatorial position of a male voyeur” (Cohan, 2002:63).

Feminist enquiry also forms an important part of my research. I wish to reveal “how texts position the female subject in narratives and textual interactions, and in so doing, contribute to a definition of femininity in collaboration with the reader” (McQuail, 2010: 344).

*Class and Feminine Excess: the strange case of Anna Nicole Smith* suggests how the media depicts what “a white beauty ideal” is (Brown, 2005: 74). In my dissertation, I

will be looking at these ideas of bodily ideals and determine how relevant and prevalent this concept is in the chosen films. Brown also states that there exists a very strictly defined beauty ideal for women and that women are expected to strive for an abstract notion of beauty (Brown, 2005). I shall discuss this strict beauty ideal in later chapters.

I believe that my topic is important and interesting as it draws attention to what I will argue is a particular societal concern, which includes the stereotypes that have surrounded women throughout history, particularly in the visual art form, and continues to form a major part of women's worth and identity.

I will be looking into the origins of dance, and then more specifically at the dance traditions in American musical theatre and its meanings. The book entitled *The Nature of Dance* by Roderik Lange (1975) has interesting information on the cultural side of dance and how dance meanings develop in different cultures, and Judith Lynne Hanna says that "dance is physical behaviour... a conceptual natural language with intrinsic and extrinsic meanings" (Hanna, 1979: 5).

Jack Anderson argues in his book entitled *Dance* that "usually dances are accompanied by suitable music...scenery and costumes" (Anderson, 1974:9). He also says that "whether it tells a story, preaches a message, or conjures a mood, dance communicates because it prompts responses within us" (Anderson 1974: 9). We also learn from Anderson that "productions combining dance with speech and song arose during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Western Europe" (Anderson 1974: 63).

I will be focussing my study around specifically the dance sequences in each film. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), I primarily want to look at the very popular number *Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend*, sung by Marilyn Monroe. The reason for choosing

this number, is that I believe it will give me a lot of material to work with and analyse, to form an argument. In the number, Monroe is surrounded by many men who are constantly touching her, lifting her up, and swooning over her. She is dressed in a bright pink, boob-tube dress, covered in diamond jewellery (rings, necklace, bracelets, earrings), and wears vibrant, striking make-up. She is made to stand out, and contrasts the men significantly in her bright attire. The men all wear plain, black suits.

As part of this number, we also see women dressed in long, skimpy, black boob-tube dresses with cut-outs, forming part of a giant chandelier which hangs above the middle of the stage. Some of the women are positioned lying on their backs with their legs open, in the air.

I will also be looking at the number *Two Little Girls from Little Rock* from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953). The two leading ladies wear very low-cut, glittery red dresses, with slits right up to the top of their thighs. They are adorned in diamonds - bracelets, earrings and necklaces - and wear red high heels. Jane Russell's mocking performance of *Diamonds are a Girls' Best Friend* is also a number I want to look at, as she performs the same song Monroe performed, in the court room, as Lorelei-Lee (Monroe's character), wearing a very skimpy silver costume under a fur coat. At one stage she says the line "sometimes life is very hard for a girl like I, especially if she happens to be pretty like I, and have blonde hair" (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, 1953).

In *Nine* (2009) the first number I'd like to look at is *Be Italian*. The female characters/dancers are all dressed in lacy, red and black lingerie-looking outfits, they all wear high heels and have striking make-up with bold red lips. The dance moves are extremely sexualised - for example, in one section, the dancers are all sitting

backwards on chairs, with their legs open, and they lean over the chairs towards the camera, exposing their cleavage in their tight outfits.

*A Call from the Vatican*, and *Cinema Italiano* are two of the primary numbers I'd like to analyse. In *A Call from the Vatican*, Guido's mistress, Carla, performs the entire number in black and white lingerie, on a pink silk sheet hanging from the ceiling. The scene is filled with close ups of her legs, breasts and bum, and the camera captures many provocative poses. In *Cinema Italiano*, the journalist, Stephanie (Kate Hudson), performs an upbeat number (filmed in black and white), in knee-high silver boots, and a short, silver, spectacular, swimming costume-like outfit with tassel-like detail. She is surrounded by back-up female dancers in the same outfits, and male dancers in hats and plain, grey suits.

The approach that I intend on adopting will focus on the female characters of the musicals, and how they are comprised, what contexts, situations and stories they are placed within, as well as their objectives within the films. I will do this by looking specifically at certain dance sequences within each movie.

The assumptions of this approach are that the text will present specific depictions of women through the above stated criteria, giving me enough data to analyse my chosen films. I am expecting the representation of women to be quite limiting, stereotyped, stylized and lacking, as Laura Mulvey argues (Mulvey, 1989).

## **1.1 Chapter Breakdown**

My dissertation will be broken up into chapters as follows:

### **Introduction**

The approach that I intend on adopting will focus on the female characters of the musicals, and how they are comprised, what contexts, situations and stories they are placed within, as well as their objectives within the films. I will do this by looking specifically at certain dance sequences within each movie.

The assumptions of this approach are that the text will present specific depictions of women through the above stated criteria, and I will be able to determine clear findings. I am expecting the representation of women to be quite limiting, stereotyped and stylized as Laura Mulvey argues (Mulvey, 1989).

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Theories from the following, amongst others, will be used. Thomas Schatz writes about film genre and the genre film; Rick Altman (1999) speaks of a semantic/syntactic approach to film genre; Leo Braudy (1999) speaks of the conventions of connection within genre; Linda Williams (1999) is concerned with gender, genre and excess; Christine Gledhill writes a chapter entitled *Rethinking Genre* (2000), and Steven Cohen (2002) has written a case study interpreting *Singin' in the Rain*, which I will be using as a comparative point for the Classic Hollywood musical. Cohan has also written a book entitled *Hollywood Musicals, the Film Reader* (2002), which includes information on the musical genre, gender representation and the representation of sexual difference in spectacle. Peter Wollen's book, *Singin' in the Rain* (1992) takes

the reader through the entire process of how the musical came to be - from pre to post-production stage: a very interesting read.

Lola Young's book entitled *Fear of the Dark* (1996) which deals with gender and sexuality, reads well with 'A Bit Much', *Feminist Media Studies* (2005) written by Helene Shugart and Catherine Waggoner, which deals with the concept of spectacle. *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (1990) by Patricia Erens, and *Women & Film* (1988), edited by Janet Todd, will also assist me in forming my argument.

Dance resources at this stage include: *Dance as Text- Ideologies of the Baroque Body* (1993) by Mark Franko, *Understanding Dance* (1992) by Graham McFee, who discusses expression in dance, and *Moving History/ Dancing Culture - A Dance History Reader* (2001), edited by Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright. I have also been looking at *Dance* (1974) by Jack Anderson, and what he says about the purpose of dance. Janet Adshead-Lansdale and June Layson's *Dance History: An Introduction* (1994) has proven to be helpful so far, as well as *To Dance is Human* (1979) by Judith Hanna. Hanna talks about the language of dance and how it relates to other aspects of human life.

Each theorist and their work was chosen for my dissertation because they are the foremost theorists in their fields – the fields that I am researching. Each theorist that I included spoke to me in some way, and stood out enough for me to want to include their work in my dissertation. I sifted through many different articles, books and online material in order to find theorists and theories that I believe to be the most influential, as well as beneficial for this particular study.

All of these sources shall be utilised in order to assist my argument that women have been represented in a particular, restricted, artificial way in the Hollywood Musical

since its emergence - and that dance and spectacle play a role in determining how women are represented in these musicals.

## **Research Methodology**

My research shall be primarily a qualitative textual, visual and critical analysis in which I shall be analysing two film musicals as my data, based largely on Deacon et al's suggested methods (Deacon et al, 1999; Deacon et al, 2010).

## **Analysis**

In my analysis chapter, I will be formulating my own argument, discussing how images and depictions have been created and moulded for us in film musicals with reference to dance and female characters in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *Nine* (2009), and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) as a comparative point. I will also be looking at other contemporary film musicals as a comparative point, such as *La La Land* (2016) and *Ghostbusters* (2016). I will account for my findings with regards to:

1. What the musical genre tropes are and what it presents for us with regard to representing the leading women in these films,
2. What film devices have been put into place in this genre to create specific meaning with representing women e.g.: close-ups, editing, focal-points,
3. How feminist theory is dealt with in these films, with reference to traditional ideals of beauty and femininity, as discussed by my chosen theorists, and
4. How dance styles, tropes and techniques create specific meaning for us with regard to the female characters in each film.



## **Summary and Conclusions**

This section will sum up my argument and my findings, which ideally will include that the Hollywood film industry still has a way to go, and more progress is still to be made in musicals (with reference to feminist theory), in terms of representing women in a realistic, fair way, in roles equal to those of men, praising them for more than simply their beauty and sexualism, and objects for the male gaze. I will also explore the idea that there is maybe a positive side to this representation of women, and I would like to argue effectively that dance perhaps can be used in different, novel ways to create different representations and meanings for audiences.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

My research will draw on theorists that I believe to be influential in my chosen fields - dance, film, feminism and the musical.

### **2.1 Genre and the Musical Genre**

Genre, and specifically the musical genre, have fascinating origins, and I would like to explore these further.

Some of the most influential theorists I shall be using include Thomas Schatz (1999) who speaks about film genre and the genre film; Rick Altman (1999) who speaks of a semantic/syntactic approach to film genre; Leo Braudy (1999), who argues about the conventions of connection within genre; Linda Williams (1999), who is concerned with gender, genre and excess; Christine Gledhill, who writes a chapter entitled *Rethinking Genre* (2000) and Cohan who wrote a case study interpreting *Singin' in the Rain* (2000). Cohan also wrote a book entitled *Hollywood Musicals, the Film Reader* (2002), which includes information on the musical genre, gender representation and the representation of sexual difference in spectacle. I will also be using a book written by Peter Wollen entitled *Singin' in the Rain* (1992) which takes the reader through the entire process of how the musical came to be - from pre to post-production stage.

Genre is my starting point for this discussion, and is generally considered a code between a communicator and the audience. This code includes repetitive conventions. A 'genre approach' to cultural production is one which recognises the interest and value of different ways of making meaning, and according to Altman (1999), genres are popular because they are coded ways of dealing with the social and cultural concerns of cinema audiences.

Bordwell and Thompson (2008) state that genres are ways of classifying films that are shared across society by filmmakers, critics and viewers. "Films are most commonly grouped into genres by virtue of similar plot patterns, similar thematic implications, characteristic filmic techniques, and recognisable iconography" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 336). Genres tend to use a set of icons or visual features, such as objects, settings, or typical actions - which occur often in a particular genre and therefore take on symbolic importance. The themes of a genre usually give it its enduring interest and value.

This is illustrated by Gledhill and Williams (2000:238) arguing that "genres construct fictional worlds out of textual encounters between cultural languages, discourses, representations, images, and documents according to the conventions of a given genre's fictional world, while social and cultural conflicts supply material for renewed generic enactments" (Gledhill & Williams, 2000: 238).

Altman states that genre films lure its audience into a familiar world which is filled with reassuring stereotypes of character, action and plot (Altman, 1999). In my study I am going to explore what these stereotypes consist of for the female characters, with particular reference to dance.

I would argue that it is also important to consider the social role and culture of genre. Appadurai states that "culture...is an activity rather than a thing: it is a way of generating a stable sense of self in the complex and confusing flows of the contemporary globalised world. Cultural identity is a 'boundary-maintenance device' in which certain activities or features are presented as natural." (Appadurai, 1996: 2). He says that culture is "the conscious and imaginative construction and mobilisation of difference" (Appadurai, 1996: 2). According to Bordwell and Thompson, the fact that

every genre has fluctuated in popularity reminds us that genres are tightly bound to cultural factors (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008).

No major genre remains unchanged over the many decades of its existence, as they evolve, according to Altman and Schatz (Altman, 1999 and Schatz, 1999). This will be interesting to explore in the films. Braudy and Robert Kolker also state that all art must exist in some relation to the forms of the past, whether in contrast or continuation, and maintain that a genre will remain vital so long as its conventions still express themes and conflicts that preoccupy its audience (Braudy: 1999, and Kolker, 2000). Altman adds to this and says that because of the existence of generic expectations, a genre film can step beyond the moment of its existence and play against its own aesthetic history (Altman, 1999). Bordwell and Thompson further Altman's theory and state that "audiences expect the genre film to offer something familiar, but they also demand fresh variations on it. The filmmaker may devise something mildly or radically different, but it will still be based on tradition" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 321).

Thomas Schatz argues that there is a demand for a happy ending in genre films, which I agree with, and have seen is very relevant in traditional Hollywood musicals (Schatz, 1999). For instance, in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), the movie ends with both leading ladies getting married, and they also have their own cabaret show. In *Nine* (2009), the film ends with Guido finally having the inspiration to direct his new film, and he also has the support from all the women that have played a part in his life, and it's clear that all the 'loose ends' are tied up.

**2.1.1.** I will now go on to define the musical genre and discuss its components such as narrative structure (discussed further in section 2.4) and spectacle (2.1.2).

Musical theatre combines music, songs, spoken dialogue and dance. According to Bordwell and Thompson: “song-and-dance numbers become motivated as either expressions of the characters’ emotions or stage shows mounted by the characters” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 95). Cohan (2002: 83) argues that “a typical characteristic of the movie musical genre is that there are two leads, a man and a woman, who sing and dance together, and eventually become romantically involved; that they sing and dance so fluidly together is a metaphor for the perfection of their relationship”. Wollen points out that in the early 1940s the operetta and the musical comedy “developed a new vision, whereby dances were integrated into the drama as expressions of characters’ moods and feelings, rather than slotted in simply as opportunities for spectacular dancing” (Wollen, 1992:12). This is an important focus of my study, as I aim to determine how women are represented for us within dance sequences.

Even though the musical has passed its heyday, which Altman states as being 1929 to 1930 (Altman, 1999), it is still relevant today, for instance in contemporary musicals such as *High School Musical 1, 2 and 3* (2006, 2007, 2008), *Sweeney Todd* (2007), *Nine* (2009) and *Moulin Rouge* (2001), the very recent *La La Land* (2016), *Into the Woods* (2014), *Burlesque* (2010), *Pitch Perfect* (2012), *Rock of Ages* (2012), *Rent* (2005), *The Phantom of the Opera* (2004), *Dreamgirls* (2006), *Once* (2006) and *Across the Universe* (2007), to name a few. We even still see animated musicals such as *Frozen* (2013) and *Tangled* (2010), and various remakes of popular stage and screen musicals such as *Footloose* (2011), *Annie* (2014) and *Fame* (2009), amongst others. We have also seen the emergence of popular musical Television Series’ such as *Glee* (2009-2015), *Nashville* (2012-2018) and *Smash* (2012-2013). In these productions, the traditional elements of the musical are still evident - the song and dance numbers,

the elaborate costumes, the romantic couple/s, and the special lighting. In my analysis chapter (Chapter 4), I will be looking closer at some of these films, particularly *La La Land* (2016), to compare the song and dance numbers and characters to the chosen films -*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *Nine* (2009).

Musicals' conventions take on different roles and have new meanings, and as Braudy argues, "the musical... infuses old stories with new characters to express the tension between the past and present. All pay homage to past works even while they vary their elements and comment on their meaning" (Braudy, 1999: 616). This links to what Kolker (2000) and Altman (1999) have said about genres changing over time, yet using elements of the past in new ways.

The article entitled *American Musical Theatre History*, as well as theories from Thomas Schatz (1999) and Bordwell and Thompson (2008), provide a very detailed history of the musical, and highlight many aspects relevant to this discussion, such as the incidence of scantily clad women, a trope in musicals which was evident already during the first burlesque performances. I aim to discover how this trope is relevant to the female characters in my films.

The very first musical production was a ballad opera called *Flora*, performed in South Carolina in 1735 and imported from England. After the American colonies had become a nation, the Burlesque, a new kind of stage production, began to attract interest (Lubbock, 1962). It was defined as a dramatic or musical work which uses satire.

Burlesque and Vaudeville, which emerged around the same time, are two ancestors of the modern musical. Vaudeville, known as 'the heart of American show business' was composed of a series of acts which included musicians, dancers, comedians, and

impersonators, amongst others, which existed in the United States and Canada from the early 1880s to the early 1930s.

There was an accent on the beauty of females in Burlesques (who were usually in flimsy attire), which became an important element in later American musicals, and this is a vital element of my research, forming part of my research on the concept of spectacle. The production *The Black Crook* (1866) introduced some of the rituals which identify American musical comedy and are still evident in many musicals today: “chorus girls, ornate production numbers, elaborate costuming, songs provocative with sexual innuendos, large numbers, amongst others” (Lubbock, 1962: 753).

According to Bordwell and Thompson, at first many musicals were *revues*, programmes of numbers with little or no narrative linkage between them. Eventually filmmakers began to create plots that could motivate the introduction of musical numbers (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008).

Bordwell and Thompson state that the notion of basing a film on a series of musical numbers did not emerge until the late 1920s when the introduction of recorded soundtracks became successful (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). The greatest revolution in the American musical theatre up to that time came in 1927 with *Show Boat*, by Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern. An entirely new genre was introduced, as *Show Boat* included “complete integration of song, humour and production numbers into a single and inextricable artistic entity” (Lubbock, 1962: 755).

Cohan maintains that “a typical characteristic of movie musical genre is that there are two leads, a man and a woman, who sing and dance together, and eventually become romantically involved...” (Cohan, 2002: 83). Thomas Schatz furthers this statement and states that the plots of the musical genre usually centre on a dual-protagonist -

the romantic couple - who begin the movie in an antagonistic relationship, yet end up compromising their individuality by becoming a couple so that they may be integrated into a new social community. "As such, the generic character is the physical embodiment of an attitude, a style, a worldview, of a predetermined and essentially unchanging cultural posture" (Schatz, 1999: 647). This information is useful with regard to my study, as I shall be examining the conventions of the musical and the society that determines how we view the world, creating representations for us as the audience.

Bordwell and Thompson maintain that not all musicals take place in a show business situation like the backstage musical in nightclubs and theatres: there is also the *straight musical*, where people sing and dance in everyday contexts. "In both backstage and straight musicals, the numbers are often associated with romance. Often the hero and heroine realise that they form the perfect romantic couple because they perform beautifully together....this plot device has remained a staple of the genre" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 320-333).

Bordwell and Thompson present a trope of the musical, which is an informative summary of the musical genre: "Hollywood musicals tend to accentuate the positive [side of human nature], and [the] world of the musical makes it possible for people, at any time and in any place, to express themselves through song and dance... Musical tend to be brightly lit, to set off the cheerful costumes and sets and to keep the choreography of the dance numbers clearly visible....in order to show off the patterns formed by the dancers in musical numbers, crane shots and high angles are common" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 334-335).



Musicals therefore traditionally serve to provide the audience with a kind of 'feel good' entertainment, presenting a world where nothing goes wrong.

**2.1.2.** The concept of spectacle and its role in musicals will be discussed, with particular reference to its part in the construction of the female characters and the creation of the ideal body.

Since my subject is musicals which typically weave song and dance numbers into their narratives, I will also draw on the concept of spectacle in order to understand how these musical moments work in the films concerned. Spectacle is relevant to the musical as it traditionally includes elaborate song-and-dance numbers with vibrant colours, glamorous costumes, creative *mise-en-scène* and spectacular dance sequences. Laura Mulvey says that "mainstream film neatly combines spectacle and narrative" (Mulvey, 1989: 19). Both the films make use of all of these accoutrements.

As dance and singing are seen as a spectacle - which are primary elements of the musical, it is important to discuss how spectacle can be perceived as being empowering and even transgressive, but first, let me discuss the negative connotations that the word spectacle has had.

A traditional definition of spectacle is: "[pervasive], over the top, sensational, and particularly image-driven displays or events" (Brown, 2005:65). While this definition might be seen as having negative connotations regarding spectacle, within this study the concept of spectacle is relevant and important as it makes up a large amount of the musical film content, and I will be looking at positive and negative viewpoints of the concept.

Spectacle is such a big part of the musical as it traditionally includes elaborate song-and-dance numbers with vibrant colours, glamorous costumes, creative mise-en-scène and spectacular dance sequences (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 334-335). This is relevant to my study as I will be looking closely at dance sequences and what they comprise.

Debord, author of *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) is perhaps the foremost theorist of spectacle. For him, “the society of the spectacle has more immediate origins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalist society organized around commodity spectacles and consumption” (quoted in Best & Kellner, 1999: 134). Debord maintains that the real consumer has become a consumer of illusions. I will explore this concept with regard to how my chosen film musicals present women for audiences - are we looking at illusions rather than reality?

Larry Law states that we live in a spectacular society, that is, our whole life is surrounded by an immense accumulation of spectacles. Things that were once directly lived are now lived by proxy. He says that once an experience is taken out of the real world it becomes a commodity and as a commodity the spectacular is developed to the detriment of the real. It becomes a substitute for experience (Law, 2001).

In feminist film theory, theorists have continued this critique. Theorists of this view state that women are consumed through this image they present. Mulvey states how the woman and her beauty have become an object, and “her body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator’s look” (Mulvey, 1989: 22). Cohan mirrors this stating that “the female figure is visually fragmented in a fetishised spectacle - for example in close-ups that direct attention to glamorised parts of her body” (Gledhill & Williams, 2000:62). Brown argues

how “attempts... [are made] to discipline the [female] body by inscribing standards of beauty, perfection...” (Brown, 2005: 77). He speaks about “the very strictly defined beauty ideal for women” and that “women are expected to constantly strive to reproduce an abstract notion of beauty.... Heavy stylised make-up and hair, flirtatious poses.... platinum blonde as signifying sexuality” (Brown, 2005: 78.). This feminist angle will be discussed further later on.

However, other authors have had positive things to say about spectacle, such as Best and Kellner, who say that “we are in a more advanced stage of the spectacle...that involves that creation of cultural spaces... that present exciting possibilities for creativity and empowerment of individuals” (Best & Kellner, 1999: 144). I am very interested in this view, and will explore this in my analysis chapter (Chapter 4). I believe that it is beneficial to look at spectacle and this representation of women as possibly having a positive side to it too.

Some theorists say that spectacle has the potential to be “resistive of normative gender assumptions via the denaturalisation of gender” (Shugart & Waggoner, 2005: 65). Others have suggested that through ‘spectacular’ performances of femininity, women may be transgressive. Doane, speaking of the concept of the female masquerade, states that “women deliberately flaunt femininity to their own advantage, making the natural seem unnatural” (Shugart & Waggoner, 2005: 67). Instead of only looking at spectacle as presenting women merely as sexual objects, women could in fact be transgressing these stereotypes, using the spectacular embellishments as the root of their power.

## 2.2 Feminist Theory

Can 'flaunting femininity' ever have a positive side? Or does "the [musical] genre simply reproduce without problematizing a patriarchal ideology which subordinates the female body to the gaze of the male voyeur"? (Cohan, 2002: 63).

For my section on femininity and ideal beauty, I shall be looking at theorists such as Linda Williams (1999), Jacqueline Rose (1986), Janet Todd (1988), Patricia Erens (1990), Steven Cohan (2002), Laura Mulvey (1989), Susan Bordo (2008), Raewyn Connell (2008) and Brown (2005), amongst others, and exploring what they have said about feminism and its manifestations in society.

Laura Mulvey states that "the magic of the Hollywood style at its best...arose... in one important aspect, from its skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure...Unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order" (Mulvey, 1989: 16). My research will look at how women are positioned in the films for the purpose of consumption by the male viewer, for the male gaze.

Patriarchy - a modernist term - defined man as rational, and woman as emotional. Connell gives a clear definition of the structure of patriarchy, a term which women's liberation coined. It is "the overall subordination of women and dominance of men" (Connell, 2008: 371). Feminism generally argues that the metanarratives of modernity are male/patriarchal. Manuel Castells maintains that a critique of patriarchy is at the root of a redefinition of family, gender, relationships and sexuality, and that because of the impact of feminism, patriarchy is challenged in most of the world. He believes that people can constantly reconstruct themselves instead of defining themselves by adapting to what were once conventional social roles, which are not realistic any more.

“Nowadays people produce forms of sociability, rather than follow models of behaviour” (Castells, 2008: 321/311).

Susan Bordo states that: “through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenising, elusive ideal of femininity... female bodies become what Foucault calls ‘docile bodies’- bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, ‘improvement’”(Bordo, 2008: 208). According to Brown, “women in our society are subjected to the overwhelming tyranny of slenderness” (Brown, 2005: 80). Mary Russo defines the standard of beauty and perfection as “a classical body which is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical and sleek, it is identified with the high or official culture of the renaissance and later” (Russo, 1995: 8 in Brown, 2005:79). These will be some of my principal references when examining how the women’s characters and appearances are constructed in each film to fit into a predetermined mould.

Susan Brownmiller suggests that femininity is at its core a ‘tradition of imposed limitations’ (Bordo, 2008: 215). This information serves as a basis to argue how the women in the chosen films are required to adhere to such strict bodily regulations and standards, and be the ‘docile bodies’ as Susan Bordo describes (Bordo, 2008: 208).

De Beauvoir argues that “one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one. For her gender is constructed” (Butler, 1990: 280). This quote, while quite controversial, is very interesting to me as it suggests that all of the restrictions and expectations placed on women are not due to the fact that you’re born a woman, and therefore born into a particular life, but you learn to fit into the gender role that society deems correct and acceptable. I would like to delve further into this idea in my analysis chapter. A part of the preoccupation of my study, is how women are required to fit into these cultural,

and societal expectations, and De Beauvoir raises a very interesting point here which I'd like to look into further.

Mulvey argues that women's struggle to gain rights over their bodies cannot be separated from questions of image and representation (Mulvey, 1989). Brown mentions the "hegemonic power of images to lull viewers into social conformity" (Brown, 2005:66). How women are represented through images and the consequence that audiences buy into these representations, is an important aspect of this study, and will be used as part of my methodology. I would like to look at how presenting different, novel images/representations of women within this genre may give these women more power over their bodies, and may change societal expectations of the women's role, as well as what the standard of beauty is. While the process may be slow, I would argue that it is very necessary.

Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* states that "gender studies has increasingly recognised the body as a primary site of social control" (Brown, 2005:77). Judith Butler has said that the "cultural associations of the mind with masculinity and the body with femininity are well documented in the fields of philosophy and feminism" (Butler, 1990: 285).

Wicke and Ferguson, however, argue that there is an "increasing fragmentation of the categories of gender" (Wicke & Ferguson, 1992:7). This thought is mirrored by Poststructuralists who state that "gender identities are fractured and shifting" (Connell, 2008: 370). This shall be explored through analysing the female characters in the chosen musicals, and how they are placed within the narrative. I find it quite interesting what Connell mentions here, as *Nine* was released in 2009, and in my opinion, the

gender identities of these women have not changed at all from the time of the Classic Hollywood musical. This will be explored further in my analysis chapter.

Erens speaks about the “Woman as Image. Man as Bearer of the Look” (Erens, 1990:33).

“Arbuthnot and Seneca begin by investigating why watching Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell as showgirls in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) produces pleasure for them as women viewers. They isolate several factors including the energy of the two actresses, their ability to resist male objectification, and the film’s depiction of a friendship between two strong women. Reading beneath the story of heterosexual romance, they discover another story which celebrates women’s pleasure in each other” (Erens, 1990:95). I’m not sure whether I agree with what they say about the two women resisting the male objectification - because they do objectify the women in many instances, as I shall discuss in my analysis chapter, however, I like what they say about the depiction of the strong female friendship. This is something that we as female viewers should view as being a very positive representation and trait that we have as women, and that men don’t often celebrate in society, in every-day life.

The two authors provide us with a subversive reading of the film, showing how the “romantic narrative (the pre-text) is disrupted and undermined by the women’s resistance to male objectification and by their bonding with one another” (Erens, 1990:33).

Erens maintains that, “as feminists, we experience a constant and wearying alienation from the dominant culture. The misogyny of popular art, music, theatrical arts, and film interferes with our pleasure in them...” (Erens, 1990:112). *Gentlemen*

*Prefer Blondes* (1953) is clearly a product of the dominant culture, yet, we enjoy the film immensely.

Erens argues that *Gentlemen prefer Blondes* (1953) can be read as a feminist text, and that “the female subject is the object rather than the subject of the gaze in mainstream narrative cinema. She is excluded from authoritative vision not only at the level of the enunciation, but at that of the fiction. At the same time she functions as an organizing spectacle, as the lack which structure the symbolic order and sustains the relay of male glances” (Erens, 1990:33). This mirrors what the other theorists have also stated, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

I have found Janet Todd’s work to be very insightful in terms of summing up the state of the Hollywood film industry as we have always known it, and the position of women within this industry, as well as in society at large: “an important component of feminist film criticism, like most film theory and criticism of the last decade, has been an examination of the classical cinema... there exists a cinematic institution that defines the way films are produced and the way we are asked to respond to them. Central to that institution are realist narrative conventions that generally conclude at a real or an imaginary altar; and their production has been determined by and large by the American film industry. Two methodologies have defined the feminist critique of the classical cinema, methodologies corresponding to two major stages of feminist film criticism. First, there is the analysis of “images of women”, which usually points out the pernicious representations of women and their lack of correspondence to women’s lives in the real world. Distorted images of women appear on screen as if to assert and maintain the role of film as a powerful means of social conditioning” (Todd, 1988:22, 23).



Todd goes on to say that “a second feminist approach might be called the “reading against the grain” of the classical cinema. Here the assumption is that the classical cinema consists of images that are not so much “accurate” or “distorted” as they are components in a system” (Todd, 1988:22). This system, I would argue, is the greater social institution of Patriarchy.

“To speak of “images of women” suggests that the male presence behind the camera (and in the editing room, the production office, and so on) creates the world in its own image, and the very word “male” is presumed to denote an identity wholly of a piece with patriarchy itself” (Todd, 1988:24). Todd says that “some feminist critics have written off female presence onscreen as just one more instance of male fantasy”, and that the quest for a positive female role model suggests what Hollywood still refuses to deliver (Todd, 1988:25).

In the fourth chapter of Todd’s book, *Monroe and Sexuality*, Jayne Mansfield sums up quite accurately what it is that men are perceived to want, ultimately, in a woman, and what we as women are expected to strive to attain in today’s society: she says “men want women pink, helpless and do a lot of deep breathing”(Todd, 1988:69).

“She is constantly knitted into the fabric of the film through point-of-view shots located in male characters...she is set up as an object of the male sexual gaze. Frequently too she is placed within the frame of the camera in such a way as to stand out in silhouette, a side-on tits and arse positioning” (Todd, 1988:71).

“Hollywood has given [audiences] the Hollywood Siren - the woman who simply by existing, or at most sprawling on a rug or sauntering up a street - is supposed to imply all the vigorous, kaleidoscopic possibilities of human sexuality” (Todd, 1988:80).

Todd says that “women are to *be* sexuality, yet this really means as a vehicle *for* male sexuality. [In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, (1953)] Monroe refers to her own sexualness...she is not referring to a body she experiences, but rather to a body that is experienced by others, that is, by men” (Todd, 1988:80).

Todd argues that “the function of much feminist film criticism is to reveal a lack” (Todd, 1988:130). It is this lack that I am concerned with in this dissertation. She says that “women do not exist in American film. Instead we find another creation, made by men, growing out of their ideological imperatives. Gaye Tuchman has called the phenomenon the symbolic annihilation of women, the replacement of reality by the patriarchal fantasies of subservience or its opposite” (Todd, 1988:130).

“From its beginnings, American film-making has been part of the economic structure of the society, sharing its images of the world, creating images for it, aiding the process of manufacture and the turning of the human figure into a commodity. Ideology, however, is not something necessarily imposed from the top. Although it may originate in the industrial, legal, political, educational, and communications structures of a society, it must be believed and participated in by a majority of the people in a culture in order to exist as an ideology” (Todd, 1988:131).

I found the following, quoted by Janet Todd to be very insightful. She says that “the images and narratives of women that filmmakers create must be shared by both sexes in order to exist. If audiences did not assent to the images, they would not go to see them; if they were not seen, they would no longer be made. That they were made and continue to be made, that the varieties of subordinate, passive, or pacified women, of women as sexual objects...have persisted throughout the history of American film indicated either that the producers’ cliché - “we give the public what it

is wants"- is true, or that the "public" accepts whatever it is given and in that acceptance is moulded into a state of assent. Since women constitute more than half of that public, we are faced with the troubling reality of an audience passively, even willingly, accepting images of its own degradation" (Todd, 1988:131). Do women perhaps enjoy these representations, or are we just accepting what's presented to us because it's all that we know?

Todd argues that "films fragment and fetishize the body, invite us to gloat over pieces of persons...[and] the longest lasting, most eloquent film fetish of all...gathering the most heterogeneous actors and directors into its dominion, is the face" (Todd, 1988:153). I will look into how film devices are used to focus in on certain body parts, including the female characters' faces.

Todd argues that it is important to look at "the institutional frameworks surrounding the production, distribution and exhibition of films for world-wide mass markets and also as the distinctive characteristics of the films themselves - what they look like and the kinds of readings they construct. Hollywood is usually considered to be the limiting case, the ideal type, of dominant cinema..." (Todd, 1988:187).

All of these sources shall be used in order to assist me with my argument that women have been represented in a particular, restricted, artificial way in the Hollywood musical since its emergence as a popular genre - and that dance and spectacle play a role in determining how women are represented in these musicals.

## 2.3 Dance

Dance resources at this stage include: *Dance as Text - Ideologies of the Baroque Body* (1993) by Mark Franko, *Understanding Dance* (1992) by Graham McFee, who discusses expression in dance, and *Moving History/ Dancing Culture - A Dance History Reader* (2001) edited by Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright. I have also been looking at *Dance* (1974) by Jack Anderson, and what he says about the purpose of dance. Janet Adshead-Lansdale and June Layson's *Dance History: An Introduction* (1994) has proven to be helpful so far, as well as *To Dance is Human* (1979) by Judith Hanna. Hanna talks about the language of dance and how it relates to other aspects of human life.

For theory on dance, I shall be looking at what has been said about its origins, and what defines dance as compared to movement, in order to create an argument on how dance creates meaning for audiences with regard to representing women. I will also be looking into dance as linked to feminist theory. *Dance History: an Introduction* (1994) has also given me ideas to work with and explore further.

Adshead-Lansdale and Layson say "as signifying systems, representations carry with them sets of values and attributes which are embedded in particular ideologies and are, therefore capable of creating, endorsing or subverting ideas about gender" (Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1994:203).

As Dance is a main element of my study, I need to establish the relevance and importance of this art form in my study. Wollen has this to say about the famous 12-minute ballet sequence in a Classic Hollywood musical: *Singin' in the Rain* (1952): "the sequence is an outstanding example of the use of transitions for the dramatic integration of song and dance numbers into the narrative of the film... it is the careful

articulation of music, song lyrics, gesture and pantomime, dance and tap, which ensures the success of the piece” (Wollen, 1992:28). Whilst *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952) will not be one of my principal films, I will be using it as a comparative point for dance tropes and traditions in film musicals, as this film is from the ‘golden age’ of musicals (Altman, 1999).

I believe that there might be a gap in current research in terms of dance, and what has been said about how it works to create meaning with regard to the representation of women in musicals in particular. Whilst I seem to have found a lot of information and theories on film, feminism and the musical genre, I haven’t been able to find as much on dance itself and its meanings within film musicals, and how women are represented within them.

The dance theory I have been able to find includes the origins of dance, and what dance means in different cultures, as well as how it has developed in different areas of the world. I also have found a lot on the anthropology of dance, and how the meanings behind dances and choreography are very subjective.

Judith Lynne Hanna states that “dance interweaves with other aspects of human life, such as communication and learning, belief systems, social relations and political dynamics” (Hanna: 1979:3). She also says that “dance is physical behaviour...movement, organized energy” (Hanna, 1979:3). She argues that “dance is a conceptual natural language with intrinsic and extrinsic meanings, a system of physical movements, and interrelated rules, guiding performance in different social situations” (Hanna, 1979:5). What she says of dance being a language is very relevant to my study, as I am looking at how dance tropes and styles speak to us as the audience, as a language. Messages and viewpoints are communicated to us through

this 'language'. I have found Judith Hanna to be extremely insightful and useful so far for my chosen project, and I will be using her work and examples to assist with my argument.

According to Jack Anderson, "there are at least two basic kinds of dance... [the second] basic kind of dance assumes that its movements can be watched with pleasure, in fact, it exists to be watched... This kind of dance may be called theatrical dance, and it includes such otherwise disparate manifestations as ballet, modern dance..." (Anderson, 1974: 8). I will use his theories along with the idea of the male gaze and visual pleasure. Anderson also states that "usually dances are accompanied by suitable music... [and] scenery and costumes may contribute to a work's effectiveness" (Anderson, 1974:9). I will also be looking closely at what Jack Anderson has said about the meanings, impact and associations of dance. He states that "whether it tells a story, preaches a message, or conjures a mood, dance communicates because it prompts responses within us" (Anderson, 1974: 9). I will explore how dance communicates and creates meanings.

Peterson Royce maintains that "the whole complex of features that people rely on to mark their identity comprises something I have called style. Style, as I define it, is composed of symbols, forms, and underlying value orientations (Royce, 1975: 54 in Peterson Royce, 1977:157). He argues that "dance, it would seem, has great potential for communicating something about how people feel about themselves" (Peterson Royce, 1977:158).

Peterson Royce says that "the body is the instrument of dance, the medium of expression. This makes dance more immediate in its impact not only for the dancer

but for the observer as well. People always have some response to the body as it is used in dance” (Peterson Royce, 1977:159).

This theorist goes on to say that “in some ways dance reveals more than language and the other arts...dancing can reveal all the mystery that music conceals” (cited in Beaumont, 1934:16 in Peterson Royce, 1977:160).

He says that “there are many factors that can contribute toward the effectiveness of a dance as display. Some of them, like costume, attractiveness of the dancers, and spatial arrangement, have nothing directly to do with the form of the dance itself” (Peterson Royce, 1977:164). However, I am also interested in these other factors, and how they contribute to a particular representation of women.

He goes on to say that “the ballet has always been characterised by two different emphases, one on movement and the other on story or plot... [and] in the contemporary ballet we have once again returned to movement rather than plot” (Peterson Royce, 1977:183-185). The chosen films both use examples of ballet as well as contemporary dance, so it will be interesting to see how much emphasis is placed on plot as well as on movement within the dances.

“...The question of the theatre ought to arouse general attention, the implication being that theatre, through its physical aspect, since it requires expression in space ...allows the magical means of art and speech to be exercised organically and altogether... The upshot of all this is that theatre will not be given its specific powers of action until it is given its language. That is to say: instead of continuing to rely upon texts considered definitive and sacred, it is essential to put an end to the subjugation of the theatre to the text, and to recover the notation of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought” (1958:89 in Peterson Royce,

1977:202). I want to look at dance as possibly being one of the forms of this unique language.

“In dance, as in other media of communication, there is ever present the potential for ambiguity of meaning” (Peterson Royce, 1977:211). “Dance viewed from the anthropological perspective is inextricably bound up with individuals and culture in a mutually affecting relationship” (Peterson Royce, 1977:214). It will be very interesting to determine how different meanings within my dance sequences can be interpreted.

The authors argue that “one reason for the inseparability of dance and culture...is the inseparability of dance from its creator and instrument of expression. The creators and instruments live in a cultural context that shapes them and their dance” (Peterson Royce, 1977:214).

Mc Fee says that “we should treat works of art, such as dances, as if they were offering explanations...of familiar aspects of life” (Mc Fee, 1992:154), and that “our reactions to art works such as dances manifest similar learned or trained responses” (Mc Fee, 1992: 292,293). Wittgenstein says “we belong to a community which is bound together by science and education. We have been brought up to understand, using concepts we did not invent” (Wittgenstein 1969, 38 in Mc Fee, 1992:307). I want to explore this notion more, in terms of how we understand concepts based on a predetermined system of rules. Pomer and Prophet mirror this though by saying that “after all, doesn’t everyone have a unique personal perspective that influences how he or she looks at and interprets things?” (Pomer and Prophet, 2009:54). This will assist in determining to what extent the reading of my films can be seen as being subjective.



Judith Hanna says that “dance is *physical* behaviour: the human body releases energy through muscular responses to stimuli received by the brain. Movement, organized energy, is the essence of dance. The body or its parts contract and release, flex and extend, gesture and move from one place to another...dance is *cultural* behaviour: a people’s values, attitudes, and beliefs partially determine the conceptualization of dance as well as its physical production, style, structure, content, and performance” (Hanna, 1979:3).

Hanna also says that “dance is a conceptual natural language with intrinsic and extrinsic meanings, a system of physical movements, and interrelated rules guiding performance in different social situations” (Hanna, 1979:5). I want to explore what these meanings are within the two musicals.

“Dance movements, according to Khatchadourian, are... activities that “consist in patterns of movement - either pure movement or movement representing certain imagined actions of imagined characters, imaginary situations, and so on - made by parts or the whole of the human body, creating dynamic visual, or visual and auditory, forms” (1978, 25 in Bresnahan, 2015: 5).

“The most common form of representation in dance is in the story ballet where a dancer represents a character and the ballet as a whole represents a story from a folk - or fairy-tale” (Bresnahan, 2015: 17).

Anderson says that “dance is an art blessedly free of language barriers, yet each place where it thrives develops its own stylistic accent” (Anderson, 1974:137). He argues that “whether it tells a story, preaches a message or conjures a mood, dance communicates because it prompts responses within us. Dance is not simply a visual

art, it is kinaesthetic as well; it appeals to our inherent sense of motion” (Anderson, 1974:9).

Adshead-Lansdale and Layson say that “dance, as an academic discipline, is in a good position to accommodate feminist problematics in writing of dance history, feminism theorizes culture from woman’s point of view, and it is women who constitute the majority of practitioners within western theatre dance. Both feminism, as a politics, and dance, as a cultural practice, share a concern with the body. For feminists the body is understood as a primary site of social production and inscription (Grosz 1987), whereas for dance it is its capacity for movement which is the central concern” (Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1994:198).

They say that “it is women who in the main continue to develop the expanding field of dance research. Yet dance remains on the margins of feminist critical studies in the arts and feminist debates about culture have not yet been taken up in a comprehensive way within dance studies” (Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1994:198). I have found dance resources, as linked to the feminist field, to be limited.

These theorists also say that “as signifying systems, representations carry with them sets of values and attributes which are embedded in particular ideologies and are, therefore, capable of creating, endorsing or subverting ideas about gender” (Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1994:203). Humans do, I believe, have very specific ideas about gender, and gender roles, from particular representations that are created for us.

These theorists go on to say that “historical research into gender and representation within different dance genres reveals how women have been depicted by men. Ann Daly (1987), writing on ballet, characterises the genre as reliant upon an idealization

of 'Woman' which rigidly enforces patterns of dominance and subjection. She sees patriarchal ideology as underpinning depictions of gender in ballet and as crystallizing dichotomies which are harmful to women" (Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1994:203). Daly says that "in ballet, the female form has long been inscribed as a representation of difference: as a spectacle, she is the bearer and object of male desire. The male on stage - the primary term against which the ballerina can only be compared - is not inscribed as a form, but rather as an active principle." (Daly 1987/8: 57 in Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1994:203).

I find these theorists' work so interesting and relevant to my study, and I will be using their ideas when analysing the two films. They quote the famous, inspirational dancer Isadora Duncan: "Isadora Duncan is frequently acclaimed as a 'feminist' for her times because she sought to reappropriate the dancing body *for* women. As she states: "the dancer of the future...will dance not in the form of nymph, nor fairy, nor coquette, but in the form of woman in her greatest and purest expression" (Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1994:205). Adshead-Lansdale and Layson go on to say that "feminist scholarship fundamentally challenges the dominance of masculine value systems in culture and in the history of artistic production" (Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1994:212). It is this feminist scholarship which I believe Isadora Duncan preceded.

Talking about the Act II pas de deux of Balanchine's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Dils and Cooper Albright say: "where is the meaning in [the] dance? Not in the backbend, but again, in an elementary pattern of energies: here, the deployment of huge forces in small gestures" (Dils and Cooper Albright, 2001:15). It is these gestures that I will be looking at, with reference to the female characters' within the dance sequences in my films.

## 2.4 Representation and Film

Film studies has a well-established methodology for approaching the question of representation, and it does so primarily through the examination of mise-en-scène, cinematography, soundtrack, narrative and structure. I will be looking at these film elements when analysing each dance sequence that I will be using.

The musical, however, demands additional categories in order to be properly analysed. In particular, it requires a focus on spectacle (discussed within 1.2), which combines narrative, singing and dance, which aim to create meaning and provide entertainment. “As a genre of spectacle, the musical is renowned for the asymmetry with which it represents sexual difference in production numbers, encouraging the spectatorial position of a male voyeur” (Cohan, 2002: 63).

I shall be using representation as one of the concepts under which to explain and analyse my material. My research on representation is based on the work of Stuart Hall (1997 and 2013) and Joseph Childers (1995).

According to Childers, representation is an image, a likeness, or reproduction in some manner of a thing, and he argues that we can understand representation as a medium because it stands between ‘the real’ and the spectator (Childers, 1995). He says that because it can be copied or reproduced, it becomes easier to communicate representation on a mass level (Childers, 1995).

Hall states that reality is never experienced directly, but always through the symbolic categories made available by society. He believes a viewer’s historical and cultural context interprets meanings and that objects do not have stable, true, meanings, but are produced by humans (Quoted in Rotstein & Henkel, 1999). However, he also

maintains that “power-based ideological structures can have an influence on fixing the viewer’s interpretation of an image through the manipulation of stereotypes” (Quoted in Rotstein & Henkel, 1999: 101). For Hall, representation is how language and systems of knowledge production work together to create and circulate meanings (Hall, 1997).

Hall stresses the importance of ‘interrogating the image’ and challenging stereotypes in order to examine media images critically and to broaden the range of possible meanings of an image which can lead to new knowledge and new identities (Quoted in Rotstein & Henkel, 1999: 101). This is very relevant to my study as I want to find and explore ways of creating possible progression from the standard, stereotypical ideas, and I have found Hall to be very forward-thinking in this regard.

I would like to see if stereotypes are at all challenged in the two films. It is more likely that this may be the case in *Nine* (2009), as it is quite a recent film. However, as I will argue later in my analysis chapter, I don’t believe at this stage that the stereotypes are challenged.

Hall maintains that the concept of representation has taken a new and important place in the study of culture. He says that representation connects meaning and language to culture, and gives an insightful usage of the term is as follows: “representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people’ ... [Representation] does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things” (Hall et al, 2013:1).

He says that just as people who belong to the same culture must share a broadly similar conceptual map, in this same way they must also share the same way of interpreting the signs of a language, because it is only in this way that meanings can

be effectively exchanged between people. “Visual signs and images, even when they bear a close resemblance to the things to which they refer, are still signs: they carry meaning and thus have to be interpreted” (Hall et al, 2013: 5).

“Meaning and representation seem to belong irrevocably to the interpretative side of the human and cultural sciences, whose subject matter - society, culture, the human subject - is not amenable to a positivistic approach” (Hall et al, 2013: 27). Hall maintains that later developments have recognised the necessarily interpretative nature of culture and the fact that interpretations don’t ever produce a final moment of absolute truth” (Hall et al, 2013: 27).

“In a culture, meaning often depends on larger units of analysis - narratives, statements, groups of images, whole discourses which operate across a variety of texts, areas of knowledge about a subject which have acquired widespread authority” (Hall et al, 2013: 27). Hall argues that languages can use signs to symbolise, stand for or reference objects, people and events in the so-called ‘real’ world. But languages can also reference imaginary things and fantasy worlds or abstract ideas which are not in any obvious sense part of our material world.

Hall says that meaning is produced by the practice, the ‘work’, of representation. “First, the concepts which are formed in the mind function as a system of mental representation which classifies and organises the world into meaningful categories. If we have a concept for something, we can say we know its ‘meaning’” (Hall et al, 2013: 14). But he says that we cannot communicate this meaning without a second system of representation, a language: “language consists of signs organised into various relationships. But signs can only convey meaning if we possess codes which allow us to translate our concept into language - and vice versa” (Hall et al, 2013: 14). Hall

maintains that these codes do not exist in nature but are the result of social conventions (Hall et al, 2013). He also asks “‘where do meanings come from?’ and ‘how can we tell the “true” meaning of a word or image?’” (Hall et al, 2013: 10).

In my analysis, I shall look at how the narratives are constructed through different cinematic techniques, paying particular attention to the effect they create for the audience. These cinematic techniques are important when discussing and analysing film.

Narrative analysis shall take up another part of this discussion on film, as has already been discussed briefly in section 1.1. Within this section elements such as the production of the ideal couple and how women are placed within the narrative shall be discussed. I will also be looking at the importance of gender stereotypes and how these films’ narratives reinforce them.

According to Bordwell and Thompson, a narrative is what we usually mean by the term *story*. These theorists state that narrative is a fundamental way that humans make sense of the world and maintain that because stories are all around us, spectators approach a narrative film with definitive expectations (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). The concept of the ‘hero’s journey’ is also important for this study. According to the American scholar Joseph Campbell, the hero’s journey is a pattern of narrative that appears in storytelling, and describes the typical adventure of the archetype known as the hero, who goes out and achieves a particular goal (Jones, 2017).

It is important to determine the role of the classical Hollywood cinema, in terms of the way it structures stories, and in particular, for purposes of this study, the way it positions women, as this form of narrative has been the leading form since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fictional filmmaking has, throughout history, been

dominated by one type of narrative form known as the 'Classical Hollywood cinema'. The form has had a long, stable history, and arose in American studio films. The same mode is however also used in other countries (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008).

Bordwell and Thompson say that "we can consider a *narrative* to be a *chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space*" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 74- 75). This idea of narrative assumes that the action will mainly come from "*individual characters as causal agents...the narrative centres on personal psychological causes: decisions, choices, and traits of character*" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 94). This information will be used with reference to the female characters in their respective narratives.

Desire is what the character (protagonist) wants, and is what usually serves to move the story forward - to reach a goal. An antagonist or opposition to the protagonist creates conflict in the Classic Hollywood style, and there is a confrontation of some kind between the protagonist and antagonist, in which the protagonist has to change their circumstances in order to reach his goal (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008).

Most classical narrative films show a strong degree of closure at the end. A point is made in these films to tie up all loose ends. According to Bordwell and Thompson "we usually learn the fate of each character, the answers to each mystery, and the outcome of each conflict" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 95-96). This point of view is used in this study to help determine what the female characters' fates are, where they end up, and if they are left in a powerful position, or simply as the women next to the male protagonist.



Kolker maintains that “the classical Hollywood style...asks that... the viewer see only the presence of actors in an unfolding story that seems to be existing on its own” (Kolker, 2000:16).

Mulvey argues that cinema has changed (she said this in the late 1980s) and that it is no longer the “monolithic system based on large capital investment exemplified at its best by Hollywood in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s” (Mulvey, 1989: 15). This information provokes us to ask whether alternative views in film making have a space in society, or whether the mainstream Hollywood cultural ideals are still seen to place certain beliefs and values on society. I will explore this question in my research, particularly with regard to *Nine* (2009).

These theories will all fall under a postmodern framework, as we do live in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and there are various postmodern elements in *Nine* (2009) which I will discuss in my analysis.

Before postmodernity we saw the movement of modernity, which was a broad movement in western arts and literature which started around 1850 and lasted right up until the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Modernism was a revolt against conservative thinking which lead to the beginning of the emergence of the individual, and the emphasis on innovation. (Nicholson, 2017) Postmodernism, which emerged after World War 2, moves away from modern thinking, and can sometimes be self-conscious, as Homer (2002) says, which I will discuss further. I understand postmodern to be a critical reflection on the society in which it was created, or if it is a creation of something new, from a thing that already exists (Palmer, 2014).

Perhaps the most influential theorists of postmodernism are Jean-Francois Lyotard (In Bertens, 2002), Manuel Castells (2008), David Harvey (2008), and Frederic

Jameson (in Homer, 2002). Using some of their theories, I will be determining what I believe to be the most relevant elements of postmodernism for this study.

Lyotard offers a clear definition of the postmodern: “simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives” (Bertens, 2002: 245).

Lyotard sees modernity as “driven by metanarratives, the universal truths that make sense of modern western culture” (Bertens, 2002: 246). He believes metanarratives are simply specific stories we tell ourselves in order to convince ourselves of the truth, and that there are in fact not universal truths to explain and categorise everything (Bertens, 2002). He argues that “with the transition from modernity to postmodernity, meta or grand narratives have given way to *petits recits*, to modest narratives that have a limited validity in place and time” (Bertens, 2002: 247).

Jameson argues that “postmodernism is self-conscious and disrupts narrative forms” (Homer, 2002: 184). This will be explored through examining *Nine* (2009) which does fall into the postmodern era. He goes on to say that “Postmodernism as a concept allows for both continuity and difference.” (Homer, 2002: 184) I believe that most of the elements of the classic musical are pulled through into postmodernity, but that postmodernity allows for more experimentation with these conventions which shall be explored. Harvey argues that we are living in a postmodern fragmenting social landscape that allows for otherness and difference (Harvey, 2008). This will be looked at closer with regard to the content of *Nine* (2009).

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

When embarking on this dissertation, I knew immediately which musicals I wanted to use. I chose *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) mainly for its title, as this already gave me an indication that I'd be dealing with a specific representation of women here. I also knew that this musical had most of the traditional tropes of a musical - the singing, dancing, spectacular costumes, and the creation of the perfect couple. I chose *Nine* (2009) because, from watching this movie so many times, I knew that it had many examples of different, striking female characters to analyse, as well as full, elaborate and vibrant dance numbers.

My research is primarily a qualitative textual, visual and critical analysis in which I shall be analysing and drawing data from these two film musicals. "Qualitative data...includes words, pictures, drawings...films...music and sound tracks" (Struwig and Stead, 2013: 12). Hesse-Biber argues that "you should make a convincing case that your specific qualitative methods approach is the most appropriate for answering your research question", and "there are no rigid, instrumentalised methods in qualitative research" (Hesse-Biber, 2017: 36). I chose to look at specific dance numbers that offered the most text to analyse - the numbers and scenes that included some form of dancing, some form of spectacle, some examples of special film techniques, and different representations of women against which to measure the feminist theory, and beauty ideals.

### **3.1 Methodological Orientation**

Within this chapter I will be stating what I'm looking at, why I'm looking at it, and how I'm looking at it. It will include interpretativism as a part of qualitative research.

### **3.2 Method of Analysis**

As I am looking at musical films, I shall use the formal method with regard to film developed by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2008), and Robert Kolker (2000), as a way of describing and analysing the construction of meanings in the films, with particular reference to the dance sequences. I will be doing a formal analysis of the film images in each film - particularly of selected dance sequences - including narrative and structure.

As mentioned in my introduction, Robert Kolker says that “analysis of the form of the cinematic text concentrates on the two basic building blocks of film, the shot and the cut, and on the structure which comes into being when the film is assembled, the combination of shot and cut which is the finished film - this... completed structure of image and editing...communicates the narrative” (Kolker, 2000:13). I will be looking at what the stories are that these women are placed into in each film.

Laura Mulvey argues that “in cinema, objects, gestures, looks, mise-en-scène, lighting, framing, and all the accoutrements of the filmic apparatus materialize into a kind of language before or even beyond words” (Mulvey, 1995: 19). This ‘language’ shall be discussed with reference to film components according to David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2008) when analysing the elements of the chosen dance sequences in each film.

Film form is a collection of all the elements in the film that make up the whole - the overall relations that we can perceive among the elements in the film (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). And Cinema as a medium includes mise-en-scène, cinematography and editing.

Mise-en-scène is all of the elements that are placed in front of the camera to be photographed: the settings and props, production design, lighting, costumes, makeup, use of colours, figure behaviour (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). Kolker argues that a focus on mise- en-scène “permit[s] an emphasis upon the elements of film that make it distinct from other narrative forms and explains how images, through composition, camera movement, lighting, focus, and colour, generate narrative event and guide our perception through a film” (Kolker, 2000:15). Bordwell and Thompson state that we need to consider the patterns and effects that mise-en-scène creates (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008).

Cinematography is the term for all the manipulations of the film strip by the camera in the shooting phase, and by the laboratory in the developing phase. The filmmaker controls what is filmed and also *how* it is filmed. “Cinematographic qualities involve 3 factors: 1) the photographic aspects of the shot. 2) The framing of the shot. 3) The duration of the shot” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 162). Framing includes the shot composition, as well as the length of shot e.g.: long shot. Lens movement is also an important part of cinematography, e.g.: wide angles. Camera movements can include low angle shots- which are, for example, used often in *Nine* (2009) (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008).

Editing in filmmaking is the selecting and joining of camera takes, and in the finished film - the set of techniques that determines the relations among shots; it is the coordination of one shot with the next. Joining shots can be done in various ways, for instance, through the use of fades, dissolves and wipes, which are all optical effects (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). Bordwell and Thompson suggest looking for how editing patterns emphasise facial expressions, dialogue or setting. “As a technique,

it's very powerful...editing strongly shapes viewer's experiences, even if they aren't aware of it. Editing contributes a great deal to a film's organisation and its effects on spectators" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 218). This stands out for me, as it may well be that the way a film is edited, can place women in a particular light, and portray and create a particular set of meanings. Continuity editing is a form of editing where related shots are combined in a sequence to provide consistency within the story.

Kolker maintains that "a text is something that contains a complex of events (images, words, sounds) that are related to each other within a context, which can be a story or narrative" (Kolker, 2000: 10). Consequently, analyses of mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing - the visual elements of the texts, and the narrative features - will be conducted.

The design of my research will sum up how I plan to tackle my research, and what my process will be. I believe that my textual analysis is the most appropriate approach for answering my research questions. I believe this fits my study well as it is a qualitative study (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

According to Henning "narrative analysis...searches for the way participants make sense of their lives by representing them in story form" (Henning, 2004: 122). Within this section elements such as the production of the ideal couple, but primarily how women are placed within the narrative shall be discussed. I shall also be looking at the importance of gender stereotypes, and how dance sequences, styles and techniques contribute to a specific representation of women.

I will be using the theory of narrative to determine the extent to which each film conforms to the Hollywood film narrative, as well as how women are represented - whether it be as supporters of the dominant male narrative, or if there's any indication

of them having their own narrative independence. In terms of the visual elements, I will be using methods of textual and discourse analysis.

Deacon et al argue that “at its best, research offers us powerful tools for questioning received wisdoms, challenging the rhetorics of power, illuminating the blind spots on our social and cultural maps, helping us to puzzle out why things are as they are and how they might be changed, and finding ways to communicate our own gains in knowledge as widely as possible” (Deacon et al, 1999: 13). I wish to determine how my two chosen films depict a social and cultural reality for us by looking at cultural and social meanings that have been created for us as the audience in selected dance sequences, and I would argue that the qualitative methods I have selected will best enable this process.

Deacon et al argue that textual analysis deals with questions of meaning: “content analysis provides an overview of patterns of attention...In communications research... we use the term ‘text’... to include any cultural product whose meaning we are trying to puzzle out” (Deacon et al, 1999: 17). “[Textual analysis] explore[s] the ways that language is deployed, how images [and] sounds...are organised and presented...and how these various elements are combined” (Deacon et al, 1999: 17). I will be using this information when analysing my chosen film sequences - looking at how women are represented within them - with languages, images, and film devices such as mise-en-scène, cuts, close-ups on body parts such as legs, lips, cleavage and so on.

They also speak of textual analysis with regard to semiotics, and what I found particularly relevant to my study is their mentioning that “semiotics has been applied to the study of dance” (Deacon et al, 1999: 144). Semiotics and signs play an important role in my study with regard to how they make meaning for us within the dance

sequences. According to Deacon et al (2010), “the basic utility of semiotics for media studies students is in advancing certain concepts which can be applied to the analysis of media texts” (Deacon et al, 2010: 141). They maintain that semiotics helps us to think analytically about how such texts work as well as the implications they have for the broader culture in which they are produced and disseminated, and that “for semiotics the fundamental component, both of language and of written texts which are made up of language, is the sign” (Deacon et al, 2010: 141,142). This reads very well with Hall’s explanation of representation, as discussed in section 2.4 of my literature review chapter.

Deacon et al also speak about connotation and denotation. Denotation meaning a sign that is actually objectively there, and connotation meaning content which signifies something (Deacon et al, 2010).

The authors discuss the concept of discourse and say that “although [discourse] is used in different ways, most significantly it enables us to focus not only on the actual uses of language as a form of social interaction in particular situations and contexts but also on forms of representation in which different social categories, practices and relations are constructed from and in the interests of a particular point of view, a particular conception of social reality” (Deacon et al, 2010: 151). The concept of discourse works well with what I have said about representation and semiotics, and these concepts will be used when analysing the scenes and dance sequences in my chosen films in my analysis chapter (Chapter 4).

These authors maintain that: “meanings in popular media are created through the interplay between language and image” (Deacon et al, 1999: 185), and they talk about, in Chapter 9, how we view the image through the camera and film devices. This relates



to what Bordwell and Thompson say about editing: “editing strongly shapes viewers’ experiences” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 218). Deacon et al also state that “visual images in television always work in conjunction with other elements, in particular those of audio tracks involving natural sound, music and spoken discourse” (Deacon et al, 1999: 225).

Harding (1987) explains that a methodology is a theory of how research does or should ensue, and that “a researcher’s particular methodology flows from a set of philosophical assumptions...held by the researcher” (Hesse-Biber, 2017:17). The way I will be looking at the chosen films, and the connotations, denotations, discourse and signs I will be looking for, will probably be influenced by my own dance and theatre and arts training, as I’ve been trained to view pieces of art, and performance pieces with a certain artistic lens.

Hesse-Biber argues that “textual analysis work often aims to identify dominant or mainstream ideologies within a text, either in the form of stereotypes or of common patterns of behaviours and roles, and to provide insights into how our thought patterns and assumptions might be influenced by the patterns of meaning that commonly occur. Because of the importance and prevalence of stereotyping in mass media, much textual analysis is grounded in... feminist theory, and other streams of theoretical work that aim to investigate how power is evidenced within texts” (Hesse-Biber, 2017:248).

Consequently, my study will look at the visual elements of sounds, and language with regard to my selected dance sequences, as well as how the female characters are positioned within these sequences, as the smaller narratives within the entire narrative of each film.

To begin, I will watch each film in detail, analysing the characters themselves within the narrative, particularly within the dance sequences, in order to gather as much initial information as I can regarding the musical genre, narrative, film devices used, feminism and ideas of beauty, spectacle, and how dance creates meaning. I aim to determine what the story itself is in both films, using theories on genre, dance and film techniques. I will be looking at the concepts of discourse, semiotics, connotation and denotation as mentioned above, and using the theories on film from Bordwell and Thompson (2008) and Robert Kolker (2000), thoughts on narrative analysis from Henning (2004), and Laura Mulvey's ideas on film and its accoutrements being like a language. (Mulvey, 1989).

The two films were both viewed, and the following themes were noted:

- Elaborate costumes
- Stylized hair and make-up, e.g.: platinum blonde hair.
- Sexual poses and gestures
- Specific film techniques such as close-ups
- Women represented as secondary within narrative

These themes link to my original 4 research questions, which were:

1. What the musical genre tropes are and what it presents for us with regard to representing the leading women in these films,
2. What film devices have been put into place in this genre to create specific meaning with representing women e.g.: close-ups, editing, focal-points,

3. How feminist theory is dealt with in these films, with reference to traditional ideals of beauty and femininity, as discussed by my chosen theorists, and
4. How dance styles, tropes and techniques create specific meaning for us with regard to the female characters in each film.

I will look at how women are placed within each story, and how the story creates meaning for us: what we are lead to believe about women's roles in society through these representations. For instance: 1) Do the women have their own independence, goals, ambitions in each movie? 2) Are their stories the secondary or sub-plot line? 3) Are their characters based on their sexuality, or something more substantial? 4) Do they primarily wear elaborate costumes, with high heels, etc.? 5) Do they conform to what Brown says about "heavy stylized make-up and hair, flirtatious poses...platinum blonde as signifying sexuality"? (Brown, 2005: 78).

I will also look at how film devices create meaning for us as the audience, such as specific camera angles, specific editing techniques, and how *mise-en-scène* is created. Does the camera zoom into specific body parts e.g.: legs, cleavage, bum etc.? I will do a formal analysis of the film images including *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, narrative and structure using primarily Kolker (2000) and Bordwell and Thompson (2008).

This data will enable the exploration of how the ideas of femininity, beauty and feminism are dealt with in my two films by looking at how women are visually represented and what stereotypes are foregrounded. E.g.: Do the women and their beauty become an object, like Laura Mulvey says? (Mulvey, 1989). Are close-ups used to fragment the female body? Is the female form a spectacle for the viewer? Is her body glamorised?

In summary, I will watch each film critically, in order to gather all the relevant information on what the musicals comprise traditionally, in terms of musical tropes; explore how women are represented in each film; discover what institutions are in place that determine the women's context and situations, and determine how dance styles and tropes, and film devices play a role with the representation of women.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

In this analysis chapter, I will be discussing how content, images and depictions have been created and moulded for us in film musicals with reference to female characters and dance sequences in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *Nine* (2009). I will be looking briefly at examples from *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) - a Classic Hollywood musical - as a comparative point, as well as using a few examples from the 2016 Film Musical *La La Land*, as this film is more recent than *Nine* (2009), and I would like to draw on some changes and progressions that are apparent in today's film musicals.

Among other issues, I will be looking at whether there is possibly a positive element to the way women are generally represented, and whether we should give more time to this view, or whether there is a greater cause for concern with regard to how women have been represented, and that these representations can only be viewed as negative and harmful.

The way in which female characters are positioned in the narrative, with reference to feminist theory, as well as how their characters are created, will also be explored, and as I am also very much concerned with the dance element, I will be examining dance numbers in both my films to see how the dance styles and tropes add to representations and portrayals of women. I will also examine film techniques and devices and how they are manipulated within the narrative to create a particular viewpoint and lens for us to look through.

As laid out in my methodology chapter (Chapter 3) I will be looking at these common themes: Elaborate Costumes; Stylized hair and make-up, e.g.: platinum blonde hair; Sexual poses and gestures; Specific film techniques such as close-ups; women represented as secondary within narrative.

The purpose of this chapter is to determine how women are traditionally represented in film musicals, with reference to the two chosen films, looking at musical tropes such as song-and-dance numbers, spectacle, special lighting and film techniques, the narrative, and beauty ideals. The aim is to discover whether there is in fact a positive aspect to this representation that we are presented with, or whether progress still needs to be made in terms of representing women in realistic, positive, influential, progressive ways.

#### **4.1 Summary of Plots**

I will firstly give a summary of the plot of each of the two films - *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *Nine* (2009), and I will then explain how I will break up my analysis chapter.

##### **Gentlemen Prefer Blondes**

*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is a 1953 American musical comedy film, based on the 1949 stage musical, released by 20th Century Fox, directed by Howard Hawks, which stars Jane Russell and Marilyn Monroe in the leading roles. The story had previously been presented as a screenplay, as well as a stage musical and silent film, before its debut as film musical in 1953.

While Jane Russell's down-to-earth, sharp wit is evident, it is Marilyn Monroe's role as the gold-digging Lorelei Lee for which the film is often remembered. Monroe's rendition of the song *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend* and her pink dress are considered iconic, and this performance has in fact inspired homages by many contemporary performers such as Madonna, Geri Halliwell, Kylie Minogue, Nicole Kidman, Anna Nicole Smith, Christina Aguilera and James Franco.

The movie is filled with comedic gags and musical numbers, and is choreographed by Jack Cole. The movie combines songs taken from the Broadway musical, and some that were written specifically for the movie, such as *Ain't There Anyone here for Love* (Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, 1953).

Lorelei Lee (Marilyn Monroe) and Dorothy Shaw (Jane Russell) are American showgirls and best friends. Lorelei has a passion for diamonds, and believes that attracting a rich husband is one of the few ways a woman can succeed economically. She becomes engaged to Gus Esmond (Tommy Noonan) at the beginning of the film, a naïve nerd willing to do or buy anything for her. However, Gus is controlled by his wealthy, upper-class father. Dorothy, on the other hand, is looking for a different kind of love, and she is only attracted to good-looking and fit men.

Lorelei plans to marry Gus in France, but Mr. Esmond, Sr. stops his son from sailing, as he believes that Lorelei is bad for him. Lorelei's job requires that she travel to France with or without Gus, and before she leaves, Gus gives her a letter of credit to cover all her expenses when she arrives. He promises to meet her in France at a later stage. However, he also warns her to behave, noting that his father will prohibit their marriage if rumors of her misbehaving make their way to Esmond, Sr. What both Lorelei and Gus don't know, however, is that Esmond, Sr. has hired a private detective, Ernie Malone (Elliott Reid), to spy on Lorelei.

During the Atlantic crossing, Malone immediately falls in love with Dorothy, but Dorothy has already been drawn to the members of the male Olympic athletics team. Lorelei later meets the rich and foolish Sir Francis "Piggy" Beekman (Charles Coburn), the owner of a diamond mine, and is attracted to him because of his wealth. Although

Piggy is married, Lorelei naively returns his boyish flirtations, and Lady Beekman (Norma Varden) becomes rather annoyed.

Lorelei invites Piggy to the cabin she shares with Dorothy, whereupon he shares his travel stories from his trip to Africa. While Piggy demonstrates how a python squeezes a goat by hugging Lorelei, Malone spies on them through the window and takes pictures of the two. He is caught by Dorothy and walks away nonchalantly. Dorothy tells Lorelei, who fears for her reputation. They come up with a plan to get Malone drunk, and then search him to recover the incriminating film while he is unconscious. They find the film in his pants, and Lorelei promptly prints and hides the negatives.

Revealing her success to Piggy, she persuades him to give her Lady Beekman's tiara that Lorelei loved so much, as a thank you gift. However, Malone reveals that he had planted a recording device in Lorelei's cabin, and has heard her discussion with Piggy about the pictures and the tiara. Malone implies that Lorelei is a gold-digger and, when Dorothy scolds him for his actions, admits that he himself is a liar. However, Dorothy reveals to Lorelei that she is falling for Malone, after which Lorelei chastises her for choosing a poor man when she could easily have a rich man.

The ship arrives in France, and Lorelei and Dorothy spend some time shopping. However, the two are then kicked out of their hotel and discover Lorelei's letter of credit has been cancelled due to the information Malone shared with Mr. Esmond, Sr. Gus then shows up at their show, and Lorelei rejects him, after which she performs *Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend*, the musical number whose lyrics explain why and how women need to pursue men with money. I will be going into more detail about this number later. Meanwhile, Lady Beekman has filed charges regarding her missing tiara, and Lorelei is charged with theft. Dorothy persuades Lorelei to return



the tiara, but the pair discover it is missing from her jewelry box. Piggy tries to weasel out of his part in the affair when Malone catches him at the airport.

Dorothy stalls for time in court by pretending to be Lorelei, disguised in a blonde wig and mimicking her friend's breathy voice and ditsy mannerisms. When Malone appears in court and is about to reveal that "Lorelei" is in fact Dorothy, she reveals to Malone in covert language that she, Dorothy, loves him but would never forgive him if he were to do anything to hurt her best friend, Lorelei. Malone withdraws his comments, but then reveals Piggy has the tiara, clearing Lorelei's name.

Lorelei then impresses Mr. Esmond, Sr. with a speech on the subject of paternal money, and also makes an argument that if Esmond, Sr. had a daughter, he would want the best for her, to which he agrees and finally consents to his son's marriage to Lorelei. The film closes with a double wedding for Lorelei and Dorothy, who marry Esmond and Malone respectively.

## **Nine**

*Nine* is a 2009 musical drama film directed and produced by Rob Marshall and written by Michael Tolkin and Anthony Minghella. The film has been adapted from the 1982 musical *Nine*, which is based on Federico Fellini's semi-autobiographical 1963 film *8½*. The film has 3 original songs, and the rest were taken from the stage musical.

The cast consists of Daniel Day-Lewis, Marion Cotillard, Penélope Cruz, Judi Dench, Fergie, Kate Hudson, Nicole Kidman, and Sophia Loren in leading roles.

Guido Contini (Daniel Day-Lewis) is a gifted Italian filmmaker who, at the age of fifty, has developed writer's block and urges all the women in his life, alive and dead, to help him with writing his new movie. It is 1965 in the opening scene at the

famous Cinecittà movie studios, in Rome (*Overture Delle Donne*). His mind wanders to his unfinished set, where dozens of dancers and the film's leading ladies appear: Claudia Jenssen, his leading lady in his films; his wife Luisa; his mistress Carla; his costume designer and confidant Lilli; his mother; Stephanie, an American fashion journalist from *Vogue*; and Saraghina, a prostitute from his childhood;

At a press conference, he's charming and colourful, avoiding any clear answer on his new movie, his ninth, entitled *Italia*. Here he meets Stephanie, a *Vogue* fashion journalist, with whom he begins a flirtation. Escaping the biting probes of the reporters, he creates an elaborate fantasy (*Guido's Song*), where he explains that he wishes he were young and energetic once again, since his talent was better then.

He escapes the press conference and arrives at the Bellavista Spa Hotel. While being examined by the doctor, due to his symptoms of exhaustion, he receives a call from Carla, his mistress (*A Call from the Vatican*). She describes her desire for him, as he listens on the other end. She arrives at the spa, expecting to share his suite, but is upset to find that she's staying in a shabby pensione by the train station. Meanwhile, Guido discovers that a Cardinal is also staying at his hotel and tells the cardinal's assistant to arrange a meeting.

However, Dante, his producer, soon arrives at the spa and escorts Contini to a banquet hall where the entire production team is assembled to help him prepare for his film. He sees Lilli, his costume designer, and begs for inspiration, while criticizing the costume she's in the middle of making as not being something an Italian woman would wear. She reminds him of Luisa's birthday the previous day and disagrees, saying that it reminds her of Folies Bergère, a Parisian music hall that featured showgirls, where she 'learnt her art' (*Folies Bergères*).

The Cardinal agrees to meet him and advises him to lead a more moral life and look to his youth for inspiration. Guido remembers Saraghina, a prostitute whom he and his friends paid to teach them the art of love and sex (*Be Italian*). Young Guido is caught by his school teachers/priests and whipped by his principal. He awakens on top of Carla, in a fit of anxiety and abruptly leaves to meet his production team for dinner. Carla wants to come, but he vehemently refuses, reminding her that they don't want to hurt either of their spouses.

At dinner, he's happily surprised to see Luisa, who has come at Lilli's request. In song, Luisa explains how she's become a different woman to be Guido's wife, abandoning her acting career to be at his side (*My Husband Makes Movies*). She then notices Carla entering the restaurant and leaves immediately, saying only that she feels tired. Guido doesn't understand why and follows her, asking what's happened. When he returns to the restaurant and sees Carla, he finally understands. He demands that Carla go back to the pensione, and she leaves, heartbroken.

When Guido goes to the suite to try to talk to Luisa, she refuses to listen. He meets Stephanie, who has tracked him down. Guido and Stephanie continue to flirt, and she describes her love for his movies and how fashionable he makes everything seem (*Cinema Italiano*). She leaves her room key in his pocket. While in her room, watching her undress, he realizes how much he cares for his wife and leaves. He returns to the suite and promises that he's done with cheating. Luisa embraces him, but he's called away to help Carla, who's overdosed on pills. The doctor comments how reckless and immoral Guido is, which Guido doesn't argue against. He stays with Carla until her husband arrives. He returns to the hotel to find that Luisa has left and the crew has returned to Rome to begin filming.

His mother returns to him to advise him to repair his life (*Guarda La Luna*). He calls Luisa from the studio to beg her to come to the screen testing that evening. He arrives at the set to film shots of Claudia in her costumes. She does a few takes, but leaves, saying she'll return when she reads the script. Claudia realizes eventually that there is no script. She asks Guido what he wants the film to be about and his description closely resembles what he is going through in his own life: a man lost and in love with so many women. When they stop to rest, she tells him that she loves him but he is unable to love her. This, we are told in the song *Unusual Way*. Claudia tells him he doesn't see who she really is, only the movie star he has created for the masses.

He returns to review screen tests of new actresses and keeps looking to the back to see if Luisa has arrived. He's relieved when she finally does. She watches and is heartbroken to see him say something in a clip to an actress that he'd said to her when they first met. Once everyone leaves, she explains to Guido that he's made it clear to her that she's not special, just another actress, and she leaves him (*Take It All*). He finally comes to terms with his mental block (*I Can't Make This Movie*), realizing that he's lost everything: his wife, his muse, his talent, and has nothing to make the movie. He apologizes to the staff, saying that there was never a movie, just an idea, and has the set destroyed before leaving Rome.

Two years later, Guido is in a café in Anguillara looking at an advertisement for a play starring Luisa. He waits outside the theatre that night, and watches her leave with a man. He walks with Lilli a few days later and tries to find more information about her. Lilli tells him that she's not going to be the middle-man for them, implying that Luisa asks about him as well. She asks if he will ever make a movie again. He says that he won't because he wouldn't know what to make, except a movie about a man trying to

win back his wife. Lilli says that that's a good start and the costumes won't be too bad either.

Guido starts working on a film again, passionate about a story now. As he speaks with his actors about the scene, his nine-year-old self gathers the cast of Guido's life together. As Guido takes his place in the director's chair, the 'cast' of Guido's life come together on the scaffolding behind him, culminating with the arrival of his mother, and nine-year-old Guido running to sit on the older Guido's lap. This is the Finale. Luisa arrives and watches in that background, happy to see Guido back to his old self. She smiles as he is raised on a crane and calls, "Action!" (Nine, 2009).

In order to analyse my data, I will look at specific dance sequences within my films, starting with *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953).

In the number *Two Little Girls from Little Rock* in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), both leading ladies Lorelei and Dorothy wear bright red, very low-cut dresses, with high slits, exposing their cleavage and their thighs. They are both adorned with lots of diamonds - in necklaces and bracelets. They also both wear red high heels, and red and white feathered head pieces, and wear red lip stick. One of the poses includes both of them sticking their bums out to the audience, with their hands on their knees, looking over their shoulders in seductive poses.

While the movie was released in 1953, I was surprised to see a scene that included cat-calling, something that most women today would know to be highly offensive. I was surprised that this act is actually included in the film so nonchalantly. This happens during the scene where both women arrive at the Paris train station: the women are cat-called by a group of men standing close by. And while they don't seem even to notice the cat-calling, it is presented as though it is a completely normal, acceptable

thing. I have found in recent years, in the media, that more and more emphasis is being put on the fact that acts like cat-calling are derogatory and acts of subordination, something used to exude power, and that women should not see it as a compliment, but rather as a degrading act, that somehow, in history, has been deemed acceptable in society. I have also found, however, if women are not aware of the patriarchal connotations and origin of this trend, (Hollan, 2017 and Cortes, 2015) they are not perturbed by it, and are sometimes even flattered. This shocked me, as it made it even more apparent and clear that women have become accustomed to the patriarchal society that we are living in, and don't even see a form of oppression happening right in front of them or to them personally. It also means that there has not been as much progression as we would hope, with regard to the feminist movement, and educating women on the structures and pillars of patriarchy which we have just come to accept as 'the way things are'.

What I also found interesting, was that, when the men in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) are speaking about Lorelei, they completely disregard Dorothy as the brunette, and say "never mind about her, we don't care what she is" (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, 1953). This links to Brown's description of what we have come to accept as the ideal beauty, including the platinum blonde hair (Brown, 2005).

Marilyn Monroe's character is portrayed throughout as ditsy, (the blonde air-head), unintelligent, and naïve, and sometimes childlike. Yet she is always conveyed as the more attractive one, and seems to get by because of her looks. For example, she calls the port holes of the ship "round windows", and jumps on the bed like a child. She also foolishly gets stuck trying to climb through a porthole. Monroe giggles playfully, and laughs at Piggy's simple jokes (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, 1953).

In the number *Bye Bye Baby*, Dorothy, is shown in a bright red blazer, and red lips, in great contrast to the men in the scene with her, who are all wearing navy blue blazers. In the scene, the camera zooms into Lorelei's face and hands as she sings to Mr Esmond. Again here, we can quote Gledhill and Williams: "The female figure is visually fragmented in a fetishized spectacle - for example in close-ups that direct attention to glamorised parts of her body" (Gledhill & Williams, 2000:62). Lorelei's fingernails are painted red, and she wears a very large diamond ring. Her hands are placed elegantly on Mr Edmond's face, and she is really presented as the spectacle.

In *Ain't There Anyone Here for Love*, Dorothy is seen at one stage shaking her bum towards the audience in a playful, flirtatious way, again accentuating this body part.

During the scene where Dorothy and Lorelei first meet Piggy, the wealthy diamond mine owner, Dorothy is shown in a plain, brown turtle-neck dress. She evidently purposefully is not made to look attractive. She starts talking to Piggy, but as soon as Lorelei walks in, he completely disregards Dorothy, and cannot keep his eyes off Lorelei, who is wearing a bright purple dress - she is the spectacle and she must be looked at. I have found that in this movie, colour has been used so well, and in such great contrast, for effect, especially with the characters' outfits. Here, the purple dress Lorelei wears, I would argue, is very regal and signifies royalty, which is essentially what she is made out to be in this film, because of her sexuality and unblemished looks.

At the ball, Lorelei wears an elaborate, glittery, orange dress with a train-like scarf, while Dorothy is seen wearing a very plain, black, more conservative dress. Throughout the movie, both leading ladies' lips are red and glittery. In a later scene where Lorelei dances with Piggy, she wears a figure-hugging, backless green dress,

and shakes her bum to the camera at one stage, drawing attention to her bum in a sexual way. Later, in Piggy's cabin, she wears a green off-the-shoulder dress, and pushes her breasts together towards him in a flirtatious way, revealing her cleavage. We can again see Brown's statement of how the female body is disciplined to look a certain way, and standards of beauty are imposed on her: "attempts... [are made] to discipline the [female] body by inscribing standards of beauty, perfection..." (Brown, 2005). In *When Love Goes Wrong*, both Dorothy and Lorelei are seen touching their faces a lot - again drawing attention to their perfect red-painted lips, which is quite provocative.

The notion that Lorelei is so attractive, is emphasised even further, when a young boy of around age nine says to her "you've got a lot of animal magnetism", while she's childishly stuck in a porthole. What impression is supposed to be made for the audience when this kind of line from a nine year old boy is deemed acceptable, or presented to seem humorous?

*Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend* is the main number I will be analysing, as it is the most well-known number from the musical, and the most elaborate, and the song has also made its way into a more recent film musical - *Moulin Rouge* (2001).

This number has many girls dressed in black, skimpy, lingerie-like outfits, and they form part of a massive chandelier which hangs over the centre of the stage. Some girls lie on their backs with their legs in the air - this pose making up part of the chandelier. There is a candelabra in the middle of the stage which also has women forming the actual shape of it. These women wear long, black, boob-tube dresses, with parts cut out of the dresses, as part of the design, showing bare parts of their skin on their legs, stomach, and breast areas. Their breasts are also emphasised because



of the boob-tube style. Todd argues that “films fragment and fetishize the body, invite us to gloat over pieces of persons...” (Todd, 1988:153).

Lorelei wears a long, bright, baby-pink, boob-tube dress, with a huge bow on the back. The look here is coquettish. She is adorned with many diamond bracelets, earrings, rings and a diamond choker necklace. She poses with her hands on her chest, and then poses with her hands clasped together above her head in a sexual way, with her hips out. She is also seen shaking her bum in this scene, and takes on various poses where she touches her bare skin in a sexual way. She also wears long, bright pink gloves, which accentuate her hands, and she uses her hands specifically in sexual poses, which the gloves draw attention to. This same song is performed by Dorothy later in the courtroom, where she masquerades as Lorelei.

In this trial scene from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), the entire courtroom scene is turned into a spectacle. It is a satirical, spectacular moment, something that a fan of the musical would expect and anticipate from the genre. Dorothy’s costume resembles a theatrical costume, and the whole case is made to seem like a show or a farce. She wears fur - which symbolises luxury - full make-up and red lipstick, emphasising the ideal beauty and restrictions that Mulvey (1989) and Brown (2005) discuss.

She intentionally speaks in a higher pitch, and acts more naïve, more unintelligent, and poses in more flirtatious ways. With the fur coat on, she exposes her legs to the judge and says “won’t you tell me what to say?” in a very flirtatious way. She also says: “sometimes life is very hard for a girl like I, especially if she happens to be pretty like I, and have blonde hair” (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, 1953). The sexual innuendos are very blatant, and it is forced onto us as the viewer - that this is what we need to believe - this is what is desirable.

Dorothy takes off her coat during her rendition of *Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend*, and reveals a black, white and grey small, lingerie-like outfit, with shimmery tassels around the hips, black gloves, diamond bracelets and diamond earrings and a ring. She shakes her bum a lot, possibly mocking Lorelei. She also shakes and shimmies her breasts, and flirtatiously touches all the men in the courtroom, and they all gather round her and start clapping, because she is entertaining them with her sexuality. Todd says that "some feminist critics have written off female presence onscreen as just one more instance of male fantasy (Todd, 1988:25). The colour in this scene, again, is important to note as there are different connotations evident. The black gloves could signify sophistication, and even though Dorothy is mocking Lorelei, she is still presented as being more sophisticated. There is also a lot of white and grey in her outfit, which I believe signifies Dorothy's innocence and kind nature, in terms of wanting to defend her friend, Lorelei, in the courtroom.

The stereotypes of the perfectly slender, flawlessly made-up women are given to us here, in plain sight, but I don't think it is done in a way to comment on this, but most likely to reinforce the stereotypes. It could also simply be there for entertainment, if I had to analyse it from a different angle, as this is a main element of the musical genre (Cohan, 2002). The film doesn't have a particularly serious, in-depth plot-line, and even though the movie is quite frivolous, the script still includes moments like this, to possibly only reinforce the stereotypes of what a real woman is 'supposed' to be (Brown: 2005 and Mulvey, 1989). The men in the courtroom are all in awe of Dorothy (as Lorelei), whereas, throughout the film, there hasn't been that much attention on Dorothy at all, except for during *Ain't there Anyone Here for Love*, and when the private detective, Ernie Malone, starts liking Dorothy.

Near the end of the film, when Lorelei meets Gus Esmond's father, he speaks to her in a belittling way, and says that he knows she's only after his son's money. We then have the first moment where Lorelei is presented as something more than just a 'pretty face': she speaks up for herself and says to Gus' father: "don't you know that a man being rich is like a girl being pretty? You might not marry a girl just because she's pretty, but my goodness, doesn't it help? And if you had a daughter, wouldn't you rather she didn't marry a poor man?" (Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, 1953). This statement poses some problems for me though. While she is standing up for herself, and making a valid statement that money does provide security, she is also reinforcing society's extreme emphasis on looks for females, and how, in order to gain ground or get ahead in life (for example here, being married), being attractive will help you. She drives this thought further by adding "I can be smart when it's important, but most men don't like it" (Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, 1953). Adshead-Lansdale and Layson say: "as signifying systems, representations carry with them sets of values and attributes which are embedded in particular ideologies and are, therefore capable of creating, endorsing or subverting ideas about gender" (Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1994:203).

We are presented with the idea that we, as women, need to fit into a particular mould, and act and be a certain way in order to be accepted. We need to mould ourselves around the requirements and expectations of men.

This common thought is something we as women tend to be very familiar with, and we are made very aware of it, growing up. I, myself, remember growing up being told by various members of society - class mates, aunts, friends - whether blatantly or inadvertently, that boys won't like you, or show any interest in you if you're too

intelligent. I remember specific instances throughout primary and high school, and even University, where I felt I needed to sometimes hold back, reserve my thoughts and opinions, or 'dumb myself down', in order not to 'chase the boys away', and be perceived as being unattractive and undesirable. And throughout my schooling career and University life, it was apparent that the less intelligent girls, or the girls who generally went along with anything that was deemed acceptable and 'cool', and didn't question things too much, were the ones that the boys desired the most.

It is also, to this day a preconception that the most important thing in my life (as a woman), needs to be the acceptance and adoration of a man, and settling down, getting married and having children. Whether I am successful within the workplace, with my studies, or in my dancing is still of little or no importance to members of society, and even, more specifically, family members. In the last six years or so, I've really made a point of researching feminist issues, and observing people that I'm surrounded by, to determine how these preconceptions form our reality. I will continue with this thought once I've discussed *Nine* (2009).

In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), we often see the camera zoom in on Lorelei's red lips and most of the ladies dance moves are sexual or flirtatious. In fact, there is not one dance routine in the entire movie where the moves do not seem sexual, placed or intended for the male viewer. Also, as the viewer, have come to accept this trope as being normal and acceptable (Cohan, 2002 and Mulvey, 1989).

In the opening scene of *Nine* (2009), we are introduced to this film's overarching mise-en-scène with the warm yellow lighting, yet dark stage - the Cinecitta's famous stage. We are shown lots of figures in dark silhouettes moving across the stage. All the

figures are dressed in black and the warm lighting is contrasted at some stages with a deep blue light.

We are given an introduction of who each character is in this opening scene and what their role will be in the movie. All the women wear the kind of outfit that their character is later seen in. For example, Guido's mistress, Carla, is shown in this opening number wearing black lingerie. A spotlight is shown on each leading lady as we are introduced to her in the music. All of the costumes are adorned in glitter, drawing our attention and our eye to their bodies. We are made very aware that the film is going to centre around these women, through the use of these spotlights, and the use of low camera angles.

Throughout the movie, the director experiments with a hand held camera, which isn't typical of the classic Hollywood film. He does this possibly to comment on the particular action, making it more realistic for us, so that we don't only feel like we're watching a spectacle unfold, but that we keep on being made aware that this is Guido's real story. This hand-held camera technique is never used during the dance numbers though, only in some scenes of spoken dialogue. As Homer (2002) said, Postmodernism as a concept allows for both continuity and difference and it disrupts narrative forms (Homer, 2002).

In *A Call from the Vatican* we see Carla presented in many obvious close-ups of body parts. This number serves only to present her as a sexual object- as Guido's object of desire. The camera zooms in on her feet, and pans all the way up her leg, towards her breasts, her hair and her hands. At one stage she lifts her legs up from behind the pink sheet that she hangs from, and this is the focal point of the camera. This scene serves as a very good example of how women are represented as objects for consumption

(Mulvey, 1989). The lighting is warm and pink in this scene, making the stage seem inviting. Carla wears white and black lingerie and poses in provocative positions such as with her legs open for the audience to see her lacy, frilly panties; and lying on her back on the stage, with her head hanging off the edge of the stage seductively, exposing her cleavage. There is still something left to the imagination though. “[Representation] does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things” (Hall et al, 2013:1). She does a few high kicks and shakes her bum to the audience - something we saw a lot of in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953).

In *Be Italian*, the scene opens in complete black and white. The scene is set with the girls getting ready backstage for this number. We are shown little snippets of women dressed in ragged lingerie, almost in silhouette forms. We can only see parts of their costumes, and parts of their bodies - their faces are completely unclear. They move in slow, sexual movements and poses. A hand-held camera is used, and the film is dark and grainy. There is a very eerie feel about this opening part of the number.

A curtain then drops and we are presented with a dramatic freeze frame of the huge stage, with all the women scattered across the stage, on varied platforms, in different, provocative, flirtatious poses. The stage is now flooded with colour. Some are sitting on chairs, some have one leg up on the chair, some lean back over their chair, some have their legs suggestively and provocatively open to the audience, and they all place their hands specifically on their bodies, mostly on their bare skin. Saraghina, the leading lady with lead vocals for this number is shown wearing a black and red corset, in close-ups touching her breasts, extreme close-ups touching her thighs, and pulling her sleeve down off her shoulder suggestively. Deacon et al say that “the basic utility of semiotics for media studies students is in advancing certain concepts which can be

applied to the analysis of media texts” (Deacon et al, 2010: 141). The women all wear black, knee-high fishnet stockings, black lace-up ankle-length high-heeled boots, and their lingerie-like clothes look ragged and torn, and is very tight, possibly to suggest that they are dirty, not classy. The colour in this number must be emphasised as well. Red and black are used so much, and these, I would argue are both colours of danger, as well as sexuality. There is a great deal of power exuded in this number, and the striking red and black colour enhances this mood greatly.

The lighting in this number alternates between harsh white and warm lighting, possibly to highlight the contrast of the feminine side of these women, as well as their tough and powerful side. The whole stage is never lit up though, and only specific areas of the stage, and parts of the women are lit up - specifically their faces. There is a lot of use of spotlights throughout the film. This is a postmodern quality as Harvey (2008) says “we are living in a postmodern, fragmenting social landscape that allows for otherness and difference” (Harvey, 2008). The director is experimenting with the tropes of the Classic Hollywood musical.

To enhance the spectacular element, the women start playing instruments (tambourines), and throw their hair around seductively - like an extra prop - as if in the throes of passion. They all walk to the front of the stage in unison, slowly, at the end of the number. This is so powerful because there are so many of them and it signifies the power they have as a group. As Cohan said: “as a genre of spectacle, the musical is renowned for the asymmetry with which it represents sexual difference in production numbers, encouraging the spectatorial position of a male voyeur” (Cohan, 2002: 63). Spectacle is such a big part of the musical as it traditionally includes elaborate song-and-dance numbers with vibrant colours, glamorous costumes, creative mise-en-

scène and spectacular dance sequences (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 334-335). According to Jack Anderson, “movements can be watched with pleasure, in fact, it exists to be watched...This kind of dance may be called theatrical dance, and it includes such otherwise disparate manifestations as ballet, modern dance...” (Anderson, 1974: 8).

As Adshead-Lansdale and Layson say “dance, as an academic discipline, is in a good position to accommodate feminist problematics in writing of dance history, feminism theorizes culture from woman’s point of view, and it is women who constitute the majority of practitioners within western theatre dance. Both feminism, as a politics, and dance, as a cultural practice, share a concern with the body. For feminists the body is understood as a primary site of social production and inscription (Grosz 1987), whereas for dance it is its capacity for movement which is the central concern” (Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1994:198). I agree that these two fields of dance and feminism work well together, and this adds to my viewpoint of how relevant this study is.

Judith Lynne Hanna states that “dance interweaves with other aspects of human life, such as communication and learning, belief systems, social relations and political dynamics” (Hanna: 1979:3). She adds that “dance is physical behaviour...movement, organized energy” and a conceptual natural language with intrinsic and extrinsic meanings, a system of physical movements, and interrelated rules, guiding performance in different social situations” (Hanna, 1979: 3, 5).

Peterson Royce maintains that in dance, as in other media of communication, there is ever present the potential for ambiguity of meaning” (Peterson Royce, 1977:211), and Mc Fee add to this, saying that “our reactions to art works such as dances manifest similar learned or trained responses” (Mc Fee, 1992: 292,293). I believe



that dance can definitely be subjective, and the way we interpret it stems from how we have been raised, and the environment we grew up in, with particular social and cultural rules of our given environment.

In the number *My Husband Makes Movies*, there is a spotlight on Luisa as she sings. The room, like the rest of the numbers in the movie, is dark, and there is only a white spotlight on Luisa, and this alternates with a dark blue spotlight on Guido. I would argue that this white light on Luisa signifies her purity. She is a devoted, loyal wife, and sticks by Guido through everything. The dark blue light on Guido, I believe, signifies the cold, distant nature he has - he doesn't let anyone, not even his wife, get too close to him, emotionally. There are never extreme close-ups on her in this number, only in the one part of the song where she sings "my husband hardly ever comes to bed", we see a close-up of her face, but merely to show us her emotion. Todd argues that "films fragment and fetishize the body, invite us to gloat over pieces of persons...the longest lasting, most eloquent film fetish of all...gathering the most heterogeneous actors and directors into its dominion, is the face" (Todd, 1988:153).

*Folies Bergères* is the closest number in this movie to the Classical Hollywood musical. While Lilli is dressed in a plain suit with a hat, and long, red feather boa, she poses seductively on the piano. More chorus girls then arrive on stage, making this an ornate production number (Lubbock, 1962). The cabaret girls all wear very big, elaborate feather head-pieces, with glitter sprinkled all over their flimsy, leotard-like costumes. They also have large, feather-like tails which fan out like a peacock, attached to the back of their costumes, and they wear elbow-length glittery gloves. Their legs and arms are bare. Their breasts are accentuated with the glitter on the costumes and the skimpy design of the outfits. They make slow movements, accentuating their hands

and arms, and hips, and they wrap their arms around themselves. The number is a complete spectacle with pink lighting, as Lilli is lifted up above the stage at the end of the number, waving to the audience, and lots of glitter confetti is seen falling from the roof over the stage.

“Hollywood musicals tend to accentuate the positive [side of human nature], and [the] world of the musical makes it possible for people, at any time and in any place, to express themselves through song and dance... Musical tend to be brightly lit, to set off the cheerful costumes and sets and to keep the choreography of the dance numbers clearly visible....in order to show off the patterns formed by the dancers in musical numbers, crane shots and high angles are common” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 334-335). Hall ‘s reading works well with what Bordwell and Thompson argue, and he maintains that languages can use signs to symbolise, stand for or reference objects, people and events in the so-called ‘real’ world. But languages can also reference imaginary things and fantasy worlds or abstract ideas which are not in any obvious sense part of our material world (Hall, 2013). Musicals are always full of imaginary and fantasy worlds, and we can see this in the dance routines such as *Be Italian* and *Folies Bergères* (Nine, 2009).

We are introduced to another character - Stephanie - wearing dark, dramatic eye make-up, giving us the immediate thought that she’s confident - presenting herself in a seductive way, leaning on the bar counter. She’s very flirtatious with Guido, and says to him about his films: “every frame is like a postcard” (Nine, 2009) which is very true about the entire make-up of the film with its edits and cuts, as well as how each woman is always carefully positioned in each frame. This entire number (*Cinema Italiano*) is in black and white. Stephanie and the female back-up dancers are seen

wearing short, white and silver, glittery, shimmering, frilly costumes with tassels, which expose their bare stomachs. They also wear knee-high silver boots and sunglasses. There is so much energy in this cool, hip number. The men, again, in contrast to the women, wear dark grey suits. This is in great contrast to the traditional song-and-dance number we would see in *Singin in the Rain* (1952) for instance, as the dancing here is a lot more loose and free, and while there are choreographed sections, the dancers aren't perfectly placed throughout the number (Lubbock, 1962). While the scene is in black and white, and we don't see special lighting, the costumes and dance moves draw us into this spectacle. The film is grainy and artistic and this gives the number an old-fashioned feel. Altman argues that there is a "period of reflexivity dominated by parody...and deconstruction of a genre" (Altman, 1999). This scene is very postmodern in that the director is playing with the normal Classic Hollywood look and feel as Bordwell and Thompson (2008) discuss.

In *In a Very Unusual Way*, Claudia, Guido's leading actress, wears a gold, long boob-tube dress, with elaborate, dangling earrings. She's made to look like a trophy. After talking to Guido about his movie and his state of mind she says: "I'd rather be the man" and goes on to sing the lyrics "one time I needed you", in this song. Her facial features are accentuated through close-ups, and her moves are slow and sensual, and the sexuality is almost subtle, but there is no doubt that the camera and lighting choices have been chosen for the benefit of the male voyeur. As Cohan says, Guido takes on the "spectatorial position of a male voyeur" (Cohan, 2002:63).

The number takes place on the stage too, with a large water fountain, which I believe signifies romance. The fountain could also stand as a signifier of the fountain of youth, in that Guido possibly is not feeling as young as he used to, and he is slowly realizing

that he needs to change his ways. There is always a white light on Claudia as she sings, and the scene is filled with yellow, white and blue lighting. She sings “in a very unusual way, I owe what I am to you” (Nine, 2009), again suggesting that it’s because of the male that she is successful. We are given a representation here of a woman who was once very reliant on a man, and who now has become more independent, has come to rely more on herself - something we never saw in the earlier Hollywood musicals. So here we have an example of a transgression possibly from earlier, classical musicals. We also see this in *La La Land* (2016), as will be further discussed.

The ending is exactly the traditional Hollywood ending, as the ‘cast’ of Guido’s life all appear at the end, ready to be a part of his new film journey. The young Guido orchestrates the entire scene, as mentioned before. It is a cathartic moment, as he has realized the error of his ways, and has come back to try and make this movie once more. All the characters in his life come together to support him. He is happy once again for what the future will bring with this new adventure, and the film ends with him saying “Action!”

In summary, therefore, I can ascertain that there aren’t too many differences in the way that women have been represented in these two films, and that there is definitely a standard trend, narrative pattern, and representation that musical film makers rely on, and stick to, to represent women within this genre, even in current times. The actual physical representation of women has not changed at all. We still see them presented as sexual beings for consumption, positioned almost always in sexual poses and contexts. Their bodies all adhere to the strict rules of perfect slenderness, immaculate hair, flawless make-up and sexualised poses, and that have been prescribed on women for years, and they are positioned specifically and perfectly in

each frame (Brown, 2005). Their body parts are what is made to seem important - not the complete human woman with everything else she has to offer and embodies, such as an intelligence, talents she may have, the quality of generosity, and so on.

The dance numbers and tropes of the musical, I would argue, have also remained the same, as discussed. Both films include the elaborate costumes, heavy, stylized makeup and hair, perfectly choreographed dances, and flirtatious dance moves. If anything, the sexuality of the dances has become more prevalent, and more detailed in this genre as time has progressed, as we can see in specific dance numbers like *Be Italian* in *Nine* (2009). This film is a lot more overtly sexually suggestive than *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953).

I wanted to include the following quote as an example from a different, postmodern film musical, *Dancer in the Dark* (2000). Selma, the leading lady, says near the beginning of the film: “in a musical, nothing dreadful ever happens” (*Dancer in the Dark*, 2000). This corresponds directly with Schatz’s notion of the Hollywood happy ending, and the demand for it in genre films (Schatz, 1999). We still see elaborate costumes, dance numbers including high-kicks, shaking of the bum, provocative poses, touching of bare skin. The dance styles haven’t changed much, as we still see tap dance, modern dance, and ballet in both films. Although the dancing has possibly become more risqué and experimental. For example, we see this in the composition of *Be Italian*, with the dancers’ legs suggestively open to the audience and leaning forward to show their cleavage to the audience, drawing attention to, and sexualising these body parts by placing their hands on them.

In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) we do indeed see very simple dancing. If you compare this film to *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), we are made very aware that the

dancing element in this movie has been watered down. Wollen says the following about the famous 12-minute ballet sequence in the Classic Hollywood musical: *Singin' in the Rain* (1952): "the sequence is an outstanding example of the use of transitions for the dramatic integration of song and dance numbers into the narrative of the film... it is the careful articulation of music, song lyrics, gesture and pantomime, dance and tap, which ensures the success of the piece" (Wollen, 1992:28). I would argue that the story-line in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), although weak, outweighs the dance aspect, and that, perhaps, if embarking on a further study, another musical should be analysed as well, in order to get a clearer, more definite understanding of the role of dance within Hollywood film musicals.

In 2017, I believe that while a lot of aspects of society are changing, and a bigger space is being created for the successful, equal female, there are still so many stigmas, and so many expectations for women, and moulds which we are almost forced to fit into, if we want to be accepted by society. We still see movie trends today where the male, almost all of the time, is the protagonist, and where the big-budget films have the male as leading character. Very seldom do we see films with female characters as the main protagonists. We saw the remake of *Ghostbusters* in 2016, with an all-female cast, which was utterly unsuccessful at the box office. While the film had some of the greatest American female actresses, who have made names for themselves in Hollywood, the main criticism against this movie was that it wasn't the same with an all-female cast (Kermode, 2016). But this, I believe, is only due to the fact that we have been conditioned to believe that the film will not be worth watching if the lead is not a male, and/or the story does not centre around a male. It can also be argued that the original film was a cult classic, and that this is perhaps why it was not well-received; however, I believe that this is only a small component of the reason.

If we look at other popular films where we see female protagonists, such as, for example, Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* (2003), we see Uma Thurman in the lead role. She is the femme fatale, and we have come to see that this archetype works in film, because it is about the voyeurism (Cohan, 2002), but it seems that when female characters go against the grain of this archetype, that these films are less well-received by mass audiences. Todd explains that the woman is "constantly knitted into the fabric of the film through point-of-view shots located in male characters...she is set up as an object of the male sexual gaze. Frequently too she is placed within the frame of the camera in such a way as to stand out in silhouette, a side-on tits and arse positioning" (Todd, 1988:71).

This is an area wherein I would argue that society desperately needs progression. While we are seeing more female directors (such as the recent *Equity* directed by Meera Menon in 2016), there is still the common conception that the story needs to revolve around a man for us to want to watch it. I, myself, can even admit to not being as interested initially in women-centred films as male-centred ones, simply because all the greatest Hollywood movie scripts have traditionally been written with males as leads, and we have come to expect, with the help of the media, the more popular, 'better' movies to be male character-centred, and better quality films. The 'hero's journey' template of screen writing has been so engrained in us that we tend to reject anything that counteracts it - because no one has been successful in providing an attractive alternative to the traditional Hollywood film. While there are many instances of people abandoning the hero's journey method, and we see examples of these at film festivals such as the Cannes Film Festival, The Sundance Film Festival, and the Berlin Independent Film Festival, amongst others, these films never leave a lasting impression on the vast majority of society - enough to make headway and a change

in the masses' thinking. People want to see what they are used to, and what they have been conditioned to believe is true. As Rick Altman argues, genre films lure its audience into a familiar world which is filled with reassuring stereotypes of character, action and plot (Altman, 1999).

An article by Christopher Campbell entitled *40 Movies Directed By Women to Look Forward to* (Campbell, 2016) and an article by the Verge called *Fewer women directed top-grossing movies in 2016 than in 1998* (Plaugic, 2017) were insightful reads about the current state of society, and what the general thinking amongst the masses seems to be. These articles show the difference in societal thinking.

*La La Land* is a 2016 musical, as mentioned before, which I would argue has made some head-way for women in the musical film industry, and the movie has also proven that musicals are indeed still very relevant, as the film won 6 Academy Awards in 2017 as well as multiple Golden Globes, British Academy Film and Television Awards and, Screen Actors Guild Awards, amongst others. The musical still shows the standard musical trope of the couple falling in love and the choreographed dance (tap and ballet) numbers that Cohan talks of: "a typical characteristic of movie musical genre is that there are two leads, a man and a woman, who sing and dance together, and eventually become romantically involved; that they sing and dance so fluidly together is a metaphor for the perfection of their relationship" (Cohan, 2002: 83). However, the plot-line in *La La Land* (2016) is altered, and both male and female leads end up leading separate lives, with the female lead in fact being made to seem more successful than the male. This is very different to what we see in the Classic Hollywood Musical, such as *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), as Don and Kathy end up forming a couple, and, as Schatz says, they end up compromising their individuality by forming an



integrated heterosexual couple, in order to be integrated into a new social community (Schatz, 1999). Bordwell and Thompson build on Altman's theory and argue that audiences expect the genre film to offer something familiar, but they also demand fresh variations on it. "The filmmaker may devise something mildly or radically different, but it will still be based on tradition" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 321). I found the movie and story-line of *La La Land* (2016) to be just as enjoyable though, even though this important trope has been altered quite substantially.

To add to what we find in the Classic Hollywood musical, we are introduced to women in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) as soft-spoken, delicate creatures, who don't stand up for themselves, and rely on men for almost everything that they do. Kathy - while vocal about her feelings and beliefs, still conforms to the stereotypical view of women. She even puts her career on hold in order to help Don with the movie *The Dancing Cavalier*, by lending her voice to the film, without any recognition, ultimately putting her career on hold.

The last song of the movie, *I'm Lucky in Your Arms*, is sung by Don and Kathy, and represents this final integration of the perfect couple into society. We as the audience are led to believe that Kathy's primary role in this movie was to partner Don. We also see, in the 12 minute long song and dance number, a female dancer, who remains nameless, who partners Don. She is silenced in order to be eroticised as pure spectacle. She doesn't sing or speak at all, she only serves to partner Don in this number- it's the only time we see her in the entire film. Susan Bordo states that: "through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenising, elusive ideal of femininity... female bodies become what Foucault calls 'docile bodies'- bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation,

'improvement'" (Bordo, 2008: 208). Daly (1987/8) agrees, arguing that in ballet, the female form has long been inscribed as a representation of difference: as a spectacle, she is the bearer and object of male desire. The male on stage - the primary term against which the ballerina can only be compared - is not inscribed as a form, but rather as an active principle" (Daly 1987/8: 57 in Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1994:203).

The dances in *La La Land* (2016) are seamlessly choreographed and we see traditional, classical dance styles like tap, ballet and contemporary, and in terms of spectacle, we still see the traditional, technically trained dancers. "Films are most commonly grouped into genres by virtue of similar plot patterns, similar thematic implications, characteristic filmic techniques, and recognisable iconography" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 336). The movie uses Bob Fosse techniques, something a musical fan would immediately recognise and appreciate. Bob Fosse is one of the most influential men in Jazz Dance History. He created a unique dance style that is still used in dance studios throughout the world. Some of the distinctions of his style included sideways shuffling, turned-in knees, rolled shoulders, and of course jazz hands - tropes we see a lot of in *La La Land* (2016). This is not to say that we see no musicals today with this original trope of the formation of the perfect couple. For example, this is still evident in the popular *High School Musical* films (2006, 2007, 2008), and while these movies were aimed at a younger, teenage audience, the movie was found to be popular amongst adults as well, especially for its song and dance routines.

In the opening scene of *La La Land* (2016) the four dancing ladies wear complementary coloured dresses: blue, red, yellow and green, and this is so effective

for the scene, adding so much colour, energy and vibrance, again drawing on a traditional element of the Classic Hollywood musical - the elaborate costumes. “musicals tend to be brightly lit, to set off the cheerful costumes and sets and to keep the choreography of the dance numbers clearly visible....in order to show off the patterns formed by the dancers in musical numbers, crane shots and high angles are common” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008: 334-335).

As I have discussed in previous chapters, there are various tropes of the Hollywood Musical which we have become familiar with, and which we still see in modern day musicals. These include the forming of the perfect couple; bright, elaborate costumes; patterned dance routines; crane shots and high angles; and the musical numbers with full musical accompaniment are almost always brightly lit to highlight the dance sequences (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). Both *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *Nine* (2009) use continuity editing throughout - making these films fit neatly into the classic Hollywood narrative - according to Kolker (2000) and Bordwell and Thompson (2008). This effect draws the audiences into the narratives.

Rob Marshall experiments with the traditional continuity editing in *Nine* (2009) - he makes use of a hand-held camera along with some blurry close-ups. The hand-held camera gives the movie a documentary-like effect, as the viewer is being made aware of the camera, and this, I would argue, makes the viewer feel uneasy, as if you're watching real people's lives happening in front of your eyes. A possible reason for Marshall doing this, could be that he wants to take the focus off a false reality, and make people believe that what they are seeing is real. In other words, he is playing with the conventions of the musical, where directors traditionally aim to draw audiences into the spectacle.

We see these aforementioned traditional musical tropes in both my chosen musicals. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) we see the film ending with both leading ladies getting married - in fact, having a combined wedding. I felt that the ending of the movie was brought to a close almost too fast, just to ensure that the traditions - where the women and men end up together, and the loose ends are tied up - are upheld.

In *Nine* (2009), however, the ending is somewhat different. While Guido has his choice of more than four women, he ends up with none of them. His wife leaves him, his mistress leaves him, and the other women that had been seen spending so much time with him, like Stephanie and Claudia, also abandon him. He is shown on his own, with one of his mentors (his costume designer) walking in the streets of an Italian town. He looks much older, cold, unhealthy and unhappy. The movie ends with him sitting in his Director's chair in the theatre, with all the women that have been in the film and involved in his life, on stage, ready to support him in his new endeavour of finally writing his new film script, and then directing the movie. He is finally happy. The women coming back is troublesome to me, because it's perpetuating the idea that his actions - the way he treated all of these women - is acceptable. However, we as the audience would like to assume that he's changed his ways, and that that's why they've come back.

While Guido isn't involved in a couple at the end of the movie, there is still a happy ending, in the sense that Guido - the protagonist - has reached his goal of directing his new film. I don't know how I feel about the fact that the women are all there to support him though. He used all of them for his benefit, and yet they are there again to support him once more - for his own selfish needs. Ultimately I would argue that the movie is saying that he - the man - has still won.

One of the things I love about *La La Land* (2016) is that it still upholds the traditions of musicals, the traditions that musical lovers expect and love watching, yet, with time, the standard, traditional plot lines seem to be changing, and this is a very good, progressive sign for women. In my opinion these new plot lines are opening up new opportunities for actresses and character identities, and are therefore hopefully giving women better ideals and qualities to aspire to. While we may not be seeing as many female movie directors currently as we did in 1998 (Plaugic, 2017), at least some of the content of the musical films seems to be shifting, which is a great and inspiring start.

After reading the above-mentioned article, which stated that fewer movies were directed by women in 2016, than 20 years ago, it did confuse me, as I was very much under the impression that we were making steady progress, especially after being aware of various successful contemporary female writers such as Tina Fey, Kate McKinnon, Amy Poehler, Kristin Wiig, and Amy Schumer in the entertainment industry, and especially on the very well-known American TV skit show, *Saturday Night Live*, where these actresses are writers as well. This can only mean that films directed by women are still not receiving enough credit and support, making it seem unviable for them. While this isn't the main focus of my study, it is an extension of it, and would be worth studying further.

While I acknowledge that the musical was originally, and is still to a great extent, intended to serve purely as entertainment, I would argue that it has grown and progressed into something more substantial, commenting more on society, and while in my opinion it is so important for it to keep its roots and its popular tropes because of the magical element of this genre, there is now definitely a space for the musical

also to convey a more pressing message, which could be a progressive, more positive one for women.

We see throughout both movies that specific angles, close-ups and editing techniques are used to emphasise female body parts, like breasts, thighs and bare stomachs. In *Nine* (2009), in the number *A Call From the Vatican*, so many parts of Carla's body are emphasised, as previously mentioned. There are close ups on her breasts, her legs, her stomach, her lips, as well as the movement of her body in very sexual patterns. I can't remember ever (being a huge fan of musicals) seeing men portrayed with so little clothing, or in any poses or positions like this, and I don't recall ever even seeing any camera techniques emphasising any of their body parts. This, I have learnt, is a common, standard trope, perhaps not only in musical films, but definitely in the musical genre. The woman is definitely positioned as secondary, as an object of consumption, as part of the male character's desires, as discussed by Laura Mulvey (1989).

Both the films express the exact notions of ideal beauty that both Brown (2005) and Gledhill and Williams (2000) discuss, and this is done equally in both films, which are 56 years apart. Brown explains how women in our society "are subjected to the overwhelming tyranny of slenderness" (Brown, 2005: 80), and this is so evident in both films as almost all the women have perfectly sculpted, flawless figures. This standard of beauty and perfection is defined by Mary Russo (1995) as "a classical body which is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical and sleek, it is identified with the 'high' or official culture of the renaissance and later... The physical traits of the classical body are metaphors for social traits and desirable behaviour" (Russo, 1995, quoted in Brown, 2005: 81).

In my opinion, these aspects, the actual representation of the physical form of the female, have remained stagnant over the many years of Hollywood musical production, and have not changed for the good at all. As Gledhill and Williams say: “the female figure is visually fragmented in a fetishized spectacle - for example in close-ups that direct attention to glamorised parts of her body” (Gledhill & Williams, 2000:62). This is so evident in both films. I love how they put it - visually fragmented - as if the female is a perfectly constructed object that is made to be consumed, leaving the rest of the female population trying to live up to this construction or illusion, as Debord (1967) argues. Brown’s specific use of the word ‘discipline’ says to me that the woman has been represented as something to be contained, something that needs to be moulded and changed into something more desirable, something that constricts her in her physical appearance and movement. She is a thing - an object. Brown talks of “heavy stylized make-up and hair, flirtatious poses...platinum blonde as signifying sexuality” (Brown, 2005: 78). We see all of these aspects in both films. In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), Lorelei is purposefully represented as the obviously more attractive female, mainly because of her striking platinum blonde hair. The title alone suggests this - gentlemen prefer blondes - and additionally, there is a direct quote in the movie by one of the male characters about the brunette Dorothy which reinforces this: “nevermind about her, we don’t care what she is” (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, 1953).

In *Nine* (2009) we have two leading female characters with platinum blonde hair - Stephanie, the reporter, and Claudia, the famous actress. And in both films, as with all musicals, the female characters’ hair and make-up is always heavily stylized and perfect.

Having read Brown's (2005) quote many times, and watching the films many times too, it is now so apparent to me that every move these women make, and in every scene they are in, they are specifically placed within the frame. Their moves are stylized and they are always perfectly positioned in a way to be "consumed", whether it's in a dance routine, or merely in a straight acting scene. This trope has become something so standard and so normalised that we as viewers often don't see it anymore. We do, however, go home after the movie, questioning ourselves, and the way we look and behave as women, ultimately comparing ourselves to them. It has become ingrained in us, because of the fact that the Hollywood film musical hasn't changed this aspect of its movies at all. We as women are left with an idea of what we *should* look like, and how we *should* behave in order to be desirable to men, and be accepted by society, whereas the male characters are presented without any of these accoutrements at all: from my findings, they are never placed in sexual poses, their outfits are always plain and normalised (something every day males would wear), their movements aren't sexualised, and the camera doesn't zoom in on or accentuate certain body parts. Ever. Why is this the norm? Why, after over 80 years of the Hollywood Golden Age, hasn't the representation of women changed? This is a major concern, and is something that needs to be addressed.

There is a scene which shows where Guido, in *Nine* (2009), meets his wife, Luisa, for the first time. She is an actress auditioning for a role in one of his movies, and she has her hair tied up tightly in a bun. Guido comes over to her and takes her hair tie out, and his face changes, showing the audience that he only now finds her attractive. Again this shows how we have stylised ideals of beauty that we as women are encouraged to adhere to in order for men to find us attractive.



As mentioned, I would like to also explore the possibility that maybe this representation of women shouldn't be viewed completely in a negative light. Perhaps we can find examples of how these representations have positive connotations, or maybe there are underlying elements of their representation that are in fact positive and transgressive. For example, a lot of low angles are used on the leading ladies in *Nine* (2009). This places these characters in positions of power. Perhaps when viewing the film for the first time, without being aware of film devices, one may not think of or recognise this device. The women in *Nine* (2009) could possibly be viewed as using their sexuality - their bodies, costumes, makeup, hair - to their advantage, as Doane (2005) has suggested when speaking of the concept of the female masquerade: she says that women purposefully flaunt femininity to their own advantage, making the natural seem unnatural (Shugart & Waggoner, 2005).

In the number *Be Italian* the stage is flooded with red lighting, adding an element of danger and sexual power to these women. While close ups are still used on body parts, they are perhaps not used in order to fetishize these body parts, but instead they represent where the power in these women comes from - the fact that they are females. Stuart Hall states that people should challenge stereotypes as they will lead to new, more accurate meanings and identities, and perhaps that is what we need to do here with these representations, is challenge what our brains have been taught to see, and see a different meaning that may be present (Rotstein & Henkel, 1999). As Best and Kellner argue "we are in a more advanced stage of the spectacle...that involves that creation of cultural spaces... that present exciting possibilities for creativity and empowerment of individuals" (Best & Kellner, 1999: 144).

However, it needs to be questioned how realistic this interpretation of women really is, and whether the representation *is* really positively transgressive for women, as the women's real life issues are never dealt with.

According to Todd (1988) two methodologies have defined the feminist critique of the classical cinema, methodologies corresponding to two major stages of feminist film criticism. First, there is the analysis of "images of women", which usually points out the pernicious representations of women and their lack of correspondence to women's lives in the real world. "Distorted images of women appear on screen as if to assert and maintain the role of film as a powerful means of social conditioning" (Todd, 1988:22, 23). She also argues that some feminist critics have written off female presence onscreen as just one more instance of male fantasy, as the quest for a positive female role model suggests what Hollywood still refuses to deliver (Todd, 1988). "Women do not exist in American Film. Instead we find another creation, made by men, growing out of their ideological imperatives. Gaye Tuchman has called the phenomenon the symbolic annihilation of women, the replacement of reality by the patriarchal fantasies of subservience or its opposite" (Todd, 1988:130).

Another aspect which I would like to argue is relevant here, is how many sayings and terms we have, that people use in everyday life that stem from a patriarchal order, and are just naturally integrated into our everyday conversations and lives. They have become normative.

For example, we hear common sayings like "don't run like a girl", and "boys don't cry". This first saying, I can honestly say, is one which I even used growing up, without ever realizing the negative, inferior connotations it has. The saying, which is only one of many similar ones, is riddled with sexism, and essentially says that one shouldn't run

like a girl, because that is inferior, and lacking in athletic ability, ultimately meaning that the female sex is inferior. De Beauvoir argues that “one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one. For her gender is constructed” (Butler, 1990: 280).

I remember from my childhood often being exposed to sayings like this; don't kick like a girl etc. and what's interesting is that, only now am I understanding the implications and root of these expressions. And what I find upsetting, is that I possibly only am aware of these meanings because of this study, and because I am passionate about the subject. When speaking to colleagues at work, or family members, whom I often hear using these sayings, they always are completely unaware of what the connotations and implications of the sayings are. It has become so normative in society, and this is something that people need to be educated on, and made more aware of. Mulvey argues that “women's struggle to gain rights over their bodies could not be divorced from questions of image and representation” (Mulvey, 1989).

While there are so many negative conceptions about feminism, what many people fail to understand is that feminism is beneficial for both males and females. People generally think, and I have experienced this many times personally in the workplace as well as in social situations, that feminism means taking power away from men and giving it all to women. They also often believe feminism essentially stands for the hatred of men, and that feminists desire a world free of men and anything male in essence. While there are differing stages of feminism, the core of the movement is desire and hope for equality amongst all sexes, without preconceived expectations and limitations on any sex.

If feminism is taught in a more detailed, explanatory and informative way, with all of its positive ideals, we may see a future of equality, in all aspects of society, which would

then be mirrored in the media that we are presented with, especially the visual art forms. We may begin to see more realistic representations of both men and women. Adshead-Lansdale and Layson (1994) point out that inspirational dancer Isadora Duncan was frequently acclaimed as a 'feminist' for her times because she sought to reappropriate the dancing body *for* women. "As she states: 'the dancer of the future...will dance not in the form of nymph, nor fairy, nor coquette, but in the form of woman in her greatest and purest expression'" (Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1994:205).

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In conclusion, I explored the following points with regard to the two films:

1. What are the musical genre tropes and what do they present for us with regard to representing the leading women in these films?
2. What film devices have been put into place in this genre to create specific meaning with representing women e.g.: close-ups, editing, focal-points?
3. How feminist theory is dealt with in these films, with reference to traditional ideals of beauty and femininity, as discussed by my chosen theorists?
4. How dance styles, tropes and techniques create specific meaning for us with regard to the female characters in each film?

I must say that I am in two minds about my findings. On the one hand it is blatantly obvious, and backed-up by the various theorists I have used, that living in the patriarchal world that we do, we are constantly bombarded with images, whether in the form of television, film or print media, of unrealistic women. For centuries women have been represented in the media as somewhat of an illusion, an unrealistic ideal to aspire towards. And while we may be aware that the images are often altered, many women still continue to strive for this notion of perfection, as the media, and society make us believe from a very early age, that we need to be and look a certain way in order to be accepted by society, and perhaps, seemingly more importantly, by men.

We are constantly shown images of makeup products, hair products, clothing, shoes, and various other 'self-improvement' products, intended to make us more desirable and more acceptable. We are shown time and time again, especially in the form of Hollywood films and series, that happiness comes from being attractive. We are given

only very few examples of 'normal' people in popular media forms. The actresses are always perfectly thin, flawlessly groomed, and seem to always be positioned in desirable poses, in almost snap-shot like images within each frame.

On the other hand, however, I think that, as discussed in my analysis chapter, there is maybe a space where we can view these women as in fact using their sexuality to their advantage.

As discussed, a lot of low angles are used on the female characters in *Nine* (2009) and this, I have argued, places the characters in positions of power. Perhaps there is a space to view this kind of representation of women as being empowering. In all the dance scenes in both my films, they do gain the complete and utter attention of the male characters, and essentially have them completely engulfed in their movements, and this, I believe is very powerful.

As Doane (2005) has suggested, speaking of the concept of the female masquerade, women deliberately flaunt femininity to their own advantage, making the natural seem unnatural (Shugart & Waggoner, 2005). Maybe we shouldn't focus too much on what is *lacking* in the representation, but rather, what do women *have* that men don't have, and how they are able to take on different representations.

During the number *Be Italian*, the stage is flooded with red lighting, adding, I believe, an element of danger and sexual power to these women. While close ups are used on body parts, as mentioned, maybe they are not used in order to fetishize these body parts, but instead, they represent where the power in these women comes from - the fact that they are females. Stuart Hall states that people should challenge stereotypes as they will lead to new, more accurate meanings and identities (Rotstein & Henkel,

1999), and maybe this is what we need to do with these female characters that we are presented with.

We must still, however, question how realistic this interpretation of women really is, as, even though we can focus on this positive side, there are a lot of negative, patriarchal elements, as discussed in my paper, and these issues are never dealt with, as I have discovered in both my films.

From the study I have learned that there certainly are very specific representations of women within film musicals, and these have been carried through from the time of the Classic Hollywood musical to the postmodern era. I am positive about the fact though, that, as discussed with regards to *La La Land* (2016), the plot-lines of musicals are starting to shift, and this, being a commercial, big-budget musical - one that was so well-received by audiences - means that it is not just an independent movie, seen by a limited audience, but a film that reached the masses. Therefore, the masses' minds and perceptions of women will hopefully start shifting too.

I still love watching musicals even though women are represented in limiting, stereotypical roles most of the time, because I enjoy the other aspects of the musical - which I believe to be the most enjoyable part of the movies - the technical dancing and singing; the spectacle; the intricate, elaborate lighting; the beautiful worlds, and the fact that, as the audience, we get drawn into this spectacular, imaginary world, where we can forget about our own issues for an hour and a half, and immerse ourselves completely in this magical 'feel-good' world, and we go home feeling happy. After all, isn't this what we all want?

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