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**YOU SHOULD SEE ME DANCE: OBJECTIFICATION OF
FEMALE DANCERS IN DANCE FILMS**

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MASTER OF ARTS THESIS

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APPROVAL

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- that this Master of Arts that I have submitted is entirely my own work and I have cited and referenced all material and results that are not my own in accordance with the rules;
- that this Master of Arts Thesis does not contain any material from any research submitted or accepted to obtain a degree or diploma at another educational institution;
- and that I commit and undertake to follow the "Kadir Has University Academic Codes of Conduct" prepared in accordance with the "Higher Education Council Codes of Conduct".

In addition, I acknowledge that any claim of irregularity that may arise in relation to this work will result in a disciplinary action in accordance with the university legislation.

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(07/05/2025)



Ailerime...

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YOU SHOULD SEE ME DANCE:
OBJECTIFICATION OF FEMALE DANCERS IN DANCE FILMS

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to examine the intersecting area of dance and cinema about aestheticization of female dancers through objectification in dance films. While dance and cinema are fields in which aestheticization and objectification of female bodies are discussed in detail (such as Mulvey's and Manning's works), this intersecting field opens an area for discussion from both disciplines. Using qualitative film analysis, the films *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Dirty Dancing* (1987) and *Flashdance* (1983) are analyzed by their narrative and narration choices. The films' accent on rebellion and liberation in their narrative structures often conflict with their narration choices that objectify the female dancers. In addition, the liberation processes often come together with passivation and/or sexualization of the female character.

Keywords: Dance, Cinema, Objectification, Aestheticization, Narrative, Narration, Feminism, Male Gaze, Feminist Cinema, Rebellion

SEN BENİ BİR DE DANS EDERKEN GÖR:
DANS FİLMLERİNDE KADIN BEDENİNİN NESNELEŞTİRİLMESİ

ÖZET

Bu tez, dans filmlerindeki kadın dansçıların nesneleştirilerek estetize edilmesini dans ve sinemanın kesiştiği bir alanda incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Dans ve sinema, kadın bedeninin nesneleştirilmesinin ayrıntılı olarak tartışıldığı alanlar olmakla birlikte (Mulvey ve Manning'in çalışmaları gibi), bu kesişen alan her iki disiplin için de tartışma ortamı oluşturmaktadır. Niteliksel film analizi kullanılarak *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Dirty Dancing* (1987) ve *Flashdance* (1983) filmleri anlatı ve anlatım tercihleri üzerinden analiz edilmiştir. Filmlerin anlatı yapılarındaki isyan ve özgürleşme vurgusu, kadın dansçıları nesneleştiren anlatım tercihleriyle sıklıkla çatışmaktadır. Ayrıca, özgürleşme süreçleri çoğu zaman kadın karakterin pasifleştirilmesi ya da cinselleştirilmesiyle bir araya gelmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Dans, Sinema, Nesneleştirme, Estetize Etme, Anlatı, Anlatım, Feminizm, Eril Bakış, Feminist Sinema, Başkaldırı

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1. INTRODUCTION

I vividly remember seeing a social media post of a university Dance Club and the minute I saw it, I could finally put a finger on what bothered me as a female dancer, about the perception of dance and helped me to shape some of the main questions of this thesis. The post (Figure 1.1) showed couples of dancers. Men standing in their elegant costumes, and women squatting on their high heels next to them, with their straight hairs tied up high in ponytails. Men were holding women's ponytails resembling leashes, "curbing" them. A series of questions rushed to my mind with anger piling up: "What does this have to do with dance?" "Why do sexual implications so often accompany dancing?" and "Why does this dynamic seem to position women in this way?" Picking up from these questions, I started thinking about the perception of the female body in dance and how they're positioned in the relationships with their male dance partners. I saw that I was neither first nor the only one that problematized this issue and with my later interest in video medium, this series of thoughts brought me to this thesis.



Figure 1.1. The social media post presenting women “on the leash” Source: budansocial (@budansocial), Instagram post, July 22, 2016, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BIJZWhLAoRY/>.

Considering their potential for visual appeal, both dance and cinema are fields where the positioning of the female body can start important discussions. These fields, where the possibilities of artistic expression have diversified, have enabled the creation of various narratives of liberation/emancipation by using different narrative methods. Dance films, which stand at the intersection of these fields, provide the opportunity to discuss these narratives of liberation through the body of a dancer reflected in the camera. My focus is on this reflection of the female dancer's emancipation narratives, both through the relations between narrative and narration of the films and through the training sequences that are frequently seen in these films. In these training sequences, women who are strengthened in terms of dance technique are also aestheticized and therefore the female dancer is objectified in the eyes of the male characters, camera and the audience. At the same time, these films feature narratives with "liberated", "emancipated" or "empowered" women. Yet, the objectification of women in the narration of the camera contradicts these narratives. This contradiction reveals an image of the female body that is open to exploitation due to these untimely cathartic "victories" of their narratives. In order to deepen this analysis, it is necessary to examine how the female body is represented in both dance and cinema and investigate what criteria emerge at the intersection of these fields. This thesis aims to address these points of discussion through the comparative analysis of three films produced in a similar period and to discuss how female dancer characters are positioned by analyzing the narratives and narrations of the films. Concluding from the analysis of these films, it is aimed to suggest an alternative to these criticized aspects about the relationship between the narrative and narration structures.

For the sake of a clear argumentation, it is necessary to agree on the terminology. Many forms are discussed under the name of dance films. Here, dance film is used as a term to describe a genre constructed on the events and developments around dancers, focusing on the act of dancing itself. As such, the cases where the film may use dance to open up narrative spaces that are narrated with the use of elements such as camera work, framing, rhythmization in the editing (Klein and Noeth 2011) will be the focal points of the analysis of this thesis. Another form of dance films is screendance, which consists of "hybrid works having both a dance performance and a filmic process as constitutive elements" (Davies 2019). With its intertwined focus on both dance and film, screendance differs

from the form of dance-screened, where the emphasis is on the dance performance that is appreciated through these recordings (Davies 2019). Both these forms provide important areas of investigation around dance films while my analysis will mostly rely on cinematic approaches.

1.1. On the Representation of Female Bodies in Dance Films

Dance, as a solidly embodied form, presents a field rich in opportunities to investigate the visual approaches to female bodies. Its aesthetic concerns create a female image to be shaped, and this shape is determined by sexual expression and perception of female bodies. In dance, bodies of women are made a focal point of pleasure for the audience (Adair 1992, 71-72). As an aesthetic form of art, aestheticization is not necessarily something to be criticized for dance, and this is valid for both male and female dancers. However, this aestheticization for women often occurs as sexualization and objectification for women and usually carries along the extremely thin and standardized body images, and this situation usually comes together with eating disorders (Wolff 1997, 423) accompanied by fragile images of women. Besides, in dance, the perception of male and female bodies is not presented and comprehended in the same way. Dance may be perceived as an emasculating activity, and this brings the problem of the differentiation of the gaze at male and female dancers (Hagan 2017, 4). The way this differentiation occurs shape the representation of the roles of dancers. Male dancers direct females, lift them, carry them around and throw them in the air and lead the dance. Hence, the female dancers are positioned as more passive in the roles within the performance. In addition to this difference in roles, female dancers' costumes display their femininities and sexualities by close fitting and low-cut clothes (Adair 1992, 72-74) (see again, also Figure 1.1). This contributes to women's presentation as "to-be-looked-at" objects (Mulvey 1975).

It is not surprising that attributions to Mulvey's fundamental work are made not only in texts about cinema but also dance. The gaze theory Mulvey defines has been applied to cinema, theater and dance for long years (Manning 1997, 153). The male gaze determines the position of women in these fields. As Chicago and Schapiro illustrate through Lee Bontecou's drawing "Unknown," even drawings can provoke the same fundamental

inquiry often explored in fields like dance and cinema: “Is woman passive or active?” (Chicago and Schapiro 2003, 42). Women’s positioning on stage and on the silver screen carry significantly parallel aspects. Women appear as the object of the voyeuristic gaze in cinema, and this happens on multiple levels: through the male characters looking at her, through the camera shooting her and through the audience watching the film (Mulvey 1975). Women are positioned as passive objects at the center of the gaze and gain value through the visual pleasure they provide. Mulvey states that even if they are unconscious, the patriarchal societies’ regulation of sexual differences is reflected through erotic gaze and objectification in films. The male gaze in traditional cinema positions an active male subject and a passive female object. Women become the objects of desire and are defined through their “to-be-looked-at-ness” in both story and for the audience. Cinema creates this through three types of gaze: camera, spectator and the character (Mulvey 1975).

In dance, as an objection to the positioning of women as passive objects, especially in classical forms such as ballet, later forms such as early modern dance, modern dance and postmodern dance arose (Manning 1997, 154) (the debate on which of these later forms could revert this gaze first is outside the concerns of this thesis). If we focus on the positioning of the dancer, the female dancer shifts her position from a to-be-looked-at object to a subject which expresses and narrates her emotions or thoughts. Even if it is a big step, this alone cannot be considered a complete “success.” Here the question shifts to what she is expressing, what she’s narrating. I consider this relation between these two shifts -the motivation behind the shift of her appearance and the importance of what she expresses- similar to the relation of narrative and narration in cinema. I think that creating an alternative in only one of them (narrative or narration) is not only not enough for objection, it also carries the risk of a “premature victory”. These “illusions of successes” will be one of the focal points of this thesis.

As a field that comes to life in the audience’s gaze, cinema is strongly related to the ways a subject is shown on the silver screen. The two main elements of cinema, narrative and narration are formed around many choices made before and during the making of the film. Narrative (or fabula) is “the story in all its semantic, chronological, and causal detail” (Cutting 2016, 1714); basically, it is the story told throughout the film. The structure of the text in narrative films often causes the audience to identify with certain

characters. This also promotes stereotypical gender representations. Hence, to break this ideological influence, feminist cinema often picks up techniques that reject traditional structures (Dodds 2001, 108-109). Narration (or *syuzhet*) consists of the ways chosen in film's style, meaning all aspects of the craft of filmmaking: editing, staging, lighting, framing, focus, color, etc. (Cutting 2016, 1714). It mainly describes how the story is told. Even if they are two intertwined elements, it is important to be able to distinguish them.

When it comes to feminist cinema practices, both narrative and narration have their significant milestones that need to be checked. From a narrative perspective, female characters must have a voice in the film and are active in the milestones of the narrative (Aston 1999) as Elaine Aston proposed for a feminist shift in theatre, but I think can be applied to cinema as well. When it comes to narration, feminist cinema often picks up radical structures in which it liberates the gaze of the camera and the audience, open an area of inquiry for patriarchal representation mechanisms (Mulvey 1975).

The aspects in which female bodies are the objects of looking and desire but never the ones creating them are repeating patterns in dance and cinema (Adair 1992, 78). Lindner's work aside, the intersection of dance and cinema needs to be further explored and evaluated in terms of both narrative and narration, and the social implications of this situation outside of the film medium.

The relationship and intersection between dance and cinema present itself as both a synergy and a conceptual tension. As can be quoted from Arendell, cinema and dance “share an uneasy relationship when it comes to primacy in the performance space,” however an area that holds a potential for new explorations can sprout from this intersection as well (Arendell 2016, 1). This field is practiced in different ways, while one of them is dance films where dance is a fundamental element of the narrative, another is screendance, where dance performance is produced specifically for the camera. When the history of screendance is taken into consideration, an investigation on the mediated body, the relationship between movement and space and the gaze are included as key areas.

The boundary between stage and screen has been blurred with the emergence of screendance as a separate field. As Arendell refers to Dodds’ “video dance body” definition as “technologically mediated”, the body exists between the physical movement

of it and a televisual apparatus (Arendell 2016, 3). With this relationship, the authenticity of performance becomes the subject of discussion. Dodds highlights that while the offer of live performance is uniqueness, that of screendance is permanence (Dodds 2004). This element of permanence determines the perception of the dancing body, especially of the female body since it's often subjected to the objectifying male gaze (Arendell 2016).

While the relationship between screendance and feminist theory can be critical, this criticism can also give way to productive fields where screendance functions as a tool that can be utilized to criticize the objectifying gaze female bodies are subjected to. Hagan's works can be considered in this manner. She asks: "What is it about dance films that makes it a space that welcomes female and feminist participants to challenge gender roles, gendered and racialized stereotypes and take control of the presentation of the body that dance or film alone cannot?" (Hagan 2016, 50). Hagan highlights the historical tensions around dance by bringing up the contradicting role of romantic-era ballerinas' as both virtuous icons and commodified bodies together with contemporary discussions of body imagery, economic accessibility and race in professional dance settings. While doing so, she also puts an emphasis on the ways the female dancers have claimed the cinematic and choreographic gaze by positioning the female dancer as an active subject rather than a passive object that creates a visual and bodily meaning (Hagan 2016, 51–52).

While taking the tension of the perception of female bodies as subjects or objects into consideration, Sprague draws attention to a comparison between advertising, commercial Hollywood cinema and screendance. Based on Sprague's reference to Vivian Sobchack's concept of the "lived-body" as interpreted by Merleau-Ponty, it can be argued that screendance allows for an image of the body that is expressive and has a power based on its intention in movement (Sprague 2010, 32). Here, it can be said that the distinction between the presentation of the body as a subject or an object has one of its bases on the movement intention of the female dancer. This phenomenon also determines women's position between the "bearers of the meaning" and "makers of the meaning" as Sprague refers to Mulvey (Sprague 2010, 5-6).

Carrying on from the relation between cinema and dance, it will be useful to define some areas where dance films use cinematographic methods to highlight dance performance and shape the audience's experience. As Preston quotes from Briginshaw, the resulting

meaning is expanded from choreography with the movement of the camera (Preston 2007). She also states that the recorded material, bodies and subjects are choreographed by the director/choreographer in such a way that the audience is moved to experience this new perception of time, space and kinesthetic response in an altered way (Preston 2007). One of the fundamental elements of camerawork in dance films that is used to “draw meaning out of a dancer’s body” is a close-up, as Brannigan emphasizes as she forms the relationship between the silent films and dance films (Brannigan 2004). According to her statement, the cinematic tools provide many ways to create meaning and/or emphasis in dance films (Brannigan 2004):

“This leads filmmakers to experiment with various rendering techniques such as slow motion, multiple-exposure, repetition, reverse-motion and digital post-production techniques such as image ‘scratching.’ These can all serve to produce new forms of choreographic practice, new modes of cine-choreography.”

Hence, dance is choreographed in editing as well, and this creates a meaning specific to the screen. This meaning differs radically from watching a live performance, where the audience may leave the theatre with different experiences since even if their gaze is also directed, there is no guarantee that the audience will watch the same thing. Meanwhile, the look is fixed in a dance film that is screened in cinema (or at home), the director and the editor decides what parts of the performance and performer the audience is going to see (Mitoma et al. 2002). This enables the change in the narrative in the editing and an interpretation or development of the dance performance. While this is very much integrated with what is shown on the screen, it is also related to what is not shown, as a way to create tension.

These discussions present an area of screendance that can be referred to for the criticism of the presentation of the bodies of female dancers in front of the camera and they also offer an alternative way that can be adapted while trying to find new ways of expression of female dancers. Here, an important distinction is made between the positioning of female dancers as active or passive roles, meaning a distinction between being a subject or an object –a discussion that is put forward in Mulvey’s arguments and is referred to frequently. The intention of movement of the dancer here is presented as an important principle that can be questioned while analyzing dance performances that are created for

the silver screen and narrated through the camerawork. I think this phenomenon can also be investigated in the performances where the dance is performed with a partner and while discussing the roles of the dancers in this manner. Meaning, to ask whether the female dancer is active or passive or moving with intention or being moved by her partner is critical for this evaluation. These power dynamics present an important criterion for role determination since these performances are permanent, recorded, and reflected in the eyes of the audience. It is important to notice the cinematographic choices in these recordings, since the meaning is transferred by film medium.

1.2. On the Relationship with the Audience

Kinesthesia in dance and identification in cinema express themselves in both stylistic and expressive aspects of these two disciplines. The kinesthesia or kinesthetic empathy towards the female dancer in later (meaning early modern, modern or postmodern) forms of dance enables the audience to be able to identify themselves with her physically and defies the voyeuristic gaze towards the female dancer (Manning 1997, 163). In classical ballet, extremely difficult movements of female dancers appear as very easy to do, and the dancers look like they have no weight but are very strong. However, later forms of dance don't hide the sweat and the physicality of the dancer, they facilitate the kinesthetic empathy, hence the identification with the female dancer and address her as a subject rather than an object. However, even if this identification is a significant step, it should not be considered sufficient as is, as stated above, because the focus on what the identified body is narrating is still a matter of focus.

The relationship between looking and touching, physical experience and the visual pleasure comes close in haptics, where looking becomes so intimate that it becomes similar to touching (Caddy 2021, 59). However, it should not be confused with the relation between looking and experiencing. Looking can feel as intimate as touching but it may not be the case for experiences of dancers. What is experienced by the dancer may not be reflected directly to the audience through the medium of video, since they are developed in different media (Foster 1997, 255-256).

Parallel to this relationship between the performance and audience in dance, cinema offers identification with its characters as an interaction through the silver screen. In a film with a structural narrative (meaning, not as a part of a post-dramatic postmodern cinema), the narrative can have different purposes while interacting with the audience. From an interdisciplinary approach, an Aristotelian narrative, mainly a tragedy, aims to identify the audience with its characters for a “purgation” or “purification” by the presentation of a catharsis (Schaper 1968). In cinema, this type of narrative constructs its plot structure so that the audience becomes emotionally integrated with the characters. To be able to carry on this identification relationship of the narrative, the narration picks up a seamless strategy where the audience is placed in a position where their observation feels like witnessing. On the other hand, some narratives object to this relationship between the audience and the characters and the concept of catharsis. For instance, by picking up the alienation concept of Bertolt Brecht in the narration and aiming to interfere with complete identification of the audience with the characters, these narratives aim to create an area of inquiry of the socio-political conditions that shape the narrative events through this alienation (Koutsourakis 2018).

Considering these relationships, the films and dance performances form with their audiences, it is possible to say that identification in cinema and kinesthetic empathy in dance are important tools to investigate while taking the narrative and narration into consideration. Thus, parallels can be seen in the strategies followed in the fields of dance and cinema, both in the relationship established with the audience and in the ways the female body is represented.

1.3. Method and Significance of the Study

This thesis investigates the visual and narrative representation of female dancers in dance films *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Dirty Dancing* (1987), and *Flashdance* (1983) using qualitative film analysis. These films are chosen due to their close production dates and similar themes. What is focused on within the scope of this thesis is the representation of the female dancers in dancing and especially dance training sequences in these films. While doing this, it is crucial to point to the places the narrative aspects and narration choices contradict, to the ways through which female bodies are aestheticized and

objectified without a narrative drive and aspects to consider while opposing this visual language.

How an issue is told and the textual and visual language cannot be thought apart from what they represent. As Bordo states clearly, “images are never ‘just’ pictures” (Bordo 2003, 455). Building an image comes with its context, such as the time it was built, by whom it was built, its place, and by what ways it was built (Adair 1992, 81). What is represented through these images acquires a meaning in the perception. Also, the meaning in this perception is not constant, it is shaped by various interactions such as economic, ideological, and aesthetic factors (Gledhill 1999, 171). It changes within different cultures, which is defined by Hanna as “the system of ideas about the nature of the world and the expected behavior of people in it” and it is expressed through art, texts, dance, drama etc. (Hanna 1988, 28). Hence, it is crucial to think about the meaning that is in our work and can be understood even if it is not intended. When it comes to the discussions on gender in the fields of dance and film, these implications behind the representations become even more critical because the implied meanings place women in such a position that what is said about a woman can easily be reflected in all women. This results in a shallow generalization (special to women and maybe other “others”) that is insufficient (Doane 1982, 133) and it is crucial to point to the power relations that cause this difference in this generalization to be able to analyze and find a way to address the female audience to overcome it (Doane 1982, 143).

The reason behind this discussion is to highlight the significance of such an investigation that is carried around the perception and expression of female bodies, because the issue has a strong response in the social perception of aesthetics and practice. Socially, the subjectivity of men is under a greater danger of getting affected by the fear of lacking than women, because women are already associated with it (Silverman 1999, 101). So, it is considered to be important to establish the masculine images firmly, for the men to be the builders rather than the ones being built, or “makers of meaning” rather than “bearers”. Female body is seen and experienced as incomplete by women as well because of its physically and socially produced perception (Wolff 1997, 421). Hence, it is crucial to consider the implications behind the representation of lacking and completion when it

comes to perception of femininity. Teaching or training can be an important element that fills this gap between the one lacking and complete, with a fixation of these statuses.

In dance films to be considered, the aestheticization of female dancers can be evaluated from the perspective of both dance and cinema, with a layer added to the intersecting field. This added layer contains two things together. The first is an aestheticizing and objectifying lens through which the male protagonist, the camera and the audience look at the female dancer during the dance performance and training sequences. This is seen in the narration choices of the films. The second is the dangerous contradiction between a lifestyle-based, exploitative sense of rebellion in the narratives and the ways the narratives reassign the positions of characters. The axis of character development in terms of dancing abilities in the training sequences go together with the aestheticization in the visual representation of the body of a female dancer. When we analyze the training sequences of films *Strictly Ballroom* and *Dirty Dancing* from this perspective, we can see that as the female protagonists in these films learn to dance in a certain way, they not only become better dancers, but also begin to come front with their sexualities, becoming more “attractive” in the eyes of the men who teach them to dance and in the eyes of the audience, and the reason behind this change is not addressed. This narrative resembles the one of *Pygmalion*, where the sculptor Pygmalion creates Galatea as a companion for himself. While doing so, he both shapes her physically and makes her an acceptable member of the cultural society (Linial 2009). As opposed to this, *Flashdance* presents a self-taught dancer, who is active in the narrative structure of the film, offering a different perception of the dance-learning journey. While remaining within the emphasis on spectacular and sexualizing aspects of the dance performance and perception in the narration, the narrative goes the opposite way in this film. Meaning, as the dancer pursues a more structured form of dancing rather than a performance that aims to provide sexual pleasure, the entire narrative is given through the objectifying lens of the male gaze in its narration as presented by Mulvey. The conclusion of this contradiction carries the risk of narrative that is about an independent and emancipated figure of a woman that is undermined by the narration choices that objectifies her. Detailed analysis of the narrative and narration structures of the three films will be provided in the upcoming chapters.

2. ANALYSIS OF *STRICTLY BALLROOM* (1992) IN TERMS OF VISUAL AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURES

2.1 Analysis of the Narrative Structure of *Strictly Ballroom*: A Rebellion to Dance Conventions

Strictly Ballroom is a film with a target audience of teenagers and young adults, about a dancing couple creating an unconventional dance performance for the Pan-Pacific Grand Prix Dancing Championship. This “rebellion” is interpreted as a suicide of their dance career because of their opposition to the classic ballroom convention. Throughout the film, the discussion on who will be the partner of the protagonist male dancer, Scott, is present. At some point, Scott decides to partner with a beginner dancer, Fran, who is willing to dance his steps which are different from the requirements of the championship. Scott teaches Fran to dance his steps, and they get prepared for the championship.

Scott is an experienced dancer who is expected to win the Pan-Pacific Grand Prix Dancing Championship. However, he insists on dancing his own steps, and it is expected to bring him a certain disqualification, instead of the prize. Because of this insistence, his previous dance partner, Liz, leaves him and he desperately needs a new partner only three weeks before the championship. While Scott is only interested in dancing his own steps, his mother, Shirley, tries her best to find him a partner who will dance the conventional steps with him at the championship. Meanwhile, Scott is approached by Fran, a beginner dancer who wants to be his dance partner. After Scott clearly objects to this, she confronts him and convinces him to partner up with her, showing willingness to participate in dancing Scott’s steps. After this first conflict between them, they begin training to dance Rumba and Fran gets better at dancing. During their one-hour practice, Scott experiences a creative block, where he needs to come up with some steps. As he is trying to improvise, Fran tries to interrupt him to suggest her steps. Even if Scott does not want to listen to her and ignores her, she dances her steps anyway, which are obviously shaped by Spanish rhythms. This affects Scott and for the first time, he acts humble and asks Fran to teach him those steps. During this training, while we see that Fran is a talented dancer and a

fast learner, we also see that she falls in love with Scott. This sequence also reveals that Scott's father, Doug, also dances his own steps.

Until the day of the dance championship performances, multiple confrontations and misunderstandings happen throughout the film about who will become Scott's partner. Shirley arranges Tina, another experienced dancer who becomes suddenly available, to be Scott's partner. When Fran learns this, she is devastated by this news and runs out of the scene, Scott follows her backstage and she unwillingly agrees that Tina is a better partner for Scott, and they share a dance. This dance, accompanied by the song "Perhaps Perhaps Perhaps", with its lyrics "if you can't make your mind up we'll never get started" makes Scott make up his mind that he wants to dance with Fran. After this dance, Scott "announces" that he wants to dance his steps with Fran. This news devastates Shirley and she talks to Fran and convinces her to give up, go home and leave this behind. Scott runs after Fran, talks her into dancing with him again. In his talk, his main argument is "I want to dance with you" and even if Fran was the one who convinced him in the beginning, and now the emphasis is on Scott doing her a favor by accepting to dance with her. Meanwhile, his main motivation is not to dance with Fran but dance his steps, which follows along quickly in the conversation. This is Fran and Scott's second conflict since Fran's confrontation with Scott before her training where she convinces him to dance with her. After he convinces Fran, while he is there, he meets her family. Her family mocks with his stylistic way of dancing -which Fran also criticized to be "too much" previously- and teaches him Paso Doble. Scott is now somehow part of this family as well and their conflict is resolved around dance.

Scott and Fran's third conflict happens at the Pan-Pacific Grand Prix Dancing Championship finals. Before the finals, Liz wants to get back with Scott and Shirley is over the moon with the news. This brings back Scott's chance to win the Pan-Pacifics, which is his dream and what he has been training for since he was six years old, as emphasized through the film multiple times. Also, he is tricked by Barry Fife, the head of the Australian Dancing Federation (ADF), into thinking that winning the prize is more important than dancing his own steps. He convinces Scott by telling him that this was what his father, Doug, did in the past and lost the championship and all Doug wants is to see his son be the champion. Scott is convinced that he should do it, at least for his father.

On the day of the performances, we see that Scott is already waiting to dance with Liz, and Fran is back with the beginners with a female partner, and she is furious. Scott runs after her one more time and tries to defend himself by telling her that it is hard for him, but she confronts him and tells him that her situation is the one which is hard because it means that she is back in beginners, where she serves others more than she dances. They get separated as Fran storms out and Scott is pulled into a heated argument among his parents about whether he should dance his steps or not at his final performance. He finally decides that he should dance his steps and he runs after Fran one last time. Their last conflict is not even a conflict. Scott, who has just wronged Fran by not even showing remorse that he has chosen a different partner, approaches her and tells her that there is no time to explain and asks if she still wants to dance with him. Without hesitation, she agrees. Despite all obstacles, they perform their big performance together, presented on the stage as “Scott Hastings and his partner”, finally dancing outside the convention on stage at the Pan-Pacifics, and everyone not only admires them, but also joins them. The movie ends with a catharsis in a crowded dance scene where everyone dances, which is surreal. As Lindner (2011) states, the dancers’ bodily tensions between the perceived and the performed body in the training sequences in the early parts of the film are resolved in their final reunion. This final dance is also a cathartic moment that this tension finally relieves and both the performance and the relationship between the couple are admired.

Film mainly discusses the process of Scott's desire to dance with his own steps and his rebellion against the “traditional” ballroom steps. At the point where he gets stuck, he finds the solution in the steps he learns by listening to the rhythm of his heart. Where he finds the solution is the traditional Spanish rhythms, which also brings a sense of multiculturalism to the film, considering it is an Australian production.

The memorized numbers in dances are not enough for Scott, and he finds a way to improvise to express himself openly. Other than one step Fran teaches Scott while she’s training, the audience has no idea about how Fran would express herself through dance. In the plot, whether Scott will get the prize he has been training for since he was 6 years old is the central question and the main goal to be achieved. It is emphasized that he has been working for it all his dancing life, his family has built a life around it. This is presented as his background story and mentioned throughout the film several times. But

similar information about Fran is never presented. We don't know what she aims for in life or what kind of childhood she had. The only goal of her we see throughout the movie is to dance with Scott - and to emphasize, her dream is not presented as dancing in a championship or win an award or a similar artistic goal, it is just to dance with Scott with his steps. What we know about Fran is that she also likes to dance outside the dance convention, but we don't know about her artistic motivation or stance. In this film, even if Fran is not completely passive in the narrative and she also contributes to his dancing and convinces Scott to dance with her in the beginning of their conflicts, we see that this confrontational side of her gets wiped away. Fran gets dizzy with love and is under the influence of Scott.

One of the important points that is not addressed in the narrative of the film is the difference in economic statuses of Fran's and Scott's family. While Scott's family is not extremely rich but in a good place, having a dance studio and money to supply for the shiny costumes, Fran's family is seen running a small market in a small neighborhood. While Scott's family's studio is in the center of the town, with an advertising billboard at the rooftop, Fran's family lives next to train tracks, dancing to its rhythm. The economic difference is seen on the screen but is never addressed, causing a silent agreement of this inequality between the couple. It never comes up as an issue but may be one of the reasons why people think Fran as an unusual partner for Scott or one of the reasons she was "unattractive" in the beginning, in a cliché way. In order to be able to have deductions on this issue we must have more information about the background of Fran and her family, which is not provided in the narrative of the film as stated before. We only know that she lost her mother and this is an information we get from a small sentence formed by her grandmother. The less the audience is informed about the backgrounds of the characters, especially female characters, the less they can identify with them, the less the characters are alive, and the audience can understand them. Thinking from this perspective, it is possible to see a drastic difference between the female and male protagonist of the film.

When we consider the flow of the film, it can be seen that in the montage sequence where Fran learns Rumba from Scott, what convinces Scott to work with Fran for a longer period is Fran's unprompted suggestion of the steps she "practiced at home". The fact that Fran only refers to her origin as "home" shows Fran's distance and detachment from her

“home” and her family in this narrative. This is also reflected in her answer “just Fran” when Scott asks her last name before the aforementioned montage sequence. Fran begins the narrative at a distance from home, a point that becomes more understandable when we see her conflicts with her conservative father. Although the major rebellion in the movie is Scott's rebellion against ballroom dancing, Fran's rebellion against her family also accompanies it but it does not last long. She gains more freedom from her family as much as Scott gets involved in it. As she breaks away from her father, she holds on to Scott. She rebels against a male figure in her life but gets under the influence of another one.

2.2 Narration in Relation to Narrative in *Strictly Ballroom*

Strictly Ballroom picks up a Brechtian narration in one of the storylines of the film. As a part of Baz Luhrmann's red curtain trilogy, there are theatre curtains at the beginning and the end of the film which announce to the audience that they're going to watch a performance, and the show is over. In a sense, the film is structured as a mockumentary with narrations from Scott's family and some members of the dance federation. The narrators appear between the scenes, usually after a conflict, and they state their opinion while their names appear on the screen as if they are stating their opinion for a documentary or an investigation and some timestamps appear in a similar way. While an element of humor is created through the exaggerated narratives of the narrators, at the same time, these exaggerated reactions to the rebellion against the dance conventions indicate the director's invitation to the audience to look at this subject from a distance. The film starts to shape its narration as if it is a crime documentary on this rebellion, hence the audience perceives these conventions as absurd. All these factors result in the alienation of the audience from the film's dance conventions storyline, making them realize they are in front of a screen.

The most obvious example of this narration style throughout the film is the part where Barry Fife, the ADF head, tells a made-up story of Doug dancing out-of-convention in the Pan Pacific finals and losing it (Figure 2.1). This lie appears on screen in a stylistic narration which includes exaggerated performances, expressions and makeup and once more, red curtains.



Figure 2.1. Barry's false narration of past events

This alienating narration style is not continuously carried through the film. Especially in the scenes between Fran and Scott, the narration becomes more seamless, exaggerating the emotions and the bodily performances of the dancers using extreme close-ups and fast cuts. In these parts of the film, the audience more easily identifies with the characters and delves into the story. Considering that the scenes with the exaggerated narrations are usually auditions or performances, and that the scenes between Fran and Scott are usually either rehearsal scenes or scenes about the pair's relationship, there are *mise-en-scène* differences between the two lines of the film as would be expected. However, considering this factor together with the difference in narration, it is easier for the audience to criticize the dance conventions and identify with the couple. Hence, even if the general narration preference of the film is Brechtian, the audience identifies with the main characters and root for the relationship.

The scopophilic gaze that is directed towards women in films presents a hierarchical dominance between the one looking and the one being looked at (Mulvey 1975). It is not unusual when the one being looked at are women, since their objectification lies within their position as the receiver. However, when this gaze is reversed, it feels unusual, and the gazing woman is perceived as a threat in a position that should be either punished or returned immediately (Williams 1984, 65). In *Strictly Ballroom*, the first conscious encounter between the main characters, Fran and Scott, begin with Fran peeping on Scott (Figure 2.2) who is performing a difficult and out-of-ordinary dance number of his. He looks amazed while he watches himself dance in the mirror. The camera often picks up



Figure 2.2. Fran secretly watching Scott

from the perspective of the mirror, showing us Scott from a scopophilic and self-centered view. At the end of his performance, as the coda he, in the literal meaning of the word, hugs the mirror and gets scared by the reflection of Fran (Figure 2.3). Scott's relation with the mirror reflects his self-perception and how he sees Fran. While he is amazed by himself, he is scared of Fran. This is a two-way fear. He is afraid of Fran's both appearance and presence, meaning what scares him is both what he's looking at and being looked at, both reflected on the mirror he just hugged.



Figure 2.3. Scott gets scared of Fran's reflection as he hugs the mirror



Figure 2.4. Fran at the beginning of the montage sequence (close-up)

Later on, as they interact, we see that he feels disrupted by her and he rejects her request to dance his steps even though dancing his steps is what he truly wants. He states that a beginner dancer cannot pick up his steps and is unwilling to teach her. After her confrontation with him by saying that he is afraid and “life with fear is a life half-lived” -stated as a proverb in Spanish multiple times throughout the film- he agrees to practice with her for one hour. During this first conversation, the general appearance of Fran is designed to be repelling (Figure 2.4). She has big glasses, obvious skin issues, messy hair and untidy but comfortable-looking practice clothes. Lighting also contributes to this look with dramatic shadows. Close-up framing of her emphasizes her appearance over her dancing ability and when she’s shown from a wider shot, she looks either shy or clumsy



Figure 2.5. Fran at the beginning of the montage sequence (wide shot)

(Figure 2.5). This stereotypical beginner look can be marked as a starting point for her appearance in the film and their long dance training journey. This journey is narrated by a montage sequence together with try-outs Scott still is attending (even though he also practices with Fran in secret) and marking of a calendar to emphasize how little time is left for Scott to choose a new partner.



Figure 2.6. Fran at the end of the montage sequence (close-up)

During this montage sequence, she not only learns to dance his steps, but also her appearance gets noticeably improved (Figure 2.6). Her hair, skin, clothing and accessories change to highlight her beauty. Also, the development in dance brings together costumes that express more of her femininity, smoother skin and a suddenly-fixed eyesight. Scott shapes Fran in any way he can, while he teaches him to dance, he even changes her appearance. As a cliché, the woman with the glasses whose sexuality is repressed, takes off her glasses and becomes the object of desire, a spectacle (Doane 1982, 139). The fact that this action is done by the male dance instructor in this sequence highlights the power relations between the couple. Scott does not even give a proper reason to Fran why he thinks taking her glasses off might help with her dance ability. This is purely for the sake of her appearance and is not a step to take during the practice. It is practical for a dancer to wear lenses instead of glasses during a performance to avoid the light reflection from the glasses or dropping them; however, as long as they are secure and necessary, a clear vision is more preferable during training sessions. What is prioritized here by Scott is how she looks rather than how she sees her surroundings. This is impractical for the

dancer and is a move made solely for the purpose of her appearance. So, a tension is built between the body the dancer performs in and the body the audience watches.

Lindner (2011) points at this tension between the perceived and the ideal bodies of dancers. She refers to the perceived body as the body the dancer physically senses as they dance, while the ideal body is how the dancer is seen by the audience (Lindner 2011, 5).

“What I have argued here is that the alienated bodily existence associated with the female dancer is variously articulated on screen. Tensions arising from the incompatibility between the perceived and ideal body tend to be addressed in the films' initial training/rehearsal sequences.”

This tension between the perceived and ideal bodies of dancers is reflected in an alienation of the body when it comes to female dancers, where they are “ideally” being looked at but they are also the performers who are active (Lindner 2011, 14). I believe this bodily alienation can be considered in relation to the narrative structure as well. When we take the example of the training montage sequence, it is seen that Fran is an active individual, who confronts Scott and convinces him to dance with her while also showing him some of her steps. However, she is also passive, in terms of being taught. This tension shows itself in the narration as the audience sees the transformation from an “active” but “ugly” Fran, to a “taught” and “beautiful” one.

The aforementioned montage sequence is not the only dance training part of the film. Another is the scene where Scott learns Paso Doble, a Spanish dance form, from Fran’s grandmother and father. This is an intense experience for him where he unlocks a level of his dancing abilities and finds his inner rhythm. The fast cuts and extreme close-ups to the steps and his face highlight this experience and creates a kinesthetic empathy in the audience. Hence, the audience easily identifies with him through his emotions. Unlike Fran, he does not fall in love with his dance teacher and his appearance only becomes sweatier, which is highly realistic. The male dancer is shown as strong and independent, and he appears in action and in control.

As stated before, the narration style differs between the contest/performances and the scenes of Fran and Scott. In the final scene of the film, these two contexts come together where Scott and Fran perform together in the finals, also announcing their love. However,

this scene gains more significance by its narration. With the unrealistically strong support from the audience, in the last scene the stage gets filled with couples dancing with peace, light and glamour, and this *mise-en-scène* resolves the tension in the whole narrative, causing a surreal catharsis. However, considering the elements used throughout the film that caused the Brechtian alienation, this scene has a different style of narration; meaning it does not carry a claim of stylistic narration while consciously breaking reality. It is a seamless but surreal final scene where everybody who comes to dance joins our couple.

All in all, the sequences in the film where an Aristotelian narration is picked up invite the audience to identify with the couple and look at Fran from Scott's eyes. It is an aestheticizing and weakening gaze, where she is not encouraged to be the one who is looking, and it is favored for her to be looked at for the pleasure of audience. This places her in a lower position from Scott, where she is (sometimes literally) shaped by him and he is in the position of power in their relationship. In order to be a better dancer, it was not enough for Fran to be taught to dance, she also had to give up on her confronting side, fall in love with her teacher and look beautiful for the camera. Because she would not be able to dance with Scott if she did not keep forgiving him and thus, she would not have the chance to get out of the beginners' and go through the training which changed her physically.

3. ANALYSIS OF *DIRTY DANCING* (1987) IN TERMS OF VISUAL AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURES

3.1 Narrative of *Dirty Dancing*: A Rebellion to Family

The film is about the visit of the Houseman family to the Catskills resort where numerous activities take place, and families have fun and relax. One of the daughters of the family, Baby, develops a relationship with one of the dance teachers of the resort while learning to dance the Mambo from him to help another dancer, Penny. Baby is portrayed as the exemplary daughter of the family who always listens to her father, is honest with him and wants to become an economist to help the Peace Corps. While she is portrayed as the one who helps out the staff working in the resort, her sister Lisa is more concerned about her dresses and shoes, as encouraged by their mother. Hence, there is a solid difference between the sisters, while Baby is prone to discuss social and political issues, Lisa is primarily concerned about her relationships with the boys around her. While we see that Baby has a very positive relationship with her father and he is proud of her, her manners, honesty, helpfulness and educational success, she has a more conflicting relationship with her sister, highlighting their aforementioned differences. Throughout the film, Baby has very limited interaction with her mother.

Baby, as a curious and helpful individual, begins exploring the resort and starts attending activities. One of the activities was a social dance course held by Penny. In this scene, it is seen that Baby is having a particularly difficult time with her dance training. At the same time the lines in the scene indicate the generally accepted gender approach. To elaborate, the examples of the lines “Oh, come on, ladies. God wouldn't have given you maracas if he didn't want you to shake 'em.” and “Remember, he's the boss on the dance floor, if nowhere else.” imply that the female body should be presented as an object of pleasure for men and that men should especially lead the dance floor. Considering the first line's discourse on how dance should instrumentalize the female body, the fact that men are the leaders of the dance floor in the second line may also point to their dominance over the female body.

Later, Baby curiously explores the resort. Here she overhears the resort manager's warnings to his employees. These warnings are that the young female guests at the resort should be given every service they ask for no matter who (even their dogs), also that the trainers should teach them everything they ask for, but that they should refrain from having relationships with the young female guests while doing so. "No funny business" the manager Max warns the employees and is met with frustration. Hence, while higher class women such as guests are taught to seduce, lower class men such as workers of the resort are taught to abstain. This tension forms one of the main conflicts in the film.

Baby is highly impressed by Johnny and Penny's dance performance at the opening event. Later, she wanders off to guest-forbidden employee quarters to escape from the attention of Neil, who is the son of the manager. While helping Billy (Johnny's cousin) carry some watermelons, she witnesses another dance atmosphere in the resort, dirty dancing. This sort-of-underground dance style that looks like intercourse with the clothes on, has strong sexual implications. Baby, who is protected under his father's shield until then, is shocked by the scene she sees. As something she has never witnessed before, we see that it amazes her. She watches Johnny and Penny dirty dance, and once again, is impressed by their performance. She also learns that they are not in fact a couple, but close friends. Later in that scene, Johnny teaches Baby to dirty dance, and we see that she is shaken by this experience, dizzy with its intensity. Considering she came here escaping from Neil, who her father thinks is a good match for her and she has no interest in, it is possible to think that she found an alternative to what her family suggests for her. This can be considered for her as an escape route where she deviates from her family's expectations. This dance culture where the line between sex and dance is very thin and their relation is highly stressed throughout the narrative, can be considered as her rebellion against a controlling family.

Later on, Baby learns that Penny is pregnant, and the father of the baby is Robbie, another waiter who is currently developing bonds with Lisa, Baby's sister. Penny or anyone around her willing to help her cannot afford the abortion. Baby wants to help her and is shocked that Robbie is not willing to help. She was raised so purely that she cannot even imagine someone acting so heartlessly. She is also sincerely concerned that her sister is developing a relationship with Robbie, and she is afraid that Lisa cannot see this side of

him, since he successfully made Penny believe that he loved her and did not do anything about the baby after he found out that she is pregnant. Baby does not want the same thing to happen to her sister since she is sure that Lisa cannot figure this side out of him by herself.

In order to take action on the subject, Baby makes her first confrontation in the film and faces Robbie. She tries to convince him to pay for the abortion and is shocked by the answer she gets. Robbie mentions that “girls who lie around like this” end up in such situations and he does not want to do anything on the subject. Baby, who is portrayed as a helpful girl with big dreams but is very naive and protected, starts to crawl out of her shell and react. She pours a whole pitcher of water on Robbie and humiliates him. This can be considered as a starting point for her confrontations, since until this moment, she is seen only as a compatible girl, who hung out with Neil even if she did not want to and attended activities that she does not really enjoy. However, at this point she starts to act as she thinks and in a manner that is not expected from a “daddy’s little girl”.

Just when she starts to act independently and makes confrontations that are unexpected of her but are strong, she searches for a solution with her father. She asks for the money Penny needs from her father and this interaction between them reveals the nature of their relationship. Her father is portrayed as a very helpful man who is respectful to his daughters and the relation of trust between them is solid. When Baby asks for the money from her father without giving a proper explanation, he accepts it as long as it is not illegal and is for helping another person. This reveals that Baby’s helpfulness is mostly encouraged by her father and also, she can trust him in any situation. He is also positioned as a savior in difficult times, which will remind itself throughout the film.

Even though now they have the money for the abortion -thanks to Dr. Houseman- Penny still cannot undergo the operation since the doctor is in town only during the time Penny and Johnny should be performing in Sheldrake, another resort of Catskills. When this is revealed, Johnny jokingly proposes that Baby fills in the spot for Penny, which shortly becomes an opinion that is supported by Billy and Penny. Because they stress that Johnny is such a talented instructor that he can teach anyone to dance in a very short period. Since Baby does not even know the Merengue, Johnny still thinks that she cannot learn Mambo for a performance that will take place in a week but has no chance but to accept. Hence,

once again, the male talented dancer who initially does not want to teach the female beginner dancer to dance, has a very limited time to shape an excellent dancer from the beginner in front of him. It is stressed that this is only possible with the excellent teaching skills of Johnny, and Baby is willing to go down this path to help Penny. The difference in Baby's motive to care for the female characters around her seems to be partly shaped by their background. She wants to help Penny since she is an excellent dancer who had a difficult childhood and is from an economically lower class and as opposed to her, Lisa, who Baby positions herself slightly higher than, is the spoiled daughter of a doctor. While Penny regrets her relationship with Robbie, Lisa is on the lookout to "go all the way" with him.

With this, the training of Baby begins. In a short time, it is revealed that she is particularly having difficulties in dancing and needs concrete assistance. This training is, once again, narrated through a montage sequence. While Johnny is the main instructor of her dance, we see that Penny is also involved and helps her learn. At a point where the process is blocked, and Johnny yells at Baby, she makes her second confrontation by telling him that the performance is in two days, and he has not even shown her "the lift" yet. Johnny seems to take her seriously only when she yells at him and he takes her to a nearby place and practices balance with her on a tree trunk that has fallen over a creek. Even though she is scared at first, she walks on the trunk and gets better at it. After practicing balance, which actually requires longer practices acquiring, they start practicing the lift. This move requires two things: balance and trust. She needs to trust him in order not to hurt him while trying to do the move. Hence, they start practicing in water, which provides them with better buoyancy and a safer zone to fall into. At the same time, plants the seeds of the sexual tension between them. Even if nothing romantic or sexual happened between them yet, it is now expected of the couple because of this romantic setting.

The performance night arrives, and Baby and Johnny perform at the Sheldrake, they are presented as "Johnny Castle and his partner" and the performance is generally good, only with small fails from Baby's side. But it serves its purpose: getting paid and not losing Penny and Johnny's gig there. Baby seems to have significantly improved as a dancer. However, her previous confrontation with Johnny and the practice at the lake seem to serve nothing since she cannot perform the lift. After the performance, they get nervous

when they spot the elderly couple among the audience who are staying in the Catskills resort but convince themselves that the couple did not see them.

When they get back, they see that Penny's abortion operation did not go as planned, she was not even properly anesthetized and is in a lot of pain. Among the crowd waiting around her, nobody can think of a solution that can save her life. Baby runs to call her father for help. Her father once again comes to the rescue and saves Penny's life, and she even has the possibility to have a child in the future. However, on the other hand, all the conditions that require Baby to go on stage in her place, such as keeping her job by making sure that her pregnancy does not become public and keeping the abortion secret, end in a negative outcome. Baby's efforts to help those around her and going to a lot of trouble for the performance, are inevitably in vain. On top of that, her father realizes that Baby has not been completely honest with him, their trust relationship is damaged, and Baby has her first argument with her father throughout the film. Her father forbids her from having anything to do with "these people" after this argument.

Baby is shaken by her conflict with her father and finds consolidation with Johnny. She goes to Johnny's room, and they start to dirty dance. This crosses the thin line between the dance and sex as presented in the film and they end up having intercourse. In a way, in order to take revenge on her father, she begins a relationship with Johnny, the groundwork for which has already been prepared, and she even takes this relationship further than would have been expected of her. She is only liberated from the influence of her father when she is sexually active and is with another man. This establishes a parallel between sex and rebellion and makes dirty dancing an intermediary between them. It has been a path to reach this result, a premise that prepares the ground in a way. Here, the fact that the conflict with the family and the way to object to injustice is through sexuality, reduces Baby's struggle to a resistance only within her lifestyle, which allows someone who wants to make a difference in the world by joining the Peace Corps to turn into a "rebel" (in her father's eyes) who seeks solace in the arms of a man. Nevertheless, there is another layer to this relationship. Here, Johnny states his status in the resort as sexually exploited, who has been given many keys by the ladies who are guests to their rooms and is dragged into having sex with them. This situation is caused by his economic status. He is struggling to make ends meet and has an unstable income. Hence, he is having difficulty

in rejecting these women and has had enough of these rich women exploiting him for his body. For this reason, it is important for him to form a solid and romantic relationship with a woman like Baby and he tries to “humanize” her by, at least, learning her real name. It is possible to say that Frances “Baby” Houseman “becomes a woman” in Johnny’s eyes after their first intercourse.

We see that their relationship is not a one-time thing and that it continues. They lip sync to the song and they dirty dance during the dance training that follows. Once again, dance and sexuality are intertwined, and the couple gets closer with sexual references in the dance performance. Following this scene, Johnny's encounter with Neil shows that Johnny (like Scott) also wants to do his own dance moves, but once again he is prevented from doing so by an authority figure. Baby gets angry at him for not fighting for himself, while Johnny accuses her of being afraid to reveal their relationship to her father. He implies that the reason for Baby's hesitation is class-based, while Baby once again confronts with the economic basis for Johnny having to work here. Their confrontation is left unresolved when Johnny leaves the scene and Robbie, seeing that Baby has gone to him to make amends after the argument, makes a move on Baby. Johnny, who had already resolved their accumulated animosity with the punches he threw at Robbie, hugs Baby with the masculinity he proved after this outburst and the conflict between them is resolved.

After an attempt to frame Johnny for a theft that occurred during a night they spent together, Baby is forced to confess to her father (who already accuses Johnny with the pregnancy of Penny) that they are together. This results in their biggest conflict between the father and daughter but without a big fight. The “silent treatment” Dr. Houseman gives to Baby is a big punishment considering their relationship dynamics. However, she stands up for herself and points to the inequality in this situation.

One of the most underlined aspects of the relationship between Baby and Johnny, the class difference, is once more in their way, because Johnny is fired from his job -not because of the theft which he was acquitted for but because of having relations with a guest and the couple is parted. While it provides the cliché of “poor boy and rich girl” it also forms a realistic context of economic difference, which was missing in the narrative context of *Strictly Ballroom*.

All these conflicts are resolved when Johnny decides to come back for Baby and recites his famous line “Nobody puts Baby in a corner.” and takes her from her seat, ripping her apart from her father in a way. His father, who tries to stop them, is stopped by her mother, which can be considered as one or only interaction between Baby and her mother throughout the film, which is not even between them. Baby and Johnny interrupt the ridiculous performance on the stage and start to dance the Mambo they have practiced together. During this performance, they can do the lift that they failed to do at the Shelldrake and amaze people. Everyone, once again, not only supports them in their relationship and performance, but also joins them. The film ends with this somewhat surreal dance scene where Johnny gets an apology from Baby’s father.

All in all, the film tells the story of Baby becoming Frances. One might ask whether what makes Baby Frances is her conflicts, her “liberation”, her becoming a better dancer, or her relationship with Johnny, or a combination of these. There is no change in the economic status of Johnny or the other employees, at most there is a guarantee that their situation will continue. Unlike at the beginning of the movie, Baby, with her father's permission, is able to have a relationship with a lower-class man openly and dance freely with him. However, at the very end, we see Johnny's gesture of removing her from the corner. If Johnny hadn't come back, Baby would have continued to sit in the corner, returned to her old life and it would have been as if all this had never happened. The system that put Penny in that position and is problematized by Baby still continues as is because it is not changed, similar to how Lindner formulates its relationship with the female body (Lindner 2011, 14):

The contradictions and anxieties articulated via the female body, and the ways in which these tensions are (often miraculously) resolved, are illustrative of the larger socio-cultural 'problems' that are addressed and 'worked out' within the dance film. The female body has to be reintegrated into a binary and hetero-normative representational order for racial, ethnic and class differences to be overcome, usually through the integration of initially incompatible dance styles, and for the heterosexual couple to be reunited in the final number.

Baby is motivated to enact change, help others, speak out against injustice and aims to make a difference in the world by joining the Peace Corps. However, the film portrays her freedom only in her sexuality and she is presented as liberated and lightened (can be lifted in the air) only when she is taught by another man. This paves the way for the

system itself not to be touched at all, by embedding it in the title of freedom. The impact of a character who does not even have a name is reduced to zero.

3.2 Narration in Relation to Narrative in *Dirty Dancing*

The narration of *Dirty Dancing* is seamless, without any alienating factors for the audience, who are targeted to be mostly young people (considering the characterization and the storyline). It is easy to identify with the characters. Narration choices ease the audience to get into the world of the film, hence the emotions and ideas of the film resonate with the audience easily. The soundtrack contributes to the narration and highlights the emotions of the characters and eases the audience to be surrounded by the elements of the film world.

In such narrations, close-ups, fast cuts and *mise-en-scène* elements such as costumes, lighting (Figure 3.1), decor... etc. contribute to the storytelling. One of the striking points in narration in this matter is when Baby is introduced to dirty dancing.

The sexual references arising from the way the dancers touch each other (Figure 3.2), and their positions are supported by the costumes. The haptic experience while watching this scene transcends to the audience and the audience feels the tension between the bodies.



Figure 3.1. Costume and lighting design in dirty dancing scene.



Figure 3.2. A plan from the dirty dancing scene

The visual analysis of this scene according to lighting, actions and costumes becomes deeper when the eye of the camera enters the picture. Close-ups of touching hands and body parts once again underline the sexual references of both the dance and the nature of relationships in the film, objectifying the bodies of dancers. In fact, when the camerawork is involved, another layer is added to the effect of objectification, since the camera directs the gaze of the audience, differing from a stage performance. If there was a dirty dancing performance on stage, the audience would have the freedom to look anywhere they want on stage or on a dancer's body, without the ability to zoom in. However, in general and specifically in this scene, the gaze is channeled towards the special places on dancers' bodies and to specific actions. In this way, especially given the seamless narrative of the film, the audience identifies with what they see on the screen and experiences the pleasure of touching, being touched or witnessing this act up close. This haptic sexual pleasure, which is usually specific not to dance but to pornography, blurs the boundary between sex and dance and makes the dancer's body an object of pleasure once again. While there are many other activities in the resort, the only one of them that is taken to the underground culture of "dirt" is dance. While the connection between sex and dance is an issue that can be related to archaic references of birth and life, hence, to mating, it is also necessary to keep in mind that it has become more than this connection and can also be interpreted as an intermediary to express ideas, feelings and relations within a community throughout its evolution.

The sexualization mentioned here is not specific to this very scene. Similar to the narration of the training sequence of *Strictly Ballroom*, the dance training brings together



Figure 3.3. Baby and Johnny in the beginning of the montage sequence

certain changes in appearance in *Dirty Dancing* as well. The dance training of Baby is narrated in a montage sequence. In the shots of Baby practicing the steps and crossing the bridge, the change of her costume and her ability to make the dance figures indicate the timelapses. This montage sequence is built with transitions between these bridge shots and the parts where Johnny teaches Baby to dance, and Penny is also involved in this



Figure 3.4. Baby crossing bridge in the beginning of the montage sequence

process. What we see at the beginning of the sequence is a relatively untalented Baby, looking comfortable in her pants and loose shirt (Figure 3.3, 3.4), but struggling to get

the rhythm. As the sequence progresses, we see Baby's costume becoming more and more feminine, more revealing and sexier each time she crosses the bridge (Figure 3.5).



Figure 3.5. Baby crossing the bridge as the montage sequence continues

In some of the threesome scenes involving Penny in this sequence, especially when Penny and Baby are dancing and Johnny is watching them, the pleasure of watching becomes a point of pleasure from within the scene, emphasized by the gestures of Baby and Penny



Figure 3.6. Johnny watching the dance practice between Penny and Baby

do with their hair (Figure 3.6). Meaning, this plan is not watched only by the audience but also by Johnny. At some point, we can see that the dance element in the bridge crossing shots is removed altogether, and that Baby is now directly standing and wearing



Figure 3.7. Baby putting on makeup on the bridge during the montage sequence

makeup on the bridge (Figure 3.7) indicating the physical transformation she is going through. While it is still a question mark as to what necessitates the change here, in this sequence, unlike in *Strictly Ballroom*, we are watching a female dancer who changes



Figure 3.8. Johnny training Baby seen through a mirror reflection. While the mirror emphasizes the aspect of appearance, it also reflects the power relations between them

“spontaneously, by herself and as she should” rather than a factor influencing the change such as the hand of a man. This “as she should” aspect, of course is not something only and firmly tied up to Johnny, female images are required to meet a certain standard set by the society in their consumerism practices and this shapes women’s appearances in a more appealing, more “western” and more cosmetic way (Adair 1992, 69) (Figure 3.8). After

a very short while the scene in which Johnny describes their dance space and says that they should not enter each other's dance spaces, Baby's body is shaped "at" Johnny's



Figure 3.9. Johnny guiding Baby in their training within the montage sequence

hands, even if it is not "by" his hands, as he directs her by directly touching her hip (Figure 3.9) where the rule of "dance space" apparently does not apply.

This montage sequence, in which sexual tension builds as the physical boundary between them disappears, creates a dancer out of Baby, somewhat forcibly, and an attractive woman out of the Housemans' little girl (Figure 3.10). This analysis is not a problematization of young women's exploration of their sexuality, on the contrary, I want



Figure 3.10. The threesome dance training scene near the end of the montage sequence

to underline the risk that the aestheticization of the bodies of dancing women, presented as an element that develops naturally with dancing, when no signs of it are given, may also create a space open to exploitation. The reason this is mentioned as a “risk” is that the dirty dancing subculture introduced here also involves resistance to the boring conventions and a system that victimizes Penny, and also Baby learns Mambo in this montage sequence to help someone from a lower class. However, there is a tension between the goal and the process brought by this goal.

As mentioned before, the watching and peeping sets a hierarchy between the one looking and the one being looked at in the scene. As the couple return from their performance at the Sheldrake, in order not to get caught in her costume, Baby changes her clothes in the car’s back seat. The presence of her changing in the back seat, a man in the driver seat and most importantly a rear-view mirror creates an anticipation of looking even before it is met. This anticipation is soon relieved by Johnny quickly peeping at the mirror (Figure 3.11), without any emphasis on it in the narration such as a close-up. The gesture is not for highlighting his desire to look at her but is normalized, considered with the narration choice here. It sets the pre-approved gender codes, and nothing bothers as long as the one peeping is a man and the one being looked at is a woman.



Figure 3.11. Johnny peeping at Baby through the rear mirror as she changes

After all the seamless narration held in the film, the final feels like a musical scene where dancers begin to dance for the love of Johnny to Baby. However, since it still has a

realistic place in the narrative because they're all dancers and they are performing a sequence similar to the one we have seen Penny and Johnny perform in the first dirty dancing scene, this "musical" scene becomes justified. Nevertheless, the narration in the final scene walks on a thin line between realism and surrealism with highly stylized but also real choreography in the continuation of the scene. Hence, it creates a dreamy finale for the film, where the couple unite in a very romantic way, without solving any economic, social and class-based barriers that kept them apart until then. It makes the audience forget about the class difference of the characters and unites them in dirty dancing. While doing so, one of the main problems of the narrative, their economic struggle and exploitation of dancers caused by this is unresolved and forgotten.

All in all, it is possible to say that the seamless narration in *Dirty Dancing* contributes to the aestheticizing gaze over the dancers' bodies, such as in the dirty dancing introduction scene. While this includes the sexualization of both male and female dancers, the training montage sequence indicates that there is another layer when it comes to dance training of women. Once again, similar to *Strictly Ballroom*, the training female dancer is aestheticized during the montage sequence while a romantic relationship is formed between the trainer man and the trainee woman. The strong and archaic references to the sexual perception of dance in *Dirty Dancing* creates an area open for exploitation since it is presented as the way of rebellion.

4. ANALYSIS OF *FLASHDANCE* (1983) IN TERMS OF VISUAL AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURES

4.1. Narrative of *Flashdance*: A Rebellion to Social Perception

Alex is a worker in a metal mill during the day, who dances at a cabaret in Mawby's at night for visual pleasure. Alex is portrayed as an orphaned, 18-year-old woman who, despite the fact that she is apparently the only woman working at the mill and younger than almost everyone else, is not ostracized or treated differently by any of the other employees and is somehow accepted at work. In this way, Alex paints a somewhat unrealistic portrait in her work life during the day and is also admired for the creativity and technical level of her dance performances at the cabaret she works at night. She makes a living by laboring with her body in various ways, and the audience has little knowledge of her past.

Even though limited knowledge is given about Alex's past, the audience is informed about her ideals and dreams. She wants to go to a formal dance school, Pittsburgh Conservatory of Dance and Repertory, for a formal dance education that she has never had. The shift from her current dancing environment to this Conservatory will represent a change in social status for her as well. Because while ballet is an activity common among middle and low-class people, the dance culture Alex is in belongs to the working-class young women (McRobbie 1991, 210). Her lack of education and self-confidence in this subject stand in her way to pursue her dream. She is self-educated on the subject. She states that she read books, watched movies and practiced by herself but the lack of a formal certificate which indicates a recognized education makes her and probably the Conservatory she wants to enroll in think that she is not qualified. This also has a lot to do with her economic status. She is a worker with no means to have a long list of dance education certificates and other dancers applying to the school are obviously more advantageous about this subject. The plan with other dancers' pointes and her muddy boots on the line of application to the school silently narrates this difference (Figure 4.1). This is an important aspect of the overall narrative because it is important to portray the

struggles of women of different color and social status on the silver screen since it represents the variety of female experiences and distances itself from a stereotypical female image (Adair 1992, 71).



Figure 4.1. Plan with Alex's boots next to another applicant's pointes

Even if Alex wants to apply to the Conservatory, she needs encouragement. She has a mentor who is a former ballerina. This old lady, Hanna, encourages her to pursue her dream of enrolling in the Conservatory and getting a formal dance education. Alex visits her regularly and updates her about her application process. They watch ballet performances together and Alex asks her about the times Hanna was performing and while they have a strong connection and support, we don't know about the nature and past of their relationship.

Alex also has a strong connection with the street. She makes fun of the traffic police on the street and transcribes his movements and interprets them as dance. She sees a potential of inspiration in everything. The scene where Alex, and her best friend, Jeanie watch the breakdancers on the street sets her solid relationship with the street. They enjoy the performance, and we recognize the movements of the breakdancers in Alex's final audition choreography. This indicates Alex's recognition and closeness to this culture and economic status, as breakdancing is a culture of struggles and street battles. This contributes to the sense of reality of the film (LaBoskey 2001, 115).

Alex is not the only female character whose dreams and paths to these dreams are revealed in the narrative. Alex's best friend, Jeanie, who also works at Mawby's and is a waitress, has a dream of learning to dance and be an ice skater. She performs in a skiing competition and falls twice during her choreography. She ends up devastated, as they cannot afford to have her compete one more time next year. This failure also opens a pure talent discussion in the film. While we see that Jeanie also values her presence in this field, her father's expectations of her and possible lack of practice resources (due to her economic status) stops her from pursuing her dream even further. At the same time, we see Alex practicing hard for her dream in her limited free time. The film does not show a unusually talented person who tries something new and succeeds in a very short time as opposed to the other films discussed in this thesis. (Especially female) characters work and practice hard for their dreams for a long time and the film lies within a realistic frame on this subject.

Another information given on Alex and is different from the female protagonist characters of the other films *Strictly Ballroom* and *Dirty Dancing* is that her already-existing sexual desire. At the beginning of the film, Alex is shown confessing to a priest about "thinking about sex a lot". She is an eighteen-year-old woman who normally has these desires, and this confession is not related to any other developments in her life. She is obviously surrounded by a sexualizing gaze in her night-time work at Mawby's but as she refers to the performance, she says that she does not see the audience. She only feels the music inside her and "disappears". Of course, she is well aware of the objectifying culture and the gaze that is reflected on her, but her main motivation is to get out of that environment and pursue dancing in a formal manner. She refuses to perform in the Zanzibar strip club despite the overwhelming invitations of Johnny C., the manager of Zanzibar. Hence, it is possible to say that the desires she has expressed during the confession are not related specifically to her dance career and relationship with Nick.

Nick, is the owner of the steel mill at which Alex works during the day, watches her dance at Mawby's and realizes she is his employee. He approaches her during her lunch break and indicates his interest in her. After resolving a conflict in which Johnny C. harasses Alex and punches her close friend Richie, Nick follows Alex home and persuades her to go out with him, despite her insistence that she does not want to go out with the boss. And they start dating. Nick has little insight into Alex's living or financial conditions, for

example, he does not immediately grasp why Jeanie does not have a second chance to participate in the ice-skating competition. Although there is an obvious power relation between them, we also see Alex positioning herself actively in the relationship. It is Alex who initiates their sexual intercourse, and she is never passive about it throughout their relationship. At the same time, because he sees Nick getting into the car with his ex-wife (whom she doesn't know who she is at that moment) after dinner for a charity event, instead of confronting Nick, she throws a brick at his house and breaks the window. We later see them resolve this by clearing up the misunderstanding in a face-to-face argument, and this is their first conflict.

Their relationship stands out for many reasons. While there is a possible age difference between them that is not directly addressed; the fact that Nick does not problematize Alex's dancing for visual pleasure even when she is sexually harassed by Johnny C. and that they openly live their relationship in a steel mill (where Nick is the boss and Alex is the worker) without any apparent critical attention drawn to it is a narrative we are not used to seeing in such relationships or in such environments. Nick is portrayed as a truthful, understanding and helpful person from many aspects. He supports Alex's attempts to enroll in the Conservatory and even arranges an audition for her. Alex reacts heavily about this and confronts him about arranging this unjust audition. She wants to be independent and considers his action as an intervention to this. This portrayal of Nick and Alex's attitude portrays Nick as a kind-hearted "saint" trying to be helpful and Alex as a "maverick" who doesn't know how to be grateful. Nick's arrangement of this audition needs to be considered carefully. There are obvious class-based reasons why Alex would not normally be called for this audition. The fact that she has no family and has to work two jobs together with the economic difficulties she is experiencing, prevents her from getting the dance training that would enable her to be called for the audition. Therefore, Nick's move can be seen as an attempt to balance this economic injustice. But at the same time, it is important to remember that Nick is a steel mill boss who lives in a nice big house, who knows people in high places and has access to the capital. So, we can even see Nick's move as a clearing of conscience, a confession. Even though he is not correcting an injustice caused directly by himself, it is possible to see Nick's move as an action to balance the system that created such a clear difference in social status between him and Alex, since it is the same system that put him in this position. This outburst of

Alex when she learns that Nick was the one who arranged the audition can be considered as the second conflict between them.

After this conflict, Alex decides not to go through with the audition and her dance career in total, also she does not go to her welding job at the mill for a week. She detaches from her environment and people worry about her. When she calls Mawby's to talk to Jeanie, she learns that she is with Johnny C. now and performing at the Zanzibar strip club. This development puts an end to her isolation, and she goes out to get Jeanie out of the club. She scolds her asking if this is the way she wants to become a dancer and Jeanie hits rock bottom when she tries to catch a banknote falling into water under the rain. Two friends hold each other crying, both cold, and Alex comforts her. This scene especially sets Alex's distance from the environment of the strip club and that she disparages this culture. Even if she also dances for the visual pleasure at Mawby's, she draws a line at a point where nudity overcomes the creative aspects of the performance. It is known to the audience that Jeanie's main motivation to be there is economic and she would not have gotten into this if Richie, her (now) ex-boyfriend, had not left town to pursue his career in comedy. She is shaken by this development and accepts the offers of Johnny C. even though being a performer at a strip club is not among her dreams. Alex's intervention therefore stands in solidarity with Jeanie. This increases the instances in the movie where women talk to each other and build positive relationships.

On her way back, she finds Nick waiting for her at her door and their third conflict begins. While the topic is still Nick's involvement in Alex being called to audition, during the argument, Alex points out the difference in their class by saying "Go play with your Porsche" while Nick points out Alex's age. As he takes a cigarette from Alex's mouth, he points out that she is too young to smoke it (even though age is not a problem for them to be together). Nick once more encourages her to go to the auditions. And as a repeating pattern between the three films, he accuses Alex of being afraid. He tells her not to use him as an excuse for not going to the auditions and advises her not to give up on her dreams. Until the final scene, this is their last encounter, and the conflict is not resolved within the context of their relationship in the plot of the film.

After this confrontation with Nick, Alex wants to make up her mind and tries to seek advice from Hanna. However, when she goes to her house, she initially finds it empty.

She then learns that Hanna passed away the day before and this devastates her. This creates an expectation in the audience that Alex will audition in Hanna's memory and pursue her dance career. This expectation is justified when we think about Hanna encouraging her to do so from the beginning of the film and we realize that their relationship is something deep-rooted that goes back further. While mourning Hanna's death, she makes her decision: as expected, she decides to attend the audition. As such, this can be considered as a decision more with the effect of Hanna (or her death) than the effect of Nick.

Another interaction of Alex with a female character after making her decision is when Alex encounters Margo, another dancer working at Mawby's when she goes back there to pick up her belongings. This conversation (that carries the risk to be overlooked) reveals Margo's past, that she started in this dance career when she was 17, she bought new costumes frequently and she looked good on stage, and then she stopped buying new costumes without being able to tell the reason. It feels like she lost her spark to do what she does and just carried along with it. She weeps as she tells her story and goes on stage with her eyes full of tears while saying "It's show time". The dance career at Mawby's is hence portrayed as something that cannot be escaped from and comes along with the dancer as long as they do not build their way out. It is something they must do in any condition, even if they are crying while doing so. The stage and the dominance it forms on the dancers requires them to wipe away their tears and go on with their performance. As Alex states earlier, they disappear on stage. This also reflects their personalities disappearing on the stage and them becoming nothing but the bodies that are served for the visual pleasure of the audience in fancy costumes. Even if they add their artistic approaches and narratives into the choreographies they perform, the audience is not there for these narratives. With this haptic and intensely sensory experience presented to them, the audience focuses on the pleasure they will get from it, and no matter what the dancer expresses on stage, their own narratives or artistic approach is not visible. This is another encounter where Alex and another female character -one that was mocked and looked down by other dancers in the beginning of the film- form a relationship based on understanding and sharing of experience. This narrative humanizes Margo, informs the audience about the past of a female dancer, helps to give her a nuanced character and influences Alex by helping her to be sure of her decision.

Similar to the one in the beginning of the film, after the audience forgets that she was even in one of them, we once more see Alex during a confession. Because as she says, it has been a long time since she last confessed. Even if Alex we see during the confession in the beginning and this time has experienced many things (such as the loss of Hanna or the invitation for the audition) they are not completely different personalities. In fact, this last confession highlights that this is the same woman we watched in the beginning of the film, who confessed having sexual desires, lying to Hanna about going through with the application to the Conservatory in order not to upset her and she wants to make something out of her life. The audience watches Alex pursue her desires, and that she still thinks that she does not belong with the other dancers. All she is able to say this time is that “I want, I want so much...”. She refers her desire to attend the audition, and it is important for a female character to say what she wants. Alex does it while crying and the audience knows that she decided to go through with the audition even if she knows that she is unfairly called for it. At the same time, since her last confession included Hanna, it can be also her grief of Hanna that makes her cry since she wanted Alex to join the Conservatory but is now unable to see it happen.

The iconic final audition scene of Alex draws a portrait of her dance journey. She begins with the classic ballet moves that she practiced on her own and fails in her first try. She asks for permission to start again and starts without confirmation. In her second try, she manages to finish her performance. At first, the jury does not look interested, however, as her performance expands from classical moves to the combination of how she already dances, what she learned from the street and her self-practices, they start to enjoy her performance, even tapping out the rhythm of her dance. This indicates a form of confirmation of this alternative dance culture (McRobbie 1991, 218). Alex also performs moves that are performed by the breakdancers she sees on the street, indicating an insistence to retain her relationship with the street. As a self-taught dancer, it would not be realistic for her to be able to perform a perfect classical ballet performance, however, she brings what she already has in her repertoire along to the Conservatory. This situation brings a somewhat realistic aspect to her audition. She affects them with her difference and uniqueness, and she holds the possibility to contribute to the institution as well. The catharsis is completed with Alex being accepted into the Conservatory and Alex and Nick getting back together, all being solved out smoothly.

All in all, it is a film about a self-taught female dancer who wants to get a formal dance education but is unable to get it easily due to her lack of resources resulting from her economic status. She is encouraged by her boyfriend but is not trained by him and her dance training process has nothing to do with their relationship. Although watching her cabaret performance is what initiated his interest in her, Alex being a dancer holds no other significance in the continuation of their relationship. He does not make her realize her sexuality, she already expresses her desires, and he does not shape her in any way. The most of his interference in her dance career is to help her get an opportunity she would not be able to get another way, and this causes their biggest and unresolved conflict. During the narrative, she is mainly the one who has a say in her life-changing decisions, and she forms different but mostly supportive relationships with other women, without the effect of a male figure. In the narrative, female characters interact with each other and have dreams and goals they have set for themselves. Alex being an orphan, is set as a situation and no information about it is given to the audience about her past about this. Her economic status and class are what is narrated in detail and these set her condition and main point of conflict during the film. This situation shapes her choices and designates her stance. However, with determination, she is able to pursue her dream in her dance career. One of the mainly different initial conditions of Alex from Fran and Baby is her lack of family. Instead, she forms alternative relationships with her friends in her life and is supported by them. She is the main factor in her life that enables her dreams to come true through her self-training and the support she gets from people around her.

4.2 Narration in Relation to Narrative in *Flashdance*

Flashdance picks up a seamless narration where the storytelling is not interrupted by any factors within or out of the frame. The audience is targeted to be young adults here as well and the storyline captures the audience and draws them into its world without any alienating effects.

Even if the narrative of *Flashdance* has significantly different aspects than that of *Strictly Ballroom* and *Dirty Dancing*, it has similar approaches in the narration, especially to that of *Dirty Dancing*. The body of the female dancer is sexualized and objectified through the camera, and this causes a conflict between the narration and the narrative. While the narrative is about a woman who tries to escape from a sexualizing dance performance

atmosphere and opposes strip clubs where the female body is objectified, the film does what is criticized through its narration. The tension between the mediated screen body and the body in live performance is reflected in the idealized young and athletic body of the dancer (Dodds 2001, 80).

The first dance performance of Alex in the film in Mawby's is also the performance the first time Nick sees her and develops an interest in her. The framing and editing of this scene create a mystery about the details of her body. She is seen in silhouette during most of her performance (Figure 4.2) and the close-ups are made mainly on her feet and face.



Figure 4.2. Alex seen in silhouette in her dance performance at Mawby's



Figure 4.3. Repeating water pouring plan during Alex's dance performance

While this could have been a chance to escape from male gaze, we understand that it is not the case as we watch the water falling plan on her body is so emphasized that it is shown twice in editing (Figure 4.3), with framing closing up on her. Hence, the more her body is shown in silhouette while the audience knows that she is undressing until a certain point, the more the audience is curious about how she looks. This mystery of withholding emphasizes her visual aesthetics more and degrades her only to a piece of flesh, which is



Figure 4.4. Two consecutive plans at the end of Alex's performance scene, first plan shows her dancing



Figure 4.5. Two consecutive plans at the end of Alex's performance scene, second plan shows a burger patty on the stove

highlighted in the following scene with a close-up to a burger patty Robbie puts on the stove, positioned on the same place in the frame (Figure 4.4, 4.5).

Throughout the film, the scenes where Alex practices at home by herself are shown with the same gaze. There are several close-ups to her hip and legs without narrative motivation (Figure 4.6). Similar narration choices are made in the scenes where Alex or other dancers are performing. The editing emphasizes them as to-be-looked-at objects on the screen and forms a hierarchy over them. The camera acts as the audience in the bar and shows the performance through its gaze. However, a narration that would highlight the kinesthetic empathy with the dancer during the performance and would not objectify the dancers with the male gaze could have resulted in the criticism of this gaze, distancing itself from the eyes of the audience.



Figure 4.6. Framing choice during Alex's practice

Nonetheless, there are several moments where the audience kinesthetically empathizes with the dancers. One of them is at the end of an aforementioned self-training scene of Alex, where she breathes heavily as she drinks water after her practice. This detail re-humanizes the dancer in the eyes of the audience and stresses that the performance is difficult, and she is putting a big effort into this work. Another scene that highlights the effort behind these performances is the work out scene of the dancers together (yet, the only topic they talk about is men). In this part the dancers shown are repeating heavy workout movements and this is emphasized with the editing. The use of repeating static shots where dancers get in and out of frame as they exercise highlights the repetition in the movements as well and creates a sense of exhaustion. The dancers are also seen sweating. In both the other films, while mostly the male dancers are shown as sweated,

the female dancers are hardly ever seen in such situations. The strong stances and appearances of men in dance films, often portrayed as sweaty, strong and have the ability of lifting, carrying and throwing female dancers in air conflict with female dancers' delicate and graceful bodies (Lindner 2011, 6). Because men in those films are the ones doing the teaching and the hard work that is seen. This is another aspect that dehumanizes the female dancers and puts them in front of the audience as spectacles while the training scenes in *Flashdance* proposes an alternative to this.

In this respect, the narration of the film is inconsistent with its narrative perspective. The camera and editing style adopt a male gaze, instead of Alex's point of view. Meaning that the camera does not put the distance that Alex wants to put between herself and the dance performances dominated by this gaze and looks at the dancers through the eyes of the viewers in the setting (McRobbie 1991, 219). This is also the case in the scenes in the strip club. We know that Alex looks at this place from a great distance, but when the camera enters this place, it prefers a sexualizing gaze towards the dancers. Through these choices, while the audience can identify with Alex in other instances, it cannot pick up her perspective when it comes to the expression and perception of the bodies of female dancers during the dance practice or performances.

There are only two dance performances we see from Alex's perspective. One of them is the breakdancing performance she and Jeanie watch on the street. The framing here respects the conventional circle that defines the breakdancing space and uses the framing to provide entry and exit points to dancers (LaBoskey 2001, 115). Considering the final audition dance of Alex, the audience knows that she is familiar with and respects the breakdancing culture. The use of framing is parallel to this approach.

The other dance performance that is shown through Alex's perspective is the one Alex wants to switch to, the one she aspires to. The ballet performance Alex and Hanna watch, a very short segment from the finale of the performance, shows the two dancers with dramatic lighting and as pure as possible, with as little distractions from the dancers as possible (Figure 4.7). They also show their performance in an effortless way, meaning even if they are in a difficult position, they show it as if it is nothing. This "noble" performance is what is aspired by Alex. Even if ballet also has its aestheticizing gaze against female bodies, positioning them as fragile and innocent while stripping them from

any excess weight (Wolff 1997, 423), in the eyes of Alex, it is what is formal and can be considered and pursued as a dance career. The static shot and modest *mise-en-scène* chosen here highlights this purity and formality and aligns with Alex's point of view.



Figure 4.7 The ballet performance Alex and Hanna watches

Even though the narrative structure of *Flashdance* is formed around Alex's struggle to get out of a dance convention that objectifies female bodies, the camera picks up this mission and continues this gaze. The liberating narrative of the film, in which the female protagonist sets up a goal and a motivation for herself, tries to achieve it and achieves it with her hard work, is constrained into plans that reduces her and other dancers to flesh to be looked at. This collision between narrative and narration creates an inconsistency and a conflict. The highlights of the narrative such as Alex wanting to be independent while forming her dance career and expressing her own sexual desire as an active individual do not have counterparts in the narration choices which positions her as a passive object to be looked at to fulfill the needs of visual pleasure.

5. CONCLUSION

As a concretely embodied form, dance has a lot to do with the dancers' bodies. Female dancers are aestheticized to meet body and beauty standards that highlight their femininity and underline their fragility. While female dancers are expected to be thin and beautiful in a conventional way in order to maintain the required look they are also positioned in passive roles within the dance narratives. They are often led and carried by male dancers while their characters (if there is a dramatic narrative structure) are also passive within the narrative.

For female dancers, aestheticization frequently operates through objectification and sexualization. This dynamic can be especially observed in both their costumes and their roles within narratives. The archaic connection between dance and sex is often either staged without a dramaturgic context and is solely for the purpose of visual and kinesthetic pleasure or is suppressed in a way that passivates the female dancers and positions them as fragile and innocent figures that need to be saved or protected. The struggle to find a way to create a dance space that female dancers can express themselves in a way they prefer is what created early-modern, modern and post-modern dance conventions after ballet. While this way is still being investigated, the liberating narratives for the dance performances are often found in sexual expressions. This aspect continues in today's dance culture that includes and addresses young audiences as in the very first example of this thesis (see, again, Figure 1.1). While it is important for women to express their sexuality in different ways actively, this embodied nature of dance does not require to be the main focus of dance performances. Dance can also be a way of expressing different themes in life. Different ways of narration in dance can be investigated to refer to dance as a tool that exceeds its archaic connections and widens the world of dance narratives. While such narratives are not completely absent today, it can be said that the need to put more emphasis on these narratives is crucial, as seen from the examples argued in this thesis.

When it comes to cinema, it is important to design a nuanced connection between narrative and narration, how these two elements talk to each other and the ways narration changes through the film according to the narrative. The dramaturgy of the film and the main messages it wants to transfer to the audience are formed altogether with the narrative elements and narration choices. Therefore, whether the film wants the audience to identify with the characters or criticize the narrative flow is highly affected by the style of narration.

Therefore, how female dancers' bodies are portrayed in dance films and how active the female characters are, indicate an area where the intersections of these approaches in dance and cinema can be seen, and where their reflections will resonate and increase their impact through narrative and narration. Three films were analyzed by their positioning of female protagonists in their narratives and their visual representation. In both *Strictly Ballroom* and *Dirty Dancing*, the female protagonists are trained by male dancers and a romantic relationship is formed between them. We can also say that both women discover their romantic interest in their partners or their sexuality through the dance training sequences and their appearance changes in a way that emphasizes their femininities. Similarly, although the film *Flashdance* also portrays female dancers as objects of visual pleasure like the other two films, it can be said that here the female character has power over her own dance training journey.

The relationship between the narration and narrative in *Strictly Ballroom* is discussed in two layers: the romantic aspect of the film and the rebellion against the dance conventions. In the film, strictly following the dance conventions is criticized in a humorous way using Brechtian alienation techniques. For example, the made-up narration of the Australian Dancing Federation head, Barry Fife, about Scott's father Doug's dance past is staged in a completely different style than the rest of the film. Generally, choosing a mockumentary style shows how the film positions itself apart from the nonsense of following these conventions too strictly by approaching it as a sort of a crime investigation. In this way, narration choices support the narrative focus of Scott's rebellion against the conventions and emphasize the film's dramaturgy on this aspect. While Scott brings an avant-garde approach to the dance conventions, he also has Fran under his influence. Fran is a dancer as long as she dances with Scott. While an alternative

dance career is possible for Scott, Fran's destiny in this matter is completely tied up to Scott's decision on whether he chooses her to dance with him or not.

At the same time, the other layer that is intertwined with the "dance rebellion", is the romantic aspect of the film. The narration of the scenes between Fran and Scott is more seamless compared to the rest of the film. The audience is aimed to be included in the story and identify themselves with the characters in the parts where they develop their romantic relationship. And this romantic relationship is filled with conflicts between Fran and Scott in the narrative aspect, and throughout these conflicts we see Fran getting more and more passive. Starting from a position where she confronts Scott bravely, she becomes a woman who accepts to dance with him even though he betrayed her as a partner several times.

While overall dramaturgy of the film focuses on the nonsense of strict dance conventions, a change in female character's development is observed in parallel. Female dancer's (mainly the female protagonist of the film) need to become more aesthetic, more beautiful in appearance as she learns to dance and more passive as character as she develops her romantic interest are two processes that happen together. Fran's physical transformation that portrays her more "beautiful" throughout her dance training refers to a statement in which female dancers' requirement to fulfill a certain physical standard in order to become successful, aesthetic dancers. Overall, in the eyes of the audience, the theme of rebellion is associated with the liberation of the male dancer only, while the rebellious side of the female dancer is rasped away. The storyline that flows in parallel to this rebellion, restricts the female dancer in predetermined aesthetic standards set by the gender-based social relations. While it is possible for the male dancer to be liberated, it is not an option for the female dancer to overcome what is socially expected of her.

Similar to *Strictly Ballroom*, *Dirty Dancing* tells a story in which dance is portrayed as a means of liberation, but this liberation is limited by gender-based dynamics and is boiled down to sexuality. In addition, throughout the film, the class conflict the film focuses on is superficialized by limiting it with a romantic relationship. This film has a strong emphasis on class difference between the couple, but the cathartic finale of the film proposes the continuation of the same conditions as the best case. In other words, through the film, there is no fundamental conclusion of the dynamics of the relationship between

the dance instructors, the customers and the owners of the resort and the audience is left with the conclusion that this is dramaturgically implied in the acceptance of Baby and Johnny's relationship. However, the ongoing conflicts between them, which are mostly based on the social and economic differences between the couple, are not resolved in any way. In the end, Baby is still a daughter who still spends her father's money and Johnny is the boy who needs money he will earn from his demanding job in order to survive the day. The possibility of changing this situation aside, there is no difference made in the narrative that will pave the way to such a change. Throughout the film, Johnny's narrative shows how the women he teaches to dance exploit his body sexually, and a critical dramaturgy is established by emphasizing the class differences that lead to this. While this is an important point of emphasis, it is also necessary to evaluate the connection between dance and sexuality in terms of gender, which is as important.

The seamless narration in this film makes identification possible in the way the narrative is perceived by the audience. The characters that the audience identifies with are young dancers who develop alternatives to the "boring" activities and dance traditions of the resort, and in doing so create a dirty dance subculture with sexual overtones. Once more, the female protagonist falls in love with her dance teacher and this training results in a change in her appearance as well. Baby starts wearing more revealing clothes and starts putting on makeup as she proceeds with her dance training. The physical change Baby undergoes during the dance training montage sequence, the relationship between dance and sexuality that is revealed in the close-ups of dirty dance scenes and, in the most general framework, the fact that Baby's transformation from an "innocent family girl" to a "woman who lives her sexuality freely" takes place at the hands of a man, are examples that present the changes that Baby undergoes which are influenced by the gender roles expected of an "emancipated" female dancer. These points raise the following question: Does the relation between dance and sexuality in these scenes position the male and female characters in the same way? In the dance training montage sequence, Baby undergoes an aesthetic transformation while Johnny is only emphasized with his strength. And while this emancipating process that praises Baby as a woman introduces her to her sexuality, for Johnny, it corresponds to a need to form sincere romantic relationships alongside the sexuality. So it brings us to the second question: In the end of the film, after the transformation of Baby and they are accepted by who they are by the crowd, is Baby

praised as a dancer who learned a difficult performance in a short time period or a woman who came to this resort as “daddy’s little girl” and left it as a “emancipated” young woman? The final dance performance scene not only highlights her as a female dancer who can now be lifted and carried away, it is also a surrealistic scene where dirty dancing comes to light in front of everybody and it is now somehow accepted. Baby’s liberation that took her from the hands of her father connects her to another male figure and after she expresses herself freely through dance, she again seeks her father’s approval. The fact that this transformation is realized through dance points to a scenario in which femininity as an embodied aspect, is physically performed and realized in ways deemed appropriate by society.

Hence, the training montage sequences in *Strictly Ballroom* and *Dirty Dancing* parallels the mythological archetypical Pygmalion narrative in which the female figure is shaped in the hands of a male artist. This process transforms the female dancers physically and behaviorally into “passive objects of desire”, in the name of a self-improvement (Linial 2009). Both Scott and Johnny shape Fran and Baby similarly while they teach them to dance, transforming their appearance and idealizing them. Their journeys into their “self-improvement”, or as I call them their “rebellions” or “premature victories” tames them in a way and shapes them into “culturally acceptable” roles. They do not move with intention but are moved, carried, and shaped.

Flashdance also picks up a seamless narration which brings identification of the audience with the characters. The theme of seeking an alternative to a dance convention is presented together with class struggles and women’s expression of their sexuality freely. Considering this, *Flashdance* is a film in which the main points discussed in the analyses of *Strictly Ballroom* and *Dirty Dancing* can be evaluated together with the male gaze in the narration. Class struggle of Alex is intertwined with her efforts to determine an alternative dance career for herself. She considers her night-time cabaret performance as a low-class job and wants a way out of it to pursue a “more formal” dance education. She is a character more active and effective in the flow of events than Fran or Baby and as opposed to them, she dances alone, however while it liberates her from a direct physical instruction of a male figure, it shapes her performance through the male gaze. In the meantime, the convention she envies, ballet, is a form in which female dancers are moved,

guided and shaped through their male dance partners. Hence what she considers (and guided into by Hanna, her mentor) as a more formal and liberating dance career is just another convention that the female dancers' roles in the dance narrative and perception of their bodies in the eyes of the audience is guided in a different way that leads to the same point. Her economic conditions are not only mentioned verbally but are narrated throughout the film with her need to work two jobs and inability to get proper dance education until then. While she is a worker, her boyfriend is a capital owner and her employer. This difference between their classes (similar to *Dirty Dancing*) is presented clearly but again, the conditions that set this inequality are not addressed. On the contrary, the capital owner helps her achieve her dreams by getting into Conservatory by pulling some strings using his contacts and even if this creates a conflict between them, it is eventually “forgiven”. With Nick holding the power to fire her from her job, although their relationship does not have this dynamic (after Nick’s “threat” to fire her if she does not go out with him), the power relations between the couple has an economic base.

Even if Alex does not discover her sexuality through dance, the dance she is performing has strong sexual implications since it is performed for the visual pleasure of the mostly male audience in the bar. These implications are amplified through cinematography of these sequences, with framing, costumes and editing. The gaze of the camera not only reflects the objectifying gaze of the audience present in the setting of the bar, but it also invites the audience to look at her body as a dancer in that way because the same framing style continues in her practice sessions as well. Therefore, a narrative in which a female character both liberates herself by taking an important step towards her dreams and expresses her sexuality freely is once again told through a narration that objectifies the female dancer and positions her as a source of pleasure.

All in all, in these films, it is possible to see the male gaze in different levels, and it is possible to say that the dance performances are shaped by the perception of women in the society, as objects of visual pleasure. In order to be able to interfere with this aspect, it is an option to address the spectator as female and resonate with the female audience (de Lauretis 1985, 159). Rather than aestheticizing the bodies of female dancers, it is possible to highlight the aspects in them that matters to the female audience (de Lauretis 1985, 174). While it is critical to address the causes which are the criticized aspects of films

discussed through this thesis, it is also important to take one more step in this discussion. That is to equip ourselves with tools to make this intervention to the negatively criticized aesthetic perspectives and create a positive pathway to highlight the politics that suggest an alternative. This tension between the negative criticism and positive politics (de Lauretis 1985, 154) should pave a way for an area to discuss not only what needs to be changed but also how to change it. Claire Johnston states the necessity to propose the alternatives ourselves clearly (Johnston 1999, 37):

Clearly, if we accept that cinema involves the production of signs, the idea of non-intervention is pure mystification. The sign is always a product. What the camera in fact grasps is the 'natural' world of the dominant ideology. Women's cinema cannot afford such idealism; the 'truth' of our oppression cannot be 'captured' on celluloid with the 'innocence' of the camera: it has to be constructed/manufactured. New meanings have to be created by disrupting the fabric of the male bourgeois cinema within the text of the film.

The narratives of the films analyzed adopt a theme of rebellion that is discussed in a relatively superficial way, and which is far from offering a systemic solution. In these films, dance carries a mysterious transformative power within itself (McRobbie 1991, 210). An important discussion is between which points this transformation takes place. These films, which mostly appeal to a teenage or young adult audience, reduce their rebellion against the system to a mere opposition in their lifestyles and present it under the theme of liberation/emancipation. The offered method of this is emphasized romantically as “not being afraid” in all three films. This liberation is mostly realized through a passive positioning of female characters, an aesthetic change and the exploration of sexuality for women. This includes a risk of opening an area of exploitation of the female bodies based on ideal images and emphasizing and trying to meet social expectations. Even though the concepts of body and sexuality do not necessarily coincide (Kelly 2003, 72), the embodied aspect of these films often come together with this phenomenon. As Adair cites from Lorde, eroticism can be considered as the way to empower a change for women in their struggle against the system and she adds “For oppression to be perpetuated, any sources of power within the culture of the oppressed must be corrupted.” (Adair 1992, 80). While of course a liberated or emancipated expression of female sexuality is revolutionary for women considering the undergoing practices, it can hold risks of exploitation of female bodies when the struggle is reduced

solely to this. Because then a sexual implication (through dance, in this case) can be considered “enough” to take a step to stand against the criticized system. Also, in time, it starts to become a necessity for women to express their sexuality openly in order to be able to appear as rebelling figures, which opens many doors to sexual exploitation. As such, it is not enough to form empowering stories, it is also required to tell them in an alternative way. Hence, it is necessary to make changes in the narrative and narration at the same time in order to be able to make a feminist intervention and propose new ways that addresses their audience as female.

Following Aston’s proposal, the narrations can be intervened in many ways. For instance, creating an alternative text combined with the original one, changing the costumes in a way to make the audience question the text or proposing an alternative ending to the story in which the feminist critics are amplified (Aston 1999, 99–100) can be strategies that can be picked up while creating an alternative narrative. Hence, it is important to amplify the voices of female characters in the narrative and to position them as active compounds of it by interfering with the text. This serves to close the gap between the textual and social positions of female characters, and it is a necessary step to make the feminist critiques resonate with the female audience. Because this gap is perceived differently for male and female audiences and this distinction is crucial for cultural and political change (Gledhill 1999, 168).

While the aspects of narrative can be more in sight, the subtle narration choices affect the way the audience perceives the film and its dramaturgy drastically. Various choices in narration can be functionable to avoid the male gaze in the film, and one of the ways it can be realized is to find the moments in which the film seeks and wants to avoid the audience identification. As Aston proposes, a Brechtian narration where it is clear where the film is intervening its socially expected narrative, distancing itself from it and where it wants the audience to get inside the characters (Aston 1999, 99) can be preferred. Making this choice can highlight the moments in which the film criticizes or praises in a more nuanced way (Gaines 1990, 8):

“The disruptive fragmentation of continuity editing and point-of-view construction and the frustration of narrative unity pioneered a new aesthetic based on refusal. Theoretically, the inventive interruption of classical narrative is meant to destroy the codes of mainstream

entertainment and ultimately replace them with a cinema that provokes thought and encourages analysis.”

This strategy can alienate the audience by making them realize that they are watching a film and question their positions as observers. Hence, it can be a powerful tool to redefine the positions of the one looking and the one being looked at.

This dichotomy between narration and narrative points to two stages in the development of feminist cinema, as de Lauretis also cites from Mulvey. The first of these stages is a starting point where intervention in content takes place and stories are shaped to function as consciousness-raising aspects for women. The second is a moment in which cinematic narrative is used as a tool and the functions of avant-garde cinema are challenged (de Lauretis 1985, 155). Here, it is important to analyze the intervention of content and form together and how these two elements speak to each other.

Overall, it is necessary to keep in mind that considering the audience as female, however, it does not mean that there is one type of female audience; this change also requires the understanding of the differences in the experiences of women (de Lauretis 1985, 164). It is highly related to the connection between the social positioning of women of different class, color etc. in the patriarchal capitalist system. It is necessary to address the multilayered cultural and societal basis of this issue and try to develop tools that both enable us to recognize the problem and guide us to the ways we can equip ourselves with the tools to prevent it.

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