A Gene Kelly: The Performing Auteur – Manifestations of the Kelly Persona

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Gene Kelly: The Performing Auteur – Manifestations of the Kelly Persona

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This paper attempts to prove Gene Kelly, generally referred to as a movie star, as a cinematic auteur. I believe that Kelly's auteur status is created through control, authenticity and innovations in *mise-en-scène*, and I will apply this hypothesis to both his on-screen and behind-the-camera personas. I will firstly give a brief overview of the auteur theory and it's relevant in my discussion of Kelly's persona. I will then move on to my case study of Kelly, with the remainder of the paper being split into two section - the first half dealing with his on-screen persona and the second half dedicated to his behind-the-camera persona. These sections will discuss the key signs I have attributed to Kelly's auteur status and, because these occur both on-screen and off, these two sections will mirror each other.

The Auteur Theory

The critics who wrote for the *Cahiers du Cinema* revolutionized film criticism by launching the *politique des auteurs*, the controversial and programmatic idea that great film artists existed even within the confines of Hollywood and its rigid studio system. Peter Wollen (1996, p.1) notes that Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock have been put forward as prime examples of auteur directors, ones who could 'be discussed in the same way that any other kind of artist could be discussed.' Wollen adds that 'previously the Hollywood director, whatever his talent, had been automatically demeaned as little more than a competent functionary of the studio system'. This could easily be applied to Gene Kelly since he was working as part of

MGM's Freed Unit, headed by producer Arthur Freed, and was primarily involved in musicals, which have been repeatedly been seen as a low form of entertainment and therefore not worthy of academic study. However, it is Kelly's complete involvement in cinema, both in front of and behind the camera, which makes him stand out from other performers.

Directors such as Hawks have been analysed using structuralist analysis, which provides a way of looking systematically at a director's career. This method firstly observes repeated motifs, and running counter to that framework of repetition, a set of differences and variations that are structured themselves. Wollen (1996, p.1) notes that Structuralism actually presents us with two structures: 'a structure of sameness and generality and a counter-structure of difference and singularity'. Wollen's argument on Hawks as auteur, in *Signs and Meanings*, discusses how Hawks' work was 'structured synchronically by a contrast between his adventure dramas and his comedies' but at the same time 'Hawks built up a diachronic structure over time by repetition and variation film by film'. By applying this to Kelly's body of work we can see how his dramas and his musicals were very different in theme and look, but at the same time the characters Kelly played had similar traits, such as being an entertainer or a serviceman; craving control; being the All-American male; and so on. Therefore, Kelly repeated *himself* in film after film, albeit giving each repetition a new twist and new flavour. No matter which genre Kelly worked in, he would find a way of making a quintessentially Kelly film, usually by using his own body on screen, whether he was directing the film or not. These two opposing themes of 'sameness' and 'difference and singularity' are also apparent in the Kelly persona as he tried to present his authenticity by portraying the Everyman, the 'blue-collar guy' on the street.

However, he was also different from these men he portrayed because he had a unique talent (displayed mainly through his dances on screen). In addition, if he is indeed an auteur, he is also an individual, a 'creative genius', therefore embodying both sameness and difference; this is part of where his auteurism lies.

While some see the auteur theory as an elitist and restrictive kind of criticism, because it allows the work of a select few 'creative geniuses' to be celebrated, I would argue that it is a worthwhile area of film studies because it means that those who have added something new and innovative to the field of cinema can be given credit for their achievement. I will now begin to engage with the arguments surrounding auteur theory, since it is such a contested theory, and explain why I think it is relevant for my discussion on Kelly, as a director and performer, in order to show where I think he differs from (or indeed is similar to) fellow auteurs. I will base my argument on developments and debates surrounding auteur theory and cite other filmmakers who have been labelled as auteurs in the past.

Andre Bazin (vol.1, 1967; vol.2, 1971) wrote a series of essays in the 1950s for the French film criticism magazine *Cahiers du Cinema* which are still highly influential today; this is arguably where auteur theory began. Many debates have surrounded the controversial theory with the likes of Andrew Sarris (1962) regarding it as a very significant development, and others such as Pauline Kael (1963) believing it is a highly flawed and unreliable theory. Indeed auteur theory has always been a greatly debated theory, with critics still disagreeing over its worth.

John Caughie (1981) edited a collection of articles documenting the stages of how auteur theory came about in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*; and, where Caughie takes a traditional view

on authorship, Catherine Grant gives her work a modern take. Grant's article 'www.auteur.com?' published in *Screen*, argues that 'film authorship has rarely been considered a wholly legitimate object of contemplation' (2000, p.101) and she attempts to prove the value of authorship by appealing for 'the revival and amplification of a commercial take on auteurism.' (ibid)

Caughie (1981, p.67) cautiously points to the resistant qualities of both concept and practice and believes that the 'attempt to move beyond auteurism has to recognise also the fascination of the figure of the auteur, and the way that he uses the cinephile's pleasure'. Caughie's work registered a shift in the post-war period from a modernist conceptualization of authorship as a exertion of self-expressive artistic control towards what Grant refers to in her article as a 'postmodernist author-function' where the 'appropriate strategies, competences and pleasure of audience seem to appear, at the very least, equally important' (2000, p.101), but Grant also suggests that Caughie's work did not fully explore this idea.

Work on the growing importance of auteurism from the 1970s to the 1990s is evident in Timothy Corrigan's essay 'The Commerce of Auterism' (2003) and Peter Wollen's noteworthy article 'The Auteur Theory' (2003), where he discusses its origins in *Cahiers du Cinema*. Wollen clearly outlines the many problems the theory has faced over the years, noting that in its development period 'it could be interpreted and applied on rather broad lines; different critics developed somewhat different methods within a framework of common attitudes' (2003, p.9). Wollen is basically saying that nobody was quite sure how to define the term 'auteur' or how to go about judging if someone was an auteur or not. As already noted, the theory has been central to study for over five decades now and is one

of the most widely used academic terms in the field, and yet some critics find it the hardest term to define.

I believe the two main questions that authorship raise are 'who is an auteur?' and 'what is an auteur?'; in other words how do we define the term auteur and what makes one person an auteur and another person just a filmmaker? Patrick Colm Hogan (cited in Grant 2000, p.1) thinks that 'the theorization of auteurism has not been well served by dominant critical approaches', believing that instead of a clear and rigid definition being agreed on, it has actually become a somewhat unclear and vague term. However, I believe that a clear definition can be reached, one such as Wollen uses to describe Howard Hawks when he says Hawks follows a true auteurist path because 'in film after film Hawks repeated himself, albeit giving each repetition a new twist, a new flavour' (2000, p.101). I would argue this same point about Kelly since his characters were often similar but slightly different, while still retaining the 'All-American Kelly persona' I will discuss in the next section. He also used innovations in *mise-en-scène*, all of which were slightly different, giving his films a distinct edge. These innovations included on-location shooting; three-way split screen; double exposure; and combining real life and animation.

The Star Persona

Kelly had roles both in front of and behind the camera and, because of this, I have labelled him as a 'performing auteur' since he displayed manifestations of his auteur status both on the screen (as an actor, dancer and singer) and behind the camera (as a director and choreographer).

I will now turn my attention to complicating the star image of Kelly, since he was not just a performer like so many of his

contemporaries. On the one hand he is the textual protagonist of musicals such as *An American in Paris* (1951) and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), in other words *he* is the American and *he* does the singing. However, when he stars in a non-musical genre he may lose some of this importance, since (although he is still acting) he is no longer 'performing' through song and dance, the way he does in musical films. The drama *Marjorie Morningstar* (1958) is a film named after Natalie Wood's character and therefore, because of this, the narrative would seem to place *her* in control. This film also creates further problems since he is not playing a typically 'Kelly' role; he is not quite the 'bad guy', but rather the 'heel' in direct opposition to Wood's innocent teen. Even in this film, far removed from his MGM musicals, he still plays a theatrical director who tries but cannot hold a 'normal' job.

Kelly as Auteur

This section sets out to provide an account of key perspectives on both authorship and star studies because I believe Gene Kelly to be a crossover of the two. Both auteurism and stardom theories propose different mechanisms for essentially the same process, namely the attribution of unity (be it thematic, stylistic or otherwise) to a group of films. It is not common for auteur theory to be discussed in relation to stars, particularly one who worked extensively behind the camera as well as in front of it, thus arguably creating two different personas.

Kelly may have worked with directors who have also been cited as auteurs, such as Vincente Minnelli, but I believe that auteurism can still exist in collaborative ventures and that Kelly continues to function as auteur in the films he starred in which were directed by Minnelli. The key question here is why authorship

theory is a valuable critical model to use and that is something I will probe in this section.

In its most basic form, auteurism means that one figure (the auteur) can impose his or her creative will on a project, and auteur theory assumed this figure was the director. In brief, it can be said that a number of people contribute to a film but they all contribute under the direction of the director. One of the key points that debates have revolved around is that if it can be argued that a director's contribution to the process of filmmaking is so complete as to overpower any input from his collaborators then he is an auteur.

A second issue to consider, and one key to my argument on Kelly, is about organisational control. A prime example is the way that the studio system might influence the input of a director (or performer) on their finished film. Since Kelly worked both under MGM bosses and as a part of The Freed Unit, headed by producer Arthur Freed, for most of his musicals, he makes an interesting case study. Parallels can also be drawn between Kelly's repressed talents at MGM and those of his character Don Lockwood in *Singin' in the Rain*, among other characters.

David Sharp suggests that there is a 'considerable European tradition that says that filmmakers develop recognisable styles, unfettered by a studio system (even if they work in one)' (2006) just as Kelly did at MGM's Freed Unit. Sharp adds that 'their own philosophy of life, thoughts, politics and worldview [are thought to be] distilled in their own creative output,'(2006) arguing that this view has a lot to do with the creation of films as works of art, much like paintings or sculptures. However, if this is the case then Sharp is giving all filmmakers the opportunity to be seen as auteurs and not just the select few who have outstanding careers in their field. I believe that these 'recognisable styles' that filmmakers develop have

to be extremely individual and apparent in order to promote them to the level of auteur and also believe that Kelly's body of work possesses these elements.

On-screen Persona

Control

Control is a key theme that runs through the majority of Kelly's work. No matter whether his characters feature in musicals, dramas or comedies, they crave control in a variety of ways.

To begin with, Kelly understood the body and therefore was able to control it. This becomes most apparent in his dance sequences when he tries to manipulate the camera and use it to film the musical numbers. It seems as though he occupies, indeed fills, both the pro-filmic and filmic space with his movements. This element of his persona can be traced throughout his body of work, particularly in his musical films. He quite literally takes control of the filmic space in *Singin' in the Rain* (or indeed his character Don does) by setting the scene for the musical number 'You Were Meant for Me' on an empty sound stage, thus becoming director, technician and performer. This number displays a sense of complete control since it combines both directorial and romantic control. By setting the scene with lights, fans, props, etc, Don is showing us that he not only knows about working in front of the camera (since he is an actor) but also what is involved, in even the slightest technical job, behind the camera. With Kelly portraying an actor with technical knowledge he is not only acting a part on-screen but manifesting his own knowledge in this character, from both sides of the camera. In *Summer Stock* (1950) he directs the show, arranges the props and creates the stage in a barn. When the leading man and lady abandon the show Joe Ross (Kelly) not only steps in to star in the show but

he also trains Jane (Judy Garland), a farmer, to become an actress, singer and dancer in order to replace the leading lady, therefore making it *his* show in all respects. In the barn, which has just been turned into a theatre, Joe tells Jane about life in show business, which is completely alien to her as a farmer, and how much it means to him.

> *Joe*: Wait till opening night when the people come in, even the air gets exciting, you can feel them out there. You can't see them but you can feel them. It's like electricity. Oh, boy!
> *Jane*: You really love this, don't you?
> *Joe*: Show business? There's nothing else in the world. If I couldn't be up here I'd be backstage or selling tickets.

When Joe tells Jane of his love for show business - and what it could mean to her if she chooses this life - he asks her to smell the grease paint that symbolises the theatre for him. Joe says 'I love the theatre and everything it stands for: the heartaches, the excitement, the applause, the hokum, everything'. This statement shows the important role that show business plays in Kelly films, and the same words could have been used by a number of Kelly's characters including Danny McGuire in *Cover Girl* (1944), Don Lockwood in *Singin' in the Rain*, Barry Nichols in *Les Girls* (1957), Noel Airman in *Marjorie Morningstar*, and Andy Miller in *The Young Girls of Rochefort* (1967). This speech leads to a very similar number to 'You Were Meant for Me' when Jane asks Joe about the importance of a musical show.

> *Joe*: We're trying to tell a story with music and song and dance and not just with words. For instance, if the boy tells the girl he loves her, he just doesn't say it, he sings it.
> *Jane*: Why doesn't he just say it?
> *Joe*: I don't know why, but it sounds kind of nice.

Joe then performs 'You Wonderful You' on the stage with Jane and, like Kathy in *Singin' in the Rain*, Jane falls in love with Joe and understands the power that a song and a perfectly set stage can have.

In more obvious examples of control, Jerry Mulligan of *An American in Paris* controls his relationship with Lisa (Leslie Caron) but is also controlled, to a certain extent, by Venus (Nina Foch) since she has the money to make his dreams of becoming a painter come true. Finally his overpowering love for Lisa allows him to be a man and take control of Venus, by telling her the truth about his relationship with Lisa. Undeniably Kelly's characters are dominant in all his on-screen relationships, rigorously pursuing his love interest until she finally admits she loves him too. This is manifested in Joe Brady from *Anchor's Aweigh* (1945), Serafin in *The Pirate* (1948), Eddie O'Brien in *Take Me Out to the Ballgame* (1949), Tommy Albright from *Brigadoon* (1954) and just about every other role Kelly played in his typical confident, cocky screen manner. He also acts as the domineering figure to his fellow comrades and colleagues, teaching Brooklyn (Frank Sinatra) how to get a girl in *Anchors Aweigh* and *On the Town* (1949); bossing his theatrical company around in *Cover Girl, Les Girls, Summer Stock* and so on; and generally never backing down to anyone else, even when paired with other major stars such as Sinatra.

Authenticity

From the start of his cinematic career, certain attributes of Kelly's persona were spelt out. John Russell Taylor and Arthur Jackson (1971, p.60) see the Kelly character as 'the open, confident, brash […] straight-forward American male, with a smile on his face for the whole human race'.

On-screen Kelly often wore casual, comfortable clothes - basically the outfit of the ordinary man on the street. In contrast to Astaire's top hat and tails and Sinatra's tailored suits, Kelly usually wore jeans, t-shirts and loafers. Not only did this outfit become a recurring theme in itself, with extreme connotations of 'everydayness', thus creating a recognisable image for Kelly, but it also meant that these tight-fitting clothes were ideal for energetic dancing, allowing him to dance freely and create a masculine silhouette. In *An American in Paris* where he plays a painter, *Singin' in the Rain* where he portrays an actor, or in the many films where he plays a nightclub owner, director, performer or a combination of all three, such as *Cover Girl, Summer Stock, Marjorie Morningstar, Les Girls* and *What a Way to Go!* (1964) he wears some version of this outfit.

Kelly is also seen wearing a take on this outfit in publicity stills; candid photographs taken backstage when he is directing or rehearsing; and even in photographs taken while he is at home. In *Let's Make Love* (1960) he appears briefly in a cameo role, where he is billed as 'himself' and referred to in the film as 'Mr. Kelly'. He again dons this outfit when he attempts to teach Yves Montard how to dance. If this role parodies his 'true' self then surely it can be argued that all of the aforementioned roles also reflect this 'true' self. Hence, 'Kelly the auteur' is doing what all auteurs do by creating a sense of himself in these films but doing it in such an obvious way - by using his own body - that it may be overlooked. Kelly simply created a recurring and recognisable outer persona to allow the audience to get to know him and relate to him on an earthly level, not as an immaculately dressed and preened movie star, but as an everyday Joe.

The other outfit that became a recurring theme for Kelly is the uniform, signifying wartime duty and patriotism and again suggesting

authenticity, since the majority of these films were made during the war and in the post-war years. Again, most of the audience could relate to this, no matter what their social background, and the uniform is used subtly to show his All-American persona in the form of patriotism and love for his country (as did *Take Me Out to the Ballgame,* with its theme of baseball, comradeship and the musical finale 'Strictly USA' where the actors are dressed in red, white and blue). Kelly's characters were in the army, the navy and the air force on more than a few occasions. His debut in *For Me and My Gal* (1942) saw him as a performer turned soldier; he also plays a soldier in *Thousands Cheer* (1943), *Living in a Big Way* (1947) and *It's Always Fair Weathe*r (1955). In *Pilot No.5* (1943) he joins the air force; and he sports a sailor suit in *On the Town, Anchors Aweigh* and *Invitation to the Dance* (1956) for the duration of each film. Again, these films intertwine real life and movies since Kelly was a lieutenant in the US Navy during World War II. The sailor suit has strong connotations of the All-American male, allowing the average man who had been drafted to have someone on screen to look up to and identify with. *On the Town* is an extremely patriotic film which follows three sailors (Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Jules Munchin) during a 24-hour leave in New York. Kelly seems to be the driving force behind the film as both star and co-director; and the revolutionary on-location shooting made it stand out from other films of the period, since it was the first Hollywood film to be shot on location.

Even when Kelly did not wear a uniform during a film, he was often referred to as having donned one before the start of film, such as in *An American in Paris* where he plays an "Ex-GI". *Living in a Big Way* also starts at the end of the war, with Kelly's character finding it hard to adjust back into society, symbolised by the removal of his 'comfortable' and familiar soldier's uniform which is replaced by an

ill-fitting suit and tie. It is only once he changes into jeans, a t-shirt and loafers that he feels 'himself' again, and subsequently performs a musical number.

In *Summer Stock,* an empty barn is used for several musical numbers including the squeaky floorboard number and 'You Wonderful You'. *Summer Stock* takes place on a farm, therefore presenting a very realistic and authentic setting where the actors are seen milking cows, picking eggs and so on, while dressed in jeans, loafers and gingham shirts. Therefore, even the staging of the musical numbers have a 'realness' about them. In addition to the performances in the barn, 'Dig for your Dinner' is set in an All-American farmhouse kitchen, with the large wooden table acting as a stage.

Kelly appears briefly in *What a Way to Go!* as one of Shirley MacLaine's many husbands, all of whom meet a grizzly end. Kelly plays Pinky Benson who establishes his own persona by constantly wearing pink. Pinky starts his career in a small nightclub where nobody pays attention to his act; he dresses in dirty clothes and his face is hidden behind clown makeup, so we do not know who the 'real' Pinky is. One night, when he is short of time, he goes on stage as 'himself' without the make-up, dressed in khakis and a t-shirt and becomes an instant hit: women whistle at him and men applaud him. Like Don Lockwood, Pinky becomes a star overnight and moves to Hollywood. In an obvious parody of *Singin' in the Rain,* he shows up for the film premiere in evening dress and with a huge smile on his face, waving at the crowd. Keeping with the *Singin' in the Rain* references, his fans stampede him, tearing his clothes as they did with Don, but this marks Pinky's demise; his fans (symbolised by elephants) trample him to death. Consequently he lived for show business and died for it too. Even after his death the nickname

'Pinky' lives on, in rather bad taste, as his coffin and the bouquet on top are both pink, displaying how his persona was indeed woven into his whole life. Thus becoming the 'real' Pinky both makes him a star and destroys him.

Innovations in *mise-en-scène*

Kelly was involved in a lot of technically innovative techniques in his many MGM musicals, both on and off screen. These are shown through the *mise-en-scène* in such ways as location shooting, double exposure, three-way split screen, and animation and real life combined.

Two significant uses of props are the squeaky floorboard and newspaper in *Summer Stock* and the dustpan lids from *It's Always Fair Weather.* With these examples, and many others, Kelly controlled the *mise-en-scène*, not only be choosing these items, but also by creating a sense of authenticity by using everyday items to create dance numbers with, combining all three signs of his auteurism, both in front of and behind the camera.

Kelly's on-screen persona and individual style was an innovation in its own right. For once the public had a star that had the personality and look of the everyday man on the street, only he had the added appeal of being able to express himself through dance. Kelly was involved in creating and executing many innovative techniques, and the way he performed these on-screen is extremely significant. One example is the combination of animation and real life in *Anchor's Aweigh* (when Kelly dances with Jerry the mouse), but it was only because of Kelly's ability to perform the number that made it a success, since he knew exactly what to do to make it appear as if he was dancing with a cartoon character. The same is true of the 'Alter Ego' number in *Cover Girl* since Kelly has to

convince the audience he is dancing with himself, and would therefore have to perform both roles suitably before they could be edited together to create the final number. Thus the 'Everyman' persona Kelly tried to present becomes one of an innovative individual deeply involved in the realms of filmmaking and, therefore, no longer an average American but rather a self-sufficient performer who does not even need a real life partner to dance with. Kelly also tap-danced on roller skates in *It's Always Fair Weather*; performed on scaffolding in *Living in a Big Way;* walked a tightrope in *The Pirate*; and swung across rooftops in *Anchors Aweigh*. Therefore, Kelly became both performer and stuntman on screen because he did all his own performing. Since the performance of a dancer cannot be faked on screen it seems that Kelly's performances themselves were innovative both in execution and in content, and therefore authentic.

Behind the Camera

Control

Kelly's control behind the camera (through directing and choreographing) often appeared on the screen in his own performances. One exception would be when he taught some of his co-stars how to dance, but even then they were performing alongside him. Both Sinatra and Debbie Reynolds had never danced before being put on screen with Kelly (in *Anchors Aweigh* and *Singin' in the Rain* respectively) and Kelly had the added task of teaching them how to dance. This again complicates the 'Everyman' persona somewhat, as this control (even over his co-stars) suggests that Kelly was an individual who not only used his skills but tried to teach them to others as well.

One behind the scenes photograph of Kelly on the set of *Brigadoon* shows him with director Vincente Minnelli but, as the image suggests, he seems to be taking over the directing process as well, with Minnelli looking on. All star images are constructed to a certain extent and, since MGM has set up this photograph, it is useful in discussing Kelly's constructed persona as a 'complete performer' both in front of and behind the camera and how the studio tried to market Kelly as an all-round performer.

Authenticity

Kelly tried to create authenticity behind the scenes, for on-screen shooting, with careful consideration going into sets and costumes, most apparent in *On the Town's* on-location shooting mentioned earlier. His authenticity is also embodied in his helping to pioneer the integrated musicals where numbers advanced, or at least referred to, the plot rather than being separate entities of the film, like Busby Berkley's extravagant numbers featuring countless comparable women. Kelly also created numbers that were on a far smaller scale than Berkley's. *On the Town's* 'Main Street' signifies the first encounter between Kelly and Vera-Ellen and takes place in a small rehearsal studio, and it is obvious that Kelly has chosen the wooden floors and mirrored walls to create the atmosphere.

In terms of not just his behind-the-camera persona, but his off-screen persona, Kelly had been a dance teacher with a theatrical background which helped him understand both dance and show business in general before he came to Hollywood and got involved in the cinema. He directed and choreographed shows on Broadway before moving to Hollywood, and this gave the impression that he knew his craft inside out, aspiring to create on screen what he saw in the theatre.

Off screen he also wore the two outfits he mostly favoured on-screen. Both the uniform (he joined the navy during World War II) and the casual, everyday ensemble of jeans, t-shirts and loafers were integral to his life, therefore creating a sense of unity between both his off-screen and on-screen personas. As a result of this, he could become an easily identifiable and accessible personality for audiences – who would no doubt be wearing similar 'everyday' clothes – and also established himself as an authentic talent, not just a 'movie star,' who was in it for money, fame, and designer clothes, but as someone who was genuinely interested in the craft of filmmaking. The paradox of ordinary/extraordinary discussed in the pioneering work of Richard Dyer in *Stars* (1998) would strongly apply to Kelly's star image since off-screen he was an extraordinary talent (presenting an ordinary image through publicity photos, magazine interviews, etc.) and presenting characters with ordinary lives (but with extraordinary talent) on-screen. This paradox overlaps both his public and private personas and would make a worthy topic for future study.

Innovations in *mise-en-scène*

Kelly used a number of innovative techniques in the films he directed, including the on-location shooting in *On the Town*, and the combining of animation and real life as previously mentioned. He also used three-way split screen in *It's Always Fair Weather* for the 'Once I Had a Dream' number and compressed time and space in *On the Town's* 'New York New York' number, to mention just a few of the major developments. Delamater notes that 'Kelly's experimentations were often more subtle, concentrated and basic, therefore mundane and less noticeable, aspects of putting steps together in a meaningful dance sequence and photographing the sequence'. (1981, pp.84-96)

If we look again at the 'Alter Ego' number from *Cover* Girl, Kelly not only performed the number but was also involved behind the scenes in the technical process of using the innovative technique of double exposure, producing Hollywood's first ever musical number to use this technique.

Kelly knew about the technical aspects of shooting a scene and he understood the camera. He used one camera for greater control, believing that the camera movement and the dancer's movement could work together to create a kinetic force on-screen, much like that of live performance in a theatre. He was also able to control the space his body moved in, using this space (rather than just performing within it) and he always used the full spatial resources of the set. The way he changed the camera angle revealed new (potential dance) space, a prime example of this being the way he uses the street in the roller skate number 'I Like Myself' from *It's Always Fair Weather,* or indeed *Singin' in the Rain's* title track, where he again uses a street to create a variety of dance spaces, editing with match cuts on the action in both numbers.

Kelly could also use the camera in innovative ways, especially in dance numbers, to create his dynamic exuberance on-screen; in other words, he used it to control the *mise-en-scène*, an important element of an auteur's filmmaking and used it to film his own performances. Therefore he would have to work out exactly where the camera was going to shoot before getting in front of it to perform. When a camera follows a dancer moving at the same speed there is hardly any movement so Kelly hardly used this kind of shot, instead opting to rectify the situation by putting props in the background of panning shots to allow him to shoot past them and create a sense of speed. No background is ever bare in a Kelly film and every item serves a purpose, which suggests that even

backgrounds and props seemed to need Kelly's approval from behind the camera before he was happy to perform in front of it.

It is through these innovations that I feel that Kelly managed to define himself as an auteur and not just a performer or 'movie star', despite the fact he was working for a Hollywood studio. I believe that he can be defined as an auteur since he used techniques that allowed him to transcend his routine assignments to create a body of work which is stamped with a distinctive style, therefore there is a sense of himself woven into the fabric of his films from both sides of the camera, allowing him to be worthy of the term 'performing auteur'.

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Brigadoon. 1954. Dir. by Vincente Minnelli. MGM.

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For Me and My Gal. 1942. Dir. by Busby Berkley. MGM.

Invitation to the Dance. 1956. Dir. by Gene Kelly. MGM.

It's Always Fair Weather. 1955. Dir. by Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen. MGM.

Les Girls. 1957. Dir. by George Cukor. MGM.

Let's Make Love. 1960. George Cukor. 20th Century Fox.

Living in a Big Way. 1947. Dir. by Gregory La Cava. MGM.

Marjorie Morningstar. 1958. Dir. by Irving Rapper. Warner Bros. Pictures.

On the Town. 1949. Dir. by Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen. MGM.

Pilot No.5. 1943. Dir. by George Sidney. MGM.

The Pirate. 1948. Dir. by Vincente Minnelli. MGM.

Singin' in the Rain. 1952. Dir. by Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen. MGM.

Summer Stock. 1950. Dir. by Charles Walters. MGM.

Take Me Out to the Ballgame. 1949. Dir. by Busby Berkley. MGM.

Thousands Cheer. 1943. Dir. by George Sidney. MGM.

What a Way to Go! 1964. Dir. by J. Lee Thompson. 20th Century Fox.

The Young Girls of Rochefort. 1967. Dir. by Jacques Demy. Warner Bros/Seven Arts.