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The Time of Our Lives

DIRTY DANCING AND POPULAR CULTURE

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INTRODUCTION

YANNIS TZIOUMAKIS

dirty gardening. dirty hiking. dirty scrubbing. (missed it at the movies? you must get it on DVD. it's the love story of a young cleaner at an upscale holiday retreat in 1960s America who teaches the teenage son of a middle class couple to become a whizz with a mop and bucket). and, OK, dirty dancing, especially the foxtrot in a muddy field. all of these, as well as sweaty jogging, warrant a shower with this gel from anatomicals, the world's most crazy (or should that be Swayze?) bath and body company. we only want you for your body.

An Increasingly Strong Presence: *Dirty Dancing* at Twenty-Five

This unusually long marketing message can be found printed on one of the four sides of Anatomicals' Cypress and Thyme Body Cleanser container that is readily available in department stores and from on-line retailers. On another side of the same container there is a small drawing of the "likeness" of Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey taking a shower together. Swayze is standing behind Grey and is ready to brush body cleanser down her arm, which she has extended to embrace him. They both seem to be losing themselves in the moment, their faces almost touching each other, their lips ready to meet. On the front of the container, the product's name, "'I've Had the Thyme of My Life'

Cypress and Thyme Body Cleanser,” appears in striking white and black lettering against a strong green background, promising an unparalleled cleansing experience that will make one’s body feel the way it has never felt before.

For anyone who has seen the film *Dirty Dancing* (Emile Ardolino, 1987), the name of the product, the drawing of the shower scene, and the fictitious film about the young cleaner teaching a middle-class teenager how to mop are all unmistakably signifiers of the film. Indeed, all three references are variations of the film’s plot (replace “cleaner,” “son,” and “a whiz with a mop and a bucket” with “dancer,” “daughter,” and “a whiz on the dance floor”), of one of the film’s most iconic scenes (remove the shower and the body cleanser and imagine that the characters are rehearsing a dance number), and of the trademark song of the film (replace “thyme” with “time”). Even without the presence of such tells as mentioning the act of “dirty dancing” and “[Patrick] Swayze,” the film’s male lead, these three playful references invoke *Dirty Dancing* in an effort to relate pleasures associated with audiences’ experiences of the film to the product.

The tie-in of a beauty and body product to an American film is certainly not new or unusual.¹ However, the tie-in of “‘I’ve Had the Thyme of My Life’ Cypress and Thyme Body Cleanser” to *Dirty Dancing* highlights a number of remarkable qualities that characterize this particular film, especially in the context of today’s franchise-driven, media-saturated environment. First, it represents licensing from a film that is a quarter of a century old. Despite the recent global success of its stage adaptation, *Dirty Dancing: The Classic Story on Stage*, for the majority of the twenty-five years since the film’s release in 1987 *Dirty Dancing* has not been subject to any major or coherent franchising plans beyond the first couple of years following its surprisingly successful theatrical release. These plans included a concert tour featuring some of the artists whose songs were heard in the film and in the two soundtrack albums that accompanied its release, and, far less successfully, a spin-off television show with the same title that lasted only a few episodes.² Even its once eagerly awaited sequel/remake, *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights* (Guy Ferland) came out as recently as 2004 (coinciding with the opening of the stage show in Australia) and had little impact, box office or otherwise, compared to its predecessor.³

Dirty Dancing failed to establish a significant commercial afterlife partly because the rights to the property changed hands several times since its theatrical release, the company that produced and distributed the film having gone out of business in 1990. In this respect, potential plans to further exploit *Dirty Dancing* in the market had to be abandoned and later redesigned by a parade of successive copyright-holding companies (LIVE, Artisan, and Lionsgate). Each of these companies occupied a different position in the marketplace and had questionable abilities to franchise a property in the manner of a major Hollywood studio.

Arguably more important, however, the failure to franchise *Dirty Dancing* for most of its history had to do more with the fact that the film had few points of contact with the *franchisable* blockbusters of the last twenty-five years, which targeted primarily young male audiences. As a period piece that was based on an original screenplay by novelist and screenwriter Eleanor Bergstein and geared primarily toward young female audiences, *Dirty Dancing* had little in common with the expensive, effects-driven action spectacles that were based on pre-existing properties and generated merchandising that would support a significant film afterlife. *Dirty Dancing* also seemed to share few characteristics with the small number of Hollywood films that targeted women and succeeded in becoming franchises or “event films” in the 2000s, such as *Legally Blonde* (Robert Luketic, 2001) and *Sex and the City: The Movie* (Michael Patrick King, 2008).⁴ Despite the fact that *Dirty Dancing* did share an emphasis on romance, escape, and, arguably, validation with the above films, it was not interested in questions of consumerism and beauty, which, according to Ashley Elaine York, represent qualities that also characterize the more recent event films targeting women.⁵ Furthermore, it was certainly not marketed with an emphasis on “spectacle aesthetics and a focus on ancillary marketing and foreign box office,” elements that, for York, are foundational in the marketing strategies of all blockbuster films, irrespective of whether they target primarily male or female audiences.⁶ Although *Dirty Dancing* was admittedly very successful in the two ancillary markets of home video and the movie soundtrack, its success in the latter market was arguably a happy accident that took even those responsible for it by surprise rather than a product of meticulous franchise design. This could also be said to be the case for the

film's unexpectedly lucrative box office outside the US given the importance non-US markets place on the presence of established stars and other marketable elements, neither of which characterized *Dirty Dancing*.

On the other hand, despite the film's failure to become a franchise in the 1990s and early 2000s, *Dirty Dancing* never quite disappeared from popular culture. Its celebrated soundtrack sold more than 42 million copies by 2006, and certain sources have referred to it as the sixth biggest selling record of all time.⁷ The film also generated *More Dirty Dancing*, an album that contained the songs from the film that did not make it onto the original soundtrack, and *Dirty Dancing: Live!*, a collection of live versions of many of the songs. All three albums have been widely available since their release. Furthermore, *Dirty Dancing* was re-released in theaters both in 1997 and 2007 to mark its 10th and 20th year anniversaries. The film has always been readily available in every new home entertainment format, from VHS to LaserDisc to DVD and Blu-ray, including several special and anniversary editions; this suggests the continuing existence of an audience in the years following its success in theaters. The franchising efforts that took place from the mid-2000s onwards, when the film's rights were bought by successful mini-major Lions Gate (later Lionsgate), were built on solid foundations. These efforts included, among others, the release of *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights* by Lionsgate, the extremely successful launch of *Dirty Dancing: The Classic Story on Stage* (2005-present) first in Australia and later in the UK, and the reality television dance competition show *Dirty Dancing: The Time of Your Life* (Living TV, 2007-2009), and proved that the film did have the potential for the kind of commercial exploitation that is associated with blockbuster films despite not sharing most of their constituting elements. This makes *Dirty Dancing* a very rare phenomenon in the American film industry, and of course justifies the decision by a modern body products company like Anatomicals to strike a licensing deal for a twenty-five-year-old film.

Between Hollywood and Independent Cinema

Second, the strong presence of *Dirty Dancing* in contemporary popular and consumer culture is even more impressive if one considers

that it is not a Hollywood film, but a film the origins of which are located in the so-called “independent sector” of American cinema, a sector that was enjoying a small boom in the 1980s before companies like Miramax and film showcases like the Sundance Film Festival helped transform it into a hugely commercial and popular market from the 1990s onwards. In an authoritatively constructed appendix of American independent theatrical releases between 1984 and 1994,⁸ *Dirty Dancing* was listed among such 1987 independent films of distinction as *The Hollywood Shuffle* (Robert Townsend) and *Matewan* (John Sayles).⁹ This is because *Dirty Dancing* was one of the first films from Vestron Pictures, a theatrical production and distribution organization that branched out from the home video market in the mid-1980s. At a time when VHS penetration in the US market was still increasing by 40% annually (1986–87),¹⁰ Vestron decided to create a production and distribution facility that would make relatively low budget films that, after a brief theatrical release, would be exploited further by its core business, the home video division.

The film’s independent credentials might come as a surprise both to the many fans of the film who are not aware of its production history and to lovers of American independent cinema who might fail to detect in the film any characteristics of independent film production in the 1980s. These typically included stylistic and narrative departures from pillars of Hollywood studio filmmaking such as continuity editing and cause-effect narrative logic, a slower narrative pace, and an emphasis on subjects and issues deemed non-commercial by Hollywood standards (for instance, unionization or the experiences of ethnic minorities, among others).¹¹ And yet on a closer look *Dirty Dancing* does contain a surprising number of such characteristics, including its focus on a young woman’s journey from adolescence to adulthood, the presence of a secondary plot revolving around the non-commercial subject of abortion and its mature, matter-of-fact handling by the narrative, the extremely prominent role of class politics in a film that is supposed to be about a summer romance, the strong presence of ethnic minorities (especially Jewish but also African American and Latino/a), and a relatively ambiguous ending that does not entirely support the lasting formation of the heterosexual couple. In this respect, it is neither surprising nor coincidental that the *New York Times* review of the film compared it to *Baby, It’s You* (John

Sayles, 1983), another 1960s-based film about a young couple's problematic relationship that featured a strong focus on class politics.¹²

On the other hand, despite these characteristics, the film had a number of points of contact with Hollywood studio productions. Indeed, while it was financed, produced and distributed away from the major studios of the time, *Dirty Dancing* also seemed to model itself on studio filmmaking. For instance, it carried the substantial budget of \$6 million at a time when the budgets of key independent films tended to be below or near the \$1 million mark;¹³ it featured actors with some marquee value—if not full-fledged star status—like Patrick Swayze; it was distributed in almost a thousand theaters in the US (which was comparable to the release of many studio films); and, as part of its marketing formula, its distributor also released an original soundtrack that included a mix of period songs and songs commissioned specifically for the film (which, as noted earlier, became one of the best-selling records of all time). Furthermore, *Dirty Dancing* was characterized by such Hollywood studio film elements as a straightforward, cause-effect driven narrative structure, a functional and fairly conservative visual style, participation in a number of clear and well-established film genres, and even the use of certain stylistic elements associated with the high-concept films that were the epitome of Hollywood cinema in the late 1980s. According to Stephen Prince, *Dirty Dancing* was a high-concept film characterized by “a catchy narrative premise,” which he summarizes in 15 words as “spoiled girl vacationing in the Catskills, learns about life from a sensual working-class performer.”¹⁴ In this respect, and despite citing comparisons with *Baby, It's You*, the same *New York Times* review also compared *Dirty Dancing* to Adrian Lyne's *Flashdance* (1983),¹⁵ a film widely considered a paradigmatic Hollywood high-concept film.¹⁶

This peculiar combination of independent and mainstream filmmaking choices has been responsible for the creation of a hybrid film and example of proto-Indiewood cinema, a predecessor of that category of filmmaking in which “Hollywood and the independent sector merge or overlap”¹⁷ that was not popularized until at least a decade after the release of *Dirty Dancing*. The unusual mixing of production, narrative, stylistic, and political elements from these two different modes of filmmaking might go some way to explain why the film has managed to maintain a strong presence in popular memory

following the end of its lucrative theatrical run. Resembling a Hollywood production enough to be distributed as a major motion picture and attract a mass audience but also utilizing enough characteristics associated with the quality independent film sector to make it stand out from the crowd, *Dirty Dancing* managed to achieve a rare feat in American cinema: to tell an extremely conventional story in a way that circumvented many of the clichés and pitfalls of commercial Hollywood studio filmmaking. However, rather than avoiding clichés through the use of irony, alienation techniques, or other more pronounced aesthetic and political choices, *Dirty Dancing*'s weapons of choice were often subtlety, understatement, and even a refusal to fully embrace hallmarks of the lovers-from-different-backgrounds story. These strategies helped undermine many of the conventional and formulaic aspects of its narrative and allowed the film to speak to the audience in a way that comparable Hollywood films (*The Karate Kid* [John Avildsen, 1984], *Pretty in Pink* [Howard Deutch, 1986], and *Cocktail* [Roger Donaldson, 1988]) rarely could while also reaching a mass audience.

More specifically, the narrative of *Dirty Dancing* presents a number of elements that deviate from or complicate the *Romeo and Juliet* narrative formula on which it heavily draws. First, the spectator's guide to the narrative is a young girl (Baby) rather than the young male character (Johnny), to the extent that the audience never gets to experience Johnny's perspective in the narrative world except when he is in the presence of Baby.

Second, and contrary to Prince's view that *Dirty Dancing* is a film about Baby learning "about life from a sensual working-class performer," the film actually ends with a public admission by Johnny that he has learned about life from Baby and her actions in the narrative. Such a male character transformation into an "ideal" posed by a woman is, according to Kristin Thompson, "certainly an unusual [feature] of a Hollywood film,"¹⁸ as it breaks from the patriarchal viewpoint that structures Hollywood cinema and suggests that *Dirty Dancing* is an atypical American film that firmly stands its ground when it comes to privileging a female perspective.

Third, for a film that deals with rites of passage, summer romance, and a love story involving a couple that tries hard to go past seemingly insurmountable obstacles, the fact that neither of the two leads ever

say “I love you” to each other is another element that differentiates the film from similar ones. Even in their goodbye scene, after Johnny has been fired and is ready to leave Kellerman’s (seemingly) forever, the two protagonists embrace in an awkward fashion, with Johnny uttering “I’ll never be sorry” and Baby responding “Neither will I.” No emotional outbursts, no indictment of the restrictive environment that crushed the romance, no long speeches, no “I love you.” Compare this to the equivalent scene from *Dirty Dancing*’s contemporary, *Pretty in Pink*, in which the working-class heroine, in an outburst of emotion, pressures her rich boyfriend into admitting that he is splitting up with her because of her class background, causing him to cry in the process. Through such narrative choices, *Dirty Dancing* subtly avoids a major Hollywood cliché, while arguably making the point through the non-diegetic rendition of the song “She’s Like the Wind” sung by Patrick Swayze.

Fourth, the film also avoids a number of climactic sequences that are normally expected when the narrative finally deals with the fate of the couple’s antagonists (in this case, Robbie the waiter, Vivian Pressman, Max and Neil Kellerman, and Jake and Lisa Houseman). Despite ample opportunity for dramatic showdowns with the numerous obstacles to the realization of the couple, the narrative once again opts for understatement, which, on the one hand, makes for a more realistic outcome to the story, while, on the other, does not detract from the fantasy of the climactic dance sequence at the end of the film. With the exception of Robbie and Vivian, whose punishments are still light and rather symbolic (the former loses his tip from Dr. Houseman and the possibility to develop a serious relationship with the cold-hearted Lisa, while the latter is punished by not being able to get Johnny), the other antagonists are last seen “dirty dancing” alongside the main couple in the final sequence. Again, the comparisons with films like *Cocktail* and *The Karate Kid*, in which the working-class male character punishes his antagonists through the use of violence, or with *Pretty in Pink*, in which the upper-middle-class Steff (played by James Spader) is confronted and exposed as a sad failure who could not buy the female protagonist with his money, are interesting.

Last and most importantly, the film supports the formation of the couple only partially. Despite the undisputed triumph of Baby and Johnny at the end of the film, which comes with the approval of the

whole community (barring Vivian) at Kellerman's, it is questionable whether couplehood is in this case a long-term prospect or a very short-term arrangement. On the one hand, there is an indirect (and subtle) acceptance by Dr. Houseman of Johnny and of Baby's maturity. The film ends with the couple dancing the night away, celebrating their victory and their integration to society. On the other hand, this narrative closure, strong as it is, does not carry with it the expectation that "they lived happily ever after." The couple's abstinence from the discourse of love, Baby's willingness to accept her fate (and a place in a corner) as soon as Johnny leaves and not to actively fight to reverse things, the narrative's refusal to open up any possibilities for a long-term future for the couple until perhaps the very last moments, and the extremely strong emphasis from both characters on standing up for people and for one's principles (which also provides the context for their own relationship) all point toward the conclusion that the formation of the couple in the film is a short-term arrangement—the culmination of a summer romance before everyone goes back to their normal lives once vacation is over. Both Johnny and Baby (who by the end of the film is called by her real name, Frances) are transformed characters at that point, ready to grapple with the challenges of a middle-class adult life (for Frances) and the injustices of a tough class system (for Johnny). However, the extent to which they can face these challenges together is certainly debatable, which marks the final dance as both their beginning and end as a formal couple.

These little deviations, based on subtlety and understatement, have helped the film both stand out from a large crowd of similarly themed films and, perhaps, achieve the longevity it has. Specifically, the film's reluctance to succumb fully to a number of formulaic elements readily embraced by other films, in tandem with the privileging of a female perspective in the narrative, creates a very particular effect whereby the narrative structure of *Dirty Dancing* comes across as *originary*, as a point of departure for the formula, before its conventions were further developed and refined by other similarly themed films such as *Cocktail*, *Never Been Kissed* (Raja Gosnell, 1999), *She's All That* (Robert Iscove, 1999), and many others. This is undoubtedly helped by the fact that this 1987 film is set in the early 1960s, while the narratives of comparable films from the 1980s are set in contemporary times (with the exception of *Baby, It's You*). The narrative of

Dirty Dancing then is set in the more “innocent” times of the 1960s (as compared to the 1980s from when the protagonist remembers her youth in the voiceover at the beginning of the film) and constructed as a more innocent story that is not spoiled by the usual clichés and conventions that characterize similar 1980s (and later) films. In this respect, the absence of “I love you,” the light punishment of the antagonists, the debatable state of the couple at the end, and so on, help construct an otherwise typical love story of two young people from different backgrounds as “original,” and therefore utterly enjoyable. Indeed, many fans treat the film as a “guilty pleasure,” as something that, recognizing its formulaic character, they should not have liked or been taken in by, but which they could not resist.¹⁹

Approaching *Dirty Dancing*

Since the success of *Dirty Dancing: The Classic Story on Stage* and Lionsgate’s more concerted efforts toward franchising the property, the original film has enjoyed a remarkable revival in popular culture. According to Lionsgate executives, the film’s DVD has consistently sold a million copies a year,²⁰ while a vast range of merchandising associated with the film or licensed to use its title or logo (including the Anatomicals body cleanser) has saturated the market. Contemporary films such as *Larnacoeur* [*The Heartbreaker*] (Pascal Chaumeil, 2010) and Warner Bros.’ *Crazy, Stupid Love* (Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, 2011) have reproduced whole sequences from *Dirty Dancing*, while a Season 2 episode of the successful television show *Glee* (Fox Television, 2009–present) features a performance of “(I’ve Had) The Time of My Life.” The *Dirty Dancing* “Connections” page on the Internet Movie Database lists over 100 films and television programs that make direct references to the film, including spoofs, re-enactments of iconic scenes, and quotations.²¹

However, the two most important elements in bringing the film into greater prominence in recent times were Patrick Swayze’s death in 2009 and Jennifer Grey’s comeback following her victory in the US reality television show *Dancing with the Stars* in 2010. Both events created a media frenzy that involved a relentless circulation of images, clips, and interviews associated with the film on a global scale, demonstrating clearly the special place that *Dirty Dancing* occupies in

popular culture. If in doubt, one can check the film's Facebook page, which as of July 22, 2012 boasted 14,239,116 "likes" (compare this with 8,367,519 "likes" for the *Star Wars* page and 9,747,196 "likes" for *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy page, both billion-dollar franchises).²² The logical extension of this *Dirty Dancing* fever took place on August 9, 2011, when it was announced that Lionsgate had given the green light for a remake of the film with Kenny Ortega, the choreographer of *Dirty Dancing*, as director.²³ The decision prompted extreme reactions from the film's fans, including a few Facebook "boycott the remake" groups (though membership is relatively low, with just a couple of thousand people having signed up).²⁴ The new film is scheduled for release in 2014.

In many respects, the genesis of this volume took place at the time when *Dirty Dancing* was enjoying this undeniable revival, even though both my co-editor and I had noticed for some time that, despite the film's availability and its great popularity across generations, there was very little scholarly work dedicated to the film.²⁵ This volume offers the first in-depth examination of *Dirty Dancing* from a number of perspectives, with an intention to discuss the film and the phenomenon at a time when its stamp on popular culture can no longer be ignored. Bringing together work from scholars from the areas of film studies, cultural studies, popular music studies, media sociology, popular theater studies, dance studies, and media industry studies, the volume aims to provide a diverse range of answers to the question of why *Dirty Dancing* has become such an important aspect of popular culture in the past twenty-five years.

As the essays that appear under each of the four sections that structure this volume ("Dirty Dancing in Context," "Questions of Reception," "The Production of Nostalgia," and "Beyond the Film") will be briefly presented in the respective introductory passages that precede each section, this general introductory chapter will finish with a few remarks on the scope of the collection, the rationale behind its structure, and the challenges we faced as editors in our effort to examine the film from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. Given that the number of scholarly collections dedicated to the study of individual films is still relatively small—especially compared to the number of (short) monographs that several publishers commission, primarily as part of book series²⁶—I hope that the brief discussion below will

inspire colleagues to undertake similar studies and thereby open up further avenues for bringing film studies closer to other disciplines, with a view toward promoting novel approaches to the study of popular film.

Given that the main question that has been driving this study was to locate the reasons for the film's unusually strong hold on popular culture, we envisaged a collection that would focus on more than *Dirty Dancing* as a film text. Although textual analysis is still at the core of the volume's overall approach, with particular emphasis on questions of genre, race, class, gender politics, and the production of nostalgia, we also wanted to conceptualize the film in other ways. One of these ways involved examining the film's industrial location and was based on two different conceptualizations of the film: *Dirty Dancing* as a product of the American film industry at a very specific, historical juncture and as a *franchisable* property with a long (if uneven) history in a variety of media outlets. In this respect, we solicited essays from film scholars whose work is often located outside traditional, text-based film studies. This work is influenced by industrial film history and by the recent surge of "media industry studies," a body of methodological, historical, and theoretical work that often brings together formerly disparate approaches to the study of media (and film).²⁷ Besides adding new and interesting dimensions in the examination of the film, these industry-based studies have demonstrated the extent to which the film's box office success and much-celebrated afterlife are often intricately linked to the host of companies that have exploited it commercially and their place in the global entertainment industry.

Alongside the collection's focus on the film as text and industrial product, the reader can find an equal level of emphasis on questions of the film's reception. Taking as a starting point Janet Staiger's often-quoted foundational principle that reception studies researches "the history of the interactions between real readers and texts, actual spectators and films,"²⁸ the collection brings together film scholars, cultural studies scholars, and media sociologists in hopes of understanding the "*Dirty Dancing* phenomenon" as it has manifested itself in the (often extreme) ways in which people have engaged with the film. Given the film's undisputed cult status and its popularity around the world, examining its reception in detail could have generated many

more book-length volumes of work; perhaps this is an area of research that future studies might wish to develop further.

Within this collection, we decided to focus on three areas surrounding the film's reception, two rather obvious and one much less prominent. The first of these areas revolved around the extent to which viewers of *Dirty Dancing* and the critical apparatus debated its feminist credentials, focusing on the ways the film might empower women and politicize the female experience. The second dealt with the ways in which the film has taught young girls how to navigate the tricky transitional years from adolescence to adulthood. Perhaps less expectedly, we've also included a chapter about the (latent) pleasures the film might offer gay audiences, especially given its strong focus on the production of heteronormativity and traditional couplehood, primarily exemplified by the dancing (heterosexual) couples. Together, these chapters highlight some of the diverse ways in which viewers have interacted with the film, although, as mentioned earlier, there is scope for many more studies that could perhaps look at the reception of the film in different geographical and cultural contexts.

The question of nostalgia could not have been excluded from the collection, and indeed this was one of the first subjects on which we solicited contributions. This explains why it stands as an individual section under the title "The Production of Nostalgia." Due to the multifaceted nature of the concept, we approached scholars from three different disciplines: youth culture studies, film studies, and popular music studies. Within the context of cultural studies, the emphasis is placed on questions of representation and the ways in which nostalgia in this film does not gloss over problems and conflicts (as is often expected). The film studies perspective tackles questions of affect and the complex ways in which nostalgia is constructed, especially for contemporary audiences who are more likely to connect with the time of the film's release in the 1980s than its setting in the 1960s. Finally, the popular music studies perspective focuses on the prominent use of anachronistic songs and the ways in which they manage not to disrupt the nostalgia for the 1960s. The role of music is explored in-depth in all three essays, but each emphasizes different aspects, highlighting the complexities of the topic and justifying the inclusion of essays from different disciplinary backgrounds.

Although there were numerous other areas relating to the film that we also considered (e.g., *Dirty Dancing* as a teen film, Patrick Swayze and stardom), given our emphasis on the film *and* the phenomenon we also decided to include work that dealt with other manifestations of *Dirty Dancing*. Two of the chapters we have included focus on the stage adaptation of the film and were written by theater and performance studies scholars. Despite the affinities between theater and film, there have been few opportunities for representatives of the two disciplines to coexist within the same project,²⁹ and we believe that the inclusion of these chapters represents a great opportunity for a renewed dialogue between the two disciplines. This is especially illustrated in these two chapters discussing the concepts of “memory” and “fantasy,” concepts that have had a long-established history of research in the field of film studies. We would have liked to include chapters on the 2004 sequel/remake, *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights*, or the reality television show *Dirty Dancing: The Time of Your Life*, especially in terms of the ways they engage with the original film; given the fact that the stage show had a much greater impact on popular culture than the sequel or television derivatives, however, we decided to focus on that.

All this work goes some way toward examining *Dirty Dancing* in an effort to understand the reasons behind its success and continuing popularity. Some of these reasons, however, are intricately linked to the manner in which the film represents identity politics and privileges particular representations over others. This necessarily means that the film takes positions on matters of gender, class, race, and sexual politics, many of which are problematic for particular social groups with a history of marginalization and exclusion. Indeed, despite its huge global fan base, the film has also attracted a number of negative responses from critics and the public,³⁰ while for many *Dirty Dancing* remains a politically suspect and ideologically manipulative Hollywood product. As the first scholarly publication on the film, *The Time of Our Lives* had to accommodate discussions of *Dirty Dancing* that represent these viewpoints, emphasising specifically the ways in which the pleasures the film offers are not necessarily for everyone (see in particular chapters 5 and 10).

Whether negative, positive, or neutral in tone, whether written by scholars who are fans of the film or who do not like it, and whether arguing for or against the pleasures it offers, the sixteen essays in this

volume take *Dirty Dancing* seriously. The film has been an increasingly significant part of global popular culture, especially since the 2000s, but academia has steered clear of bestowing on it the attention it deserves—until now. Besides throwing ample light on the film and its impact, the editors of this collection hope that the included essays will prompt more work on the subject and, more broadly, on the junctures between film studies and a number of other cognate disciplines.

Notes

- 1 Even as far back as the 1930s, LUX soap and Max Factor cosmetics were habitually attached to films, such as MGM's *Dinner at Eight* (George Cukor, 1933). See Charles Eckert, "The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window" in *Movies and Mass Culture*, ed. John Belton (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 113.
- 2 For more details, see Amanda Howell's essay in this volume.
- 3 *Havana Nights* recorded a US theatrical box office gross of just over \$14 million, compared to the \$63 million that *Dirty Dancing* had recorded fourteen years earlier. The figures were taken from The Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tto338096/> and <http://www.imdb.com/title/tto092890/> business, respectively. Accessed on October 1, 2011.
- 4 Hilary Radner, "Sex and the City: The Movie (2008): The Female Event Film" in *Neo-Feminist Cinema: Girly Films, Chick Flicks and Consumer Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010), 153–70.
- 5 Ashley Elaine York, "From Chick Flicks to Millennial Blockbusters: Spinning Female-Driven Narratives into Franchises," *Journal of Popular Culture* 43.1 (2010): 4.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Veronica Lee, "There's a Secret Dancer Inside Us All," *The Telegraph*, September 23, 2006, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/3655489/Theres-a-secret-dancer-inside-us-all.html>. Accessed on October 14, 2011.
- 8 John Pierson, *Spike, Mike, Slackers @ Dykes: A Guided Tour across a Decade of American Independent Cinema* (New York: Hyperion Books, 1995).
- 9 Ibid., 341–42.
- 10 "The 1980s: A Reference Guide to Motion Pictures, Television, VCR, and Cable," *Velvet Light Trap* 27 (1991, Spring): 86.
- 11 Annette Insdorf, "Ordinary People, European Style: How to Spot an Independent Feature," *American Film* 6.10 (September, 1981): 58.
- 12 John Sayles, the director of *Baby, It's You*, was one of the most prominent independent filmmakers of the 1980s. Samuel G. Freedman, "Dirty Dancing' Rocks to an Innocent Beat," *New York Times*, August 16, 1987, 19.
- 13 For instance, fellow 1987 independent production, *Hollywood Shuffle*, was made for \$100,000, while *Stand and Deliver* (Ramon Menendez), one of the most successful independent films of 1988, cost \$1.37 million to produce.

- David Rosen with Peter Hamilton, *Off-Hollywood: The Making and Marketing of Independent Films* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 130, 202.
- 14 Stephen Prince, *A New Pot of Gold: Hollywood Under the Electronic Rainbow, 1980-1989* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 309.
 - 15 Freedman, "'Dirty Dancing,'" 19.
 - 16 The poster for *Flashdance* decorates the cover of the main study on high-concept filmmaking. See Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).
 - 17 Geoff King, *Indiewood USA: Where Hollywood Meets Independent Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 1.
 - 18 Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 147.
 - 19 Some of these comments about *Dirty Dancing* as a "guilty pleasure" can be found in the reviews section of the film's page on IMDb. See, for instance, Thesar-2, "Each Dance is The Time of My Life," the Internet Movie Database (February 6, 2011), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0092890/reviews?start=40>; and Jackal_17, "Girl Goes to Camp, Girl Meets Boy, Girl Learns to Dance, Complications Ensurue," the Internet Movie Database (January 17, 2006), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0092890/reviews?start=20>. Accessed on November 1, 2011.
 - 20 Sandy Brown, "Lions Gate Grabs Swayze Rights," *The Street* (July 14, 2005), <http://www.thestreet.com/stocks/sandybrown/10232495.html>. Accessed on November 1, 2011.
 - 21 "Movie Connections for *Dirty Dancing*," the Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0092890/movieconnections>. Accessed on November 10, 2011.
 - 22 See <http://www.facebook.com/OfficialDirtyDancing>; <http://www.facebook.com/StarWars>; <http://www.facebook.com/lordoftheringstrilogy> Accessed on July 22, 2012.
 - 23 Ben Child, "Kenny Ortega Set to Direct *Dirty Dancing* Remake," *The Guardian*, August 9, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/aug/09/kenny-ortega-dirty-dancing-remake>. Accessed on November 1, 2011.
 - 24 See for instance the *Boycott Dirty Dancing Remake* page, which as of July 22, 2012 had just over 2000 "likes." <http://www.facebook.com/BoycottDirtyDancingRemake>. Accessed on July 22, 2012.
 - 25 Indeed, for such as a successful and influential film, we found only a handful of scholarly essays discussing it. See, for instance, Lesley Vize, "Music and Body in Dance Films" in *Popular Music and Film*, ed. Ian Inglis (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 22-38; and David R. Shamway, "Rock 'n' Roll Soundtrack and the Production of Nostalgia," *Cinema Journal* 38.2 (Winter 1999): 36-51. See also Markus Rheindorf, "The Multiple Modes of *Dirty Dancing*: A Cultural Studies Approach to Multimodal Discourse Analysis" in *Perspectives on Multimodality*, eds. Eija Ventola, Cassily Charles, Martin Kaltenbacher (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishers, 2004), 137-52.
 - 26 See, for instance, the BFI Modern Classics series and Edinburgh University Press's American Indies series.

- 27 Douglas Kellner, "Media Industries, Political Economy and Media/Cultural Studies: An Articulation" in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method*, eds. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 102.
- 28 Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 8.
- 29 One such exception is research on playwright-turned-filmmaker David Mamet, whose work has attracted the interest of both theater and film scholars in a number of collections featuring work by scholars from both disciplines. See, for instance, Christopher C. Hudgins and Leslie Kane, eds., *Gender and Genre: Essays on David Mamet* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).
- 30 For instance, there is also an "I Hate *Dirty Dancing*" Facebook page, though it has had only slightly over 100 "likes" at the time of writing. See <http://www.facebook.com/pages/I-hate-Dirty-Dancing/183432081669612>. Accessed on May 25, 2012.